

June 28, 2026 + 10:30 A.M.

Sixth Sunday of Pentecost

We Join in Worship

Liturgist: Jean Smith

If you need extra space for a wheelchair or walker, or if you have young children with you, please feel free to make use of our Prayground, the extra space across the aisle from the sound booth.

PRELUDE

Holy God, We Praise Thy Name

arr. Cindy Berry

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

*THE PEACE OF CHRIST

* CALL TO WORSHIP (Adapted from *Psalms* 89)

Leader: We will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with our mouths we will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

ALL: We declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens!

Leader: You said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to my servant David: 'I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations.'"

ALL: We declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens!

Leader: Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD?

ALL: We declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens!

Leader: The heavens are yours, the earth also is yours; the world and all that is in it—you have founded them.

ALL: We declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens! We worship you, O LORD!

*OPENING HYMN: "Arise, Your Light Is Come!" (411)

INVITATION TO CONFESSION:

Leader: In his first letter, Peter writes, "As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil." Let us confess our need to freely choose what is right and good rather than what is evil.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (unison)

God of grace and mercy, we join our hearts and voices in confessing unto you. We confess that we have indeed used our freedom as a pretext for evil. We have used freedom as a pretext for war and violence. We have used freedom as a pretext for claiming superiority over other children of God. We have used freedom as a pretext to hoard our wealth while the poor suffer. We have used freedom to oppress. Forgive us. Remind us that our freedom is a responsibility to do what is right and good. In the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, we pray. Amen.

KYRIE: Glory to God, No. 579 (unison)

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Leader: Hear the good news! The LORD blesses us and keeps us. The LORD sent Jesus Christ as a blessing to keep us.

ALL: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven! Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!

GLORIA PATRI (577)

Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now, ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

As it was in the beginning, is now, ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

STATEMENT OF FAITH: (Adapted from *The Confession of Belhar*)

We believe that the unity of the people of God must be manifested and be active in a variety of ways: in that we love one another; that we experience, practice and pursue community with one another; that we are obligated to give ourselves willingly and joyfully to be of benefit and blessing to one another; that we share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit, are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one name, are obedient to one Lord, work for one cause, and share one hope.

We Hear God's Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Gracious God, as we turn to your Word for us, may the Spirit of God rest upon us. Help us to be steadfast in our hearing, in our speaking, in our believing, and in our living. Amen.

HEBREW BIBLE LESSON: *Numbers 6:22-27*

EPISTLE LESSON: *1 Peter 2:11-16*

GOSPEL LESSON: *Luke 12:41-48*

SERMON: The Fourth of July Assignment

MUSICAL MEDITATION *He Touched Me*

William J. Gaither

We Respond in Faith

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

OFFERING INVITATION:

Leader: Jesus said, "From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded." We have been given much, we are required to use it for good. Let us give our tithes and offerings with the conviction of what is required of us. If you are here in person, please place your offering in the plate as it is passed. If you are worshipping from home, please mail in your checks or use our online giving option on the website. Now let us practice stewardship as we listen to today's offertory.

OFFERTORY *You Are My All in All*

Dennis L. Jernigan, arr. Jan Sanborn

*DOXOLOGY

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God, all creatures high and low;

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Praise God, in Jesus fully known;

Creator, Word, and Spirit one;

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

PRAYER OF DEDICATION: (Unison)

God our Father, we dedicate these gifts to you as your children who love you. Give us Wisdom to be good stewards of your blessings as we seek to serve our siblings. In the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, we pray. Amen.

We Go Into the World

***CLOSING HYMN:** "God Be with You Till we Meet Again" (Glory to God 541)

BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION *The Trees of the Field*

POSTLUDE *Brethren, We Have Met to Worship* Williamn Moore, arr. Cindy Berry

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* So that we can properly greet people who come to the building during Sunday morning worship, Door A will be the only unlocked external door during the worship service.

PEEK AT THE WEEK:

- SUNDAY 6/28: Worship In Person & Online – 10:30 AM
 Fellowship Hosts: Trustees
 Salad Sale
- MONDAY 6/29: GA – 6:30 PM
 Al-Anon – 7:00 PM
- TUESDAY 6/30: Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM
 AA – 7:30 PM
- WEDNESDAY 7/1: Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM
 GA – 7:00 PM
- THURSDAY 7/2: Mission Parking Lot Fundraiser
- FRIDAY 7/3: Mission Parking Lot Fundraiser
- SATURDAY 7/4: Independence Day
 Mission Parking Lot Fundraiser
 AA – 6:30 PM
- SUNDAY 7/5: Mission Parking Lot Fundraiser

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **SALAD SALE AFTER WORSHIP TODAY, JUNE 28TH** Support our general fund and get a delicious, nutritious, and refreshing lunch!
- **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!** The Ministry of Mission is looking for volunteers to help with Mission's Annual 4th of July Parking Lot Fundraiser. The event begins on Wednesday, July 1st and continues through Sunday, July 5th. A sign-up sheet will be available each Sunday or you can contact Tracy Oprea @ (219) 616-7181. This fundraiser is Mission's major fundraiser for the year, and the event cannot be successful without your help. The Ministry of Mission greatly appreciates your support. Blessings.
- **THE BIBLE IN TODAY'S WORLD AND BYOB ARE ON SUMMER BREAK** Keep an eye out for these opportunities in the Fall!
- **FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!** If you don't already follow us on Facebook and Instagram, please start doing so @firstpchighland on both Facebook and Instagram.
- **INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER OF FPCH?** You are always welcome here, whether a member or not! If you are interested in joining as a member, though, we would love to have you! Please talk to Pastor Tyler if you would like to learn more.

Opportunities to serve as the HEART, HANDS, and FEET of Jesus Christ:

- **BLESSING BOX** Please continue to place items in the Blessing Box and take items if you are a person in need! Items most commonly donated: Canned goods with pull tabs, socks, toilet paper, non-perishable foods, small snacks, toiletries, baby wipes and diapers. Please check expiration dates!
- **HELP STOCK OUR PANTRY!** Please pick up a beautifully decorated grocery bag in the narthex and fill it to help the church's food pantry.
- **GOT SNEAKERS??** The sneakers that we all collect will help raise money to support our church's general fund AND will help our environment by keeping sneakers out of landfills. Bring the sneakers (athletic shoes only) to the church and put them in one of the blue bins...either by Door D (inside) or in the narthex.

Prayer List

Anthony	Robin
Brady Vanes	Eunice
George Griner	Betsy
Guy Hendricks	David
Bill and Anettia Holmes	Joe & Kathy
David Markley	Breanne Polan
David Kingen	Tammy
Diana and Ray Mendoza	Alex
Janet Orem	Ben
Cindy Waltz and Sister	Mike Kelly
Yvonne Suroviak	Sue Heth
Georgette and Garry Sknerski	Ron Toren
Jakob Holden	Tony
Denise Matthys	Mildred
Jan Oprea	Neal
Florance Cody	Rita
Kathy & Chuck Pumnea	Carolyn
The Windstrups	Oscar Ochoa
Rick Parker	Tony and Sharon Nevers
Gary Everhart	Caroline
Darlene O'Brien	Jean and Clara
Doug & Sue Matthews	Suzanne
Janet Terpstra	Dave Shelborne
Glen Nahler	Kali Rosalia
Tom	Nick B.
David Hamblin	Carlito
Jana Tolley	Don
Larry & Bonnie Perryman	Donna
Delta Rose	Phyllis
Winnie Owen	Diane
Breeanne	Marly
Mom Bechtler	Jeff
Victor	Linda
Marian Clayton	Sandy
Ella P	Bill
Rita Stronczek	Debbie
Keren, Zuriel, and Gedeon	Marie Smith
Edna Cruz	Bruce Marshall
Charlie	Mark & Tina
Jerry & Rena Martinez	Sergio & Anthony
Nicole	Dave
Greg	Debbie & Meryl
Mary Ellen Edeus	Sherry
Jane and David	John
Flora R.	Hazel
Tyler Gall	Wendy
Phil	Jessica S
Luana Sulkowski	
Sonny Buono	

Numbers 6:22-27

²² The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²³ “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: Thus you shall bless the Israelites: You shall say to them:

²⁴ The Lord bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

²⁷ “So they shall put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.”

1 Peter 2:11-16

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as immigrants and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. ¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

¹³ For the Lord’s sake be subject to every human authority, whether to the emperor as supreme ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. ¹⁵ For it is God’s will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. ¹⁶ As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil.

Luke 12:41-48

⁴¹ Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?” ⁴² And the Lord said, “Who, then, is the faithful and prudent manager whom his enslaver will put in charge of his enslaved people, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? ⁴³ Blessed is that enslaved person whom his enslaver will find at work when he arrives. ⁴⁴ Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. ⁴⁵ But if that enslaved person says to himself, ‘My enslaver is delayed in coming,’ and begins to eat and drink and get drunk, ⁴⁶ the enslaver of that enslaved person will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour that he does not know and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. ⁴⁷ That enslaved person who knew what his enslaver wanted but did not prepare himself or do what was wanted will receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸ But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required, and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.

Circling Back to Servanthood

Genesis 18:1-8; Romans 5:1-8; Acts 6:1-8

The filling up of people with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost inspired a movement of new followers of the way of Jesus Christ of Nazareth who came full circle in reflecting the life and love of Jesus when he walked the earth. Twelve became three thousand became eight thousand, and they lived in the same way as the multitudes who had followed Jesus around the Galilean countryside, even though most of them had never known Jesus in the flesh. They sold all of their belongings to follow this new way. They formed community in which resources were shared and needs were met.

They ate meals together. And the apostles, those who had been part of Jesus’ OG circle, performed miraculous healings in the way that Jesus had. They recognized and honored human dignity first. They touched those who had been considered untouchable. And then they healed publicly on the grounds of the Temple, where the leaders would take notice. They then faced persecution by the exact same high priests, being arrested by Annas and Caiaphas (“Must die, must die, this Jesus must die). In all of this, they showed that not only did Jesus come back to life, but the Jesus movement was nowhere close to dead!

Well, the circle kept growing, and their work kept coming full circle to the work of Jesus. As the circle of followers of the Way grew, more and more people joined from different cultures and contexts. And so, there was bound to be some cross-cultural conflict and adjustment. The author presents this particular conflict as one between the Hebrews and the Hellenists. The Hellenists, who were either Greeks or followers of Greek philosophy and religion, started noticing that they were being treated differently by the leaders of the movement. Specifically they came to know that the most vulnerable in their midst, the widows, were being

neglected in the daily distribution of food. Further, they were noticing that the Hebrews, who were in charge of everything, had their widows being well cared for.

So, it was not just that the Hellenist widows were not getting food. It was that there was inequality and injustice in how the food was being distributed.

And this time around it was not the twelve apostles who did the full circle work. In truth, they rather shamefully bowed out. Thankfully, there have always been people in the major movements of history who step up to take the challenge and to take care of the things that, when it comes down to it, matter the most. I call them the unsung heroes. And our Bible is full of them! Our history is full of them! Our present is full of them! Our Church is full of them! Seven people stepped up to have the hard cross-cultural conversation, to resolve the injustice, and to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in Jerusalem. In the lore and legend of the Church, we consider this to be the beginning of the office of the deacons—those who are called by God and the community to be out amongst the people, learning of their spiritual and physical needs at the ground level and doing everything possible to meet those needs.

Maybe you've heard of Stephen, and maybe you've even heard of Philip, but I doubt you remember the names Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Harmanus, and Nicolaus. These seven people hit the ground running and made sure that everyone felt welcome and that everyone was cared for. I am convinced that without them the movement would have stopped right then and there.

The divisions between the cultures and the languages, the power struggles between the leaders, all of it would have been too much, and all of it would have come tumbling down. But thankfully we had those unsung heroes! The deacons! The thing is, though, that this was not really the beginning of the deacons.

A long, long time ago, in the time before time was recorded, God visited Abraham, Sarah, and their servant as three strangers in need by the Oaks of Mamre. Abraham, Sarah, and their servant welcomed these strangers fully, found out what they needed, and met their needs of water, food, shade, and rest. In that moment they embodied servanthood by radically welcoming and thus loving strangers without condition. And those strangers were God! I cannot help but think that Jesus was bringing the Oaks of Mamre full circle in *Matthew 25*!

And our seven from today's reading came full circle, picking up the *Matthew 25* mantle after the Pentecost and deaconing to the new beloved community of the followers of the way of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. They chose to be out among the masses. They chose to listen to their needs. They chose to meet those needs. They chose to listen to their voices. They chose to lift up those voices so that those with power could hear and make changes. As a result of their dedicated work, the number of disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests even joined them.

One of them, named Stephen, did great wonders and signs among the people. He is described as being full of grace and power. The Greek here is stunningly beautiful: Στέφανος δὲ πλήρης χάριτος καὶ δυνάμεως. It can best be translated like this: Stephen, full to overflowing with a divine grace and an inherent power rooted in his very nature or being. Have you ever met somebody who simply exudes the joy of the Gospel in a way that seems unstoppable and uncontainable? That's Stephen to a T.

And of course, like Jesus before him, he terrified the powers and principalities. He shook the foundations of their unjust systems. Those signs and wonders were supposed to have stopped with the execution of Jesus of Nazareth! Sure Peter and John and those other pesky apostles had been able to do some healing, but they had been in direct contact with Jesus. This Stephen was a whole nother story. He had never made contact with Jesus in the flesh. He was an upstart deacon, simply selected from the masses, and here he was coming full circle in doing what Jesus did. He was evidence that the power of Jesus Christ could spread to the everyday people. He was evidence that the Holy Spirit was truly alive—not just some story that could be explained away as drunkenness. He was evidence that the splitting of the curtain had not just been symbolic, that the living God was alive out among the people. He was evidence that these gatekeepers could no longer lock the doors or build the walls or control access to Shekinah, the glory of God.

And so, the high priests conspired once again to put a stop to things. This seems absurd, given that the movement of the Holy Spirit is unstoppable. But hey, desperate times call for desperate measures. Once again they tried to level the charge of blasphemy, just as they had with Jesus. Specifically, they claimed that Stephen was besmirching the great ancestor Moses and the law that he received from Jehovah his God. They argued that

he was trying to destroy the Temple and to change the customs that Moses had handed to the Israelites by calling upon the name of Jesus and sharing the Good News that God was with the people.

The entire council looked intently at him. They gazed upon this deacon commoner, and as the text claims, they saw the face of an angel. Now that's interesting! For, "angel" simply means "messenger," and Stephen clearly was a messenger of God. He was spreading the good news of God's love through his full circle servanthood. And he was about to be the messenger of God through testimony. The high priest asks him, "Are these things so, are these accusations true?" Full to overflowing with a divine grace and an inherent power rooted in his very being, he **replies**.

He tells the people of their history, of how they have been coming full circle for millennia. He reminds them of where they come from. He prompts them to remember what they have been through together as a people. I won't read you the lengthy speech he gives, though I encourage you to read chapter 7 verses 2 through 53 on your own time.

Right now I'll summarize. He retells the story of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David, and Solomon. He speaks of the Israelites as a whole, reminding them that God's chosen people were always the marginalized and outcast—the refugees and immigrants, the slaves and laborers. He speaks of Moses's prophecy that God would raise up a prophet among them who would be both king and liberator.

Most importantly, though, he speaks of God's presence and activity through it all. He speaks of God cutting a covenant with Abraham, of God rescuing and empowering Joseph, of God encountering Moses in the burning bush and promising to deliver the people, of God being heartbroken when the people made the golden calf, of God moving with the people in the tabernacle, of God protecting the people on their journey to Palestine. Throughout it all, he speaks of *God* speaking, ending with these words about the possibility of being contained by a human-made and human-controlled temple: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?"

And so, by providing the context of history, Stephen reminded the people that God had always been out among them—guiding them, urging them forward, protecting them, feeling their pain, listening to them, loving them. In short, God had always been practicing servanthood as a good, good father. He didn't belittle the significance of the temple as a symbol and source of strength. He contextualized the temple. It was a way for the people to honor God. It was not a thing to keep God away from the people. And so God inhabited the temple of a human body and walked among the people. And so God was breathed into the very lungs of the people, filling them with grace and power.

Stephen was not blaspheming the law. Like Jesus before him, Stephen was coming full circle and teaching the truth of the law. He was explaining to the people that the law was not meant to become a stumbling block to trip people up and exclude them, that the law was not meant to create a hierarchy of power, that the law was not meant to be weaponized and cause harm. NO, the law was always an expression of God's love. And the law was never stagnant or stuck. As he made clear, God was always present and moving among the people. God was always speaking to the people. God was always listening to the people. God was always loving the people. And so, full of grace and power, Stephen stood up in the full knowledge that he may not survive the day. And yet he chose courage. He chose boldness. All for the sake of love. Friends, this grace and power was not exclusive to Stephen. We will see it over and over again throughout the book of *Acts*. We *have* seen it over and over again in people like Simon Peter's mother-in-law, who was described as deaconing way back in the beginning of *Mark*, in people like Mary Magdalene, like Mary mother of Jesus, like John the Baptist, like the sung and unsung heroes of the Hebrew Bible. And we can see it as we look across the world today.

Hear the good news! God is still living and breathing and moving in our midst! Jesus Christ is still watching and listening and interceding and waiting for the perfect day to come back for us. The Holy Spirit is still blowing through each and every one of us, filling us with grace and power and calling us to speak boldly of the love of our God and to labor courageously in servanthood to make sure that everyone truly knows what it means to feel that love—in sustainable communities, in systems of justice and equality, in celebrations of joy, in acts of mercy, in joining them in their grief and brokenness.

And so I close by saying thank you to the deacons of this congregation, who are already doing the work. Thank you for being present when I cannot be. Thank you for meeting spiritual needs and physical needs.

Thank you for meeting people where they are. Thank you for doing the down and dirty work of the gospel. Thank you for being like Simon Peter's mother-in-law. Thank you for being like the seven.

You all are unsung heroes. May we all learn from you how to do the work of the gospel! I know that if things get tougher and tougher, I know that if we have more and more challenges, I know that if our people suffer more, you will be there and you will be willing. And I hope we can all do the same. Amen.

Arise, Your Light Is Come!

411

FESTAL SONG SM

Ruth Duck, 1974

William H. Walter, 1894

1. A - rise, your light is come! The Spir - it's call o - bey;
2. A - rise, your light is come! Fling wide the pris - on door;
3. A - rise, your light is come! All you in sor - row born,
4. A - rise, your light is come! The moun-tains burst in song!


Show forth the glo - ry of your God, Which shines on you to - day.
Pro - claim the cap-tives' lib - er - ty, Good ti - dings to the poor.
Bind up the bro-ken - heart-ed ones And com - fort those who mourn.
Rise up like ea - gles on the wing; God's power will make us strong.

God Be with You Till We Meet Again 541


Unison *Harmony*



1 God be with you till we meet a - gain; lov - ing coun - sels
2 God be with you till we meet a - gain; un - seen wings pro -
3 God be with you till we meet a - gain; when life's per - ils
4 God be with you till we meet a - gain; keep love's ban - ner



guide, up - hold you, with a shep - herd's care en - fold you:
tect - ing hide you, dai - ly man - na still pro - vide you:
thick con - found you, put un - fail - ing arms a - round you:
float - ing o'er you; smite death's threat - ening wave be - fore you:



Unison



God be with you till we meet a - gain.

