
WORSHIP COMPANION

A collection of voices and resources to guide homebound worship amidst the global pandemic.

October - November 2020

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Prior to Pentecost this year I was talking to a friend about the church's ability to continue its work amidst the challenging times at hand. The very real threat of COVID19 had most, if not all, the churches in Ohio relegated to online arenas on Sunday mornings, and seeking to extend their virtual footprint to offer words of hope, gospel, and guidance to all who are seeking.

I suggested that Pentecost this year would mirror the familiar account in Acts when the church spoke in tongues to communicate the gospel. We may not be speaking the languages that the Apostles did, but now the church would be learning how to communicate through Zoom, Facebook, YouTube, and other platforms. My friend said he thought Pentecost would mirror the New Testament story in a different way. He suggested it would be a beautiful example of the church learning how to work together in new ways, and creating a new sense of self, which has not been done on this scale since Luke's account in Acts.

In truth, Pentecost this year was both of these things, a time of speaking in new ways, and working together in unprecedented ways to establish a new sense of church. For those where I serve, we began a series of touchless food drives, encouraging parishioners to drive by the church and drop off canned goods for the local food pantry. We also worked closely with a brewery and a food truck in our neighborhood to offer a free community meal program from our parking lot. The positive engagement of parishioners & community partners began to show us that worship could happen from our homes, as new ministries were blooming outside the building.

However, there are many who cannot join current online expressions of the church because of insufficient internet, lack of computer ownership, or other technological issues. This forces us to ask the question, how does the church continue to speak, and reach out, to those on the other side of the internet divide?

What you have before you is an offering to the church during this time of shifting, growing, and recalibrating. The goal is simple; to provide words of hope, gospel, and guidance to any who may be seeking them in a printable form.

Within these pages is a complete order of worship for each Sunday from August 2nd (the 9th Sunday After Pentecost) through November 22nd (Christ The King). There is a Call To Worship, Prayer of the Day, Reading(s), Sermon, Prayers of Intercession, the Lord's Prayer, Thanksgiving for the Word, and Closing prayer for every Sunday.

These prayers, sermons, and other parts of worship have been contributed by a wonderful and diverse group of people I have the pleasure to call peers, colleagues, and most of all friends. By contributing their time and efforts, we have created this Worship Companion that is not limited or restricted by copyright or publication laws. Our hope is that this resource be shared with all seeking connection, hope, and the gospel during these isolating and challenging times.

Rev. Daniel W. Hille
Eighth Week After Pentecost, 2020

SERMONS

August 2, 2020

Rev. Eric Wooldridge, Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Enumclaw, WA

August 9, 2020

Rev. Jason Chesnut, Itinerant Preacher and Teacher, Delaware-Maryland Synod, Baltimore, MD

August 16, 2020

Rev. Bob Abrams, Assistant to the Bishop, Southern Ohio Synod

August 23, 2020

Rev. Matthew Kamprath, Pastor, First Lutheran Church, Geneseo, IL

August 30, 2020

Rev. Paul Jones Moody, Pastor, Messiah Lutheran Church, Cleveland, OH

September 6, 2020

Rev. M. Jill King, Pastor, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Durham, NC

September 13, 2020

Rev. Justin Thornburg, Pastor, Emerson Avenue Baptist Church, Indianapolis, IN

September 20, 2020

Rev. Daniel W. Hille, Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, OH

September 27, 2020

Rev. Jocelyn Johnston, Interim Pastor, St. John Lutheran Church, North Versailles, PA

October 4, 2020

Rev. Paul Offhaus, Pastor, St. John Evangelical Church, Fort Wayne, IN

October 11, 2020

Rev. Kjersten Sullivan, Pastor, Trinity Lutheran Church, Battle Creek, MI

October 18, 2020

Rev. Carolyn Albert Donovan, Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, Auston, TX

October 25, 2020

Rev. Darryl Thompson Powell, Associate Director for African Descent Ministries, ELCA and Pastor, Resurrection Lutheran, Elk Grove Village, IL

November 1, 2020

Rev. Dominic V. Guido, Senior Pastor, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Crestview Hills, KY

November 8, 2020

Rev. Jeff Schlesinger, Pastor, Heart of Illinois Lutheran Parish (First Lutheran, Lee IL and Immanuel Lutheran, Compton, IL)

November 15, 2020

Rev. Louise C. Hilbert, Interim Pastor, North Carolina Synod, Durham, NC

November 22, 2020

Rev. A. Wallace Anderson, (Retired), St. Martin Lutheran Church, Malvern, OH

LITURGICAL RESOURCES

Prayers of Intercession - August & September, Opening & Ending

Rev. Travis Meier, Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, College Station, TX

Prayers of Intercession - October

Rev. Will Rose, Pastor, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Chapel Hill, NC

Call to Worship, Prayers of the Day, Prayers of Intercession - November

Rev. Daniel W. Hille, Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, OH

Thanksgiving for the Word

Rev. R Adam Berndt, Pastor, Cross of Hope Lutheran Church, Albuquerque, NM

Closing Prayer

Bishop Yehiel Curry, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, ELCA

GRAPHICS AND LAYOUT

Cover Art, Layout

Jessica L. Wells, Administrator, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, Ohio

Graphic Art - August & September

Kevin Kryzwick

Graphic Art - October & November

Rev. Daniel W. Hille, Pastor, Faith Lutheran Church, Whitehall, OH

(With the exception of Luther's Rose used on page 92)

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EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 4, 2020



EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 4, 2020

Call To Worship

Restore us, God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

Awaken your might; come and save us.

Watch over this vine,
the root your right hand has planted,
the son you have raised up for yourself.

Awaken your might; come and save us.

Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,
the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

Awaken your might; come and save us.

(adapted from Psalm 80)

Prayer of the Day

Beloved and sovereign God, through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ you proclaimed you loved for all creation. Open our heart, minds, and ears to your love and care for us. Saturate us with your mercy, kindness, and grace that our faith may grow, and your message extend to all the corners of the world both now and forever.
Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 21:33-46

³³ "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵ "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. ³⁸ "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes,

what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." ⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvelous in our eyes' [a]?"

⁴³ "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed." [b] ⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶ They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Sermon - Rev. Paul Offhaus, Pastor, St. John Evangelical Church, Fort Wayne, IN

Has anyone seen the movie, "V Is for Vendetta"? It's a powerful movie on many levels, one of which is the idea of how far one might go in protesting an unjust government. Is protesting enough? What about violence? What about advocating and even actively working toward overthrowing an unjust government? The movie's main character, named simply 'V', forces such questions on the mind of the young female lead, named—in linguistic tension with V—Evie. As one might expect, V loves the letter 'V'. Here, for instance, is a portion of his introduction to Evie:

"The only verdict is vengeance; a vendetta, held as a votive not in vain, for the value and veracity of such shall one day vindicate the vigilant and the virtuous." For those keeping score at home, that's ten out of thirty 'V' words in just one sentence. Impressive, right?

One reason I mention "V for Vendetta" now is the whole 'V' thing. We find in today's Gospel text a whole lot of Vs as well - a veritable V Fest. Vineyards, Victims and Victors, yes, but verily, verily I say to you, there's a variety of others, as well—a virtual smorgasbord, really. We also find the same idea of violent opposition to established order. Let's consider the Vs of Matthew 21 together this day. But first, let us pray.

Lord God, may the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the applications of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our rock and our redeemer, in whom we place our trust. Amen.

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The very first 'V' we encounter in Jesus' parable is a **vineyard**:

"There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country." (Matthew 21:33)

When we encounter stories such as this in the Bible, whether it be Matthew 21, today's Psalm or the Isaiah 5 reading, the vineyard—or in the case of the Psalm, the vine—indicates something that belongs to the Lord God. It also represents a fertile place, where one might rightly expect a produce, a bountiful harvest. In Isaiah 5, the vineyard represents the Israelites, God's chosen people. In Jesus' telling of the parable, the vineyard represents the Israelites, but Jesus also introduces the tenants into the story. These are the chief priests and the Pharisees, the ones who were in charge of the vineyard while the landowner was away. As the religious leaders, they are the guardians of the Temple. But it was also their responsibility to care for the Israelites—the vineyard—and do all they could to ensure a good harvest.

Then there are the **victims**, beginning with the landowner's slaves – one of whom was beaten, another killed, and a third stoned—not to mention "other slaves" who were treated in much the same way. This suggests many attempts on the landowner's part to collect his rightful produce from his tenants. In the parable, the landowner's slaves represent God's prophets, sent one by one to remind God's people of their calling to be God's vineyard, that is, to produce fruits in the world—fruits of justice and love, righteousness and peace for all the world to see.

But it doesn't work. Their pleas fall on deaf ears, as the tenants turn them away in varying degrees of harshness, just as so many of God's prophets were resisted by God's people over the centuries. What else could the landowner do? "Finally," Jesus says, the landowner "sent his son" (Mt 21:37). Surely they will respect his own son!

And this is of course exactly what God in Christ has done. As we hear in John's Gospel, in arguably the Bible's most famous verse, John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

Verse 17, though lesser known, continues the theme:

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

In word and deed, Jesus, God's only Son, proclaimed the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice and love, righteousness and peace, for all the world to see. And he invited all people, including the religious leaders, to come together in bringing that kingdom into reality.

But like the prophets before him, Jesus' message was resisted. In the parable, Jesus describes the tenants' treatment of the son this way:

"They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him."

Ring any bells?

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were the primary people behind Jesus' arrest, sham of a trial, whipping, beating, mockery and crucifixion. And where did Jesus' crucifixion take place? Outside the city, just as the son was thrown outside the vineyard before he was killed.

Jesus knew what was coming. Jesus knew who would do it and where it would happen. And yet notice what comes next as Jesus wraps up his parable he tells the chief priests and the Pharisees.

Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

This is the 'aha' moment of the parable, the moment when the parable turns, where it startles its hearers and challenges their preconceived notions about life and faith and God. Each parable Jesus tells has such a moment, when the story turns. In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, it's when the person who cares for the man by the side of the road turns out to be a hated Samaritan, rather than an everyday Jewish Joseph. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, it's when the father *runs* to meet his son as he is making his way back home, completely disregarding all the dignity that would befit his status as the patriarch of the family.

The 'aha' moment here is Jesus asking *the very people he is telling the parable against*, the chief priests and Pharisees, what *they* think the vineyard owner will do to the tenants?

⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."

Their response reminds me of another parable Jesus tells, the Parable of the Talents, which appears just a few chapters later in Matthew's Gospel. In it, the one who had received one talent replies to his Master:

'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' (Matthew 25:24-25)

The slave 'knew' what sort of person the master was . . . or did he? The master's response suggests perhaps the slave was not as knowledgeable of his master's character as he thought:

But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! **You knew, did you**, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. (Matthew 25:26-28, emphasis mine)

Notice the master doesn't confirm the slave's assessment of him. He simply says, "You knew, did you?" I think something similar is going on here. The chief priests and the Pharisees tell Jesus what *they* would do if *they* were in the landlord's shoes—put the tenants to a miserable death and bring in a whole new crop of tenants to care for the vineyard. Then Jesus, following his own teaching ("For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get" [Matthew 7:2b]), confirms that their judgment of themselves will indeed stand:

⁴³ "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be *taken* away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom."

This is precisely what happened in 70 AD, when the Romans marched on Jerusalem in response to a Jewish revolt and destroyed the Temple that the chief priests and the Pharisees oversaw. The violence (another 'V') of the tenants is met with the violence of the master.

The Temple was where God had declared to his people that he would dwell on earth. In both the Temple's destruction and in the tearing of the curtain of the Temple at the moment of Jesus' death (Matthew 27:51), we see God's presence departing the Temple. At the same time, in the giving of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-5), we see God's presence given to the Church instead. *The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.*

But before we as the Church today get too excited, let us remember that the sword cuts both ways. Just as the Kingdom of God and its stewardship was taken from the

chief priests and the Pharisees for a lack of fruitfulness, a similar challenge and warning exists for the Church:

Matthew 3:8 (NRSV) — ⁸ Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

Matthew 7:19 (NRSV) — ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

John 15:1–2, 4–6 (NRSV) — ¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

Take care, Church! Bear the fruits of the kingdom of God—a kingdom of justice and love, righteousness and peace, for all the world to see. Speak up for those who have no voice. Defend the widow, the orphan and the alien in your midst. In other words, do what Jesus would do and say if he were in your shoes.

But what if we don't? What if we fail in God's mission for us to make disciples of the Kingdom of God?

Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

Here we are back again at the 'aha' moment of the parable. At first glance, it appears to be yet another 'V' word: **Vindication**. That is, the landowner is vindicated in the 'miserable death' of his cruel tenants – 'wretches' is what they unwittingly call themselves.

But because it is the chief priests and Pharisees who answer the question and not Jesus himself, *another* question hangs in the air:

"Is it really the character of the landowner to be vindictive?"

Maybe not. I mean, if vindication really was the landowner's endgame, why not send soldiers instead of his son, once slave after slave after slave is abused or even killed? Let's let David Lose pick up the story from here:

“So where does the bright idea come from to send his son, his heir, alone, to treat with these bloodthirsty hooligans? It's absolutely crazy. Who would do such a thing? No one . . . except maybe a crazy landlord so desperate to be in *relationship* with these tenants that he will do anything, risk anything, to reach out of them. This landowner acts more like a desperate parent, willing to do or say or try anything to reach out to a beloved and wayward child than he does a businessman. It's crazy, the kind of crazy that comes from being in love.”

“For God so **loved** the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:16-17)

See what **love** the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (1 John 3:1)

Thanks be to God for this Crazy Love, this love that will not let us – or the world God loves so much – go. This love that would not let that Son who suffered such a cruel and shameful death stay dead very long. Indeed, thanks be to God for Christ crucified yet resurrected—**Victorious**, if you will (our final ‘V’)—for the LIFE of the world. Amen? Amen!

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Gracious and patient God, you call us to be good stewards of your vineyard nurturing and working for peace and justice. Empower us to bear fruit that will feed the world with your love and grace. Lord in your mercy,
Hear our Prayer.

God of all nations, raise up leaders well equipped to foster peace and healing for all people. We pray for those who are seeking employment or lacking meaningful work, and for those who are searching for new opportunities for their vocation. Empower those in leadership and management positions to work for the well being of all people created in your image. Lord in your mercy,
Hear our Prayer.

God of healing and peace, we remember before you all wrestle with pain, suffering, disease, anxiety and stress. Remind them of your nearness and guide the hands, minds and

gifts of those who are in vocations of caretaking, healing, research and medicine. We lay before you all those who desire an extra measure of your grace and those close to our hearts. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, generous God, for your holy Word that welcomes all to yourself. Your Word crosses every boundary and barrier to proclaim your abundant life. For your Word of new life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your timeless Word has formed and reformed your Church throughout the ages. As we celebrate this good news, continue to set us free by your Word, O God, **that we might always be reformed to live out your love through our lives!**

Jesus is your Word into which we are welcomed in baptism to bear the fruit of your love. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **send us to welcome others and form the world by your love!**

In thanks and praise for your reforming Word to change the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

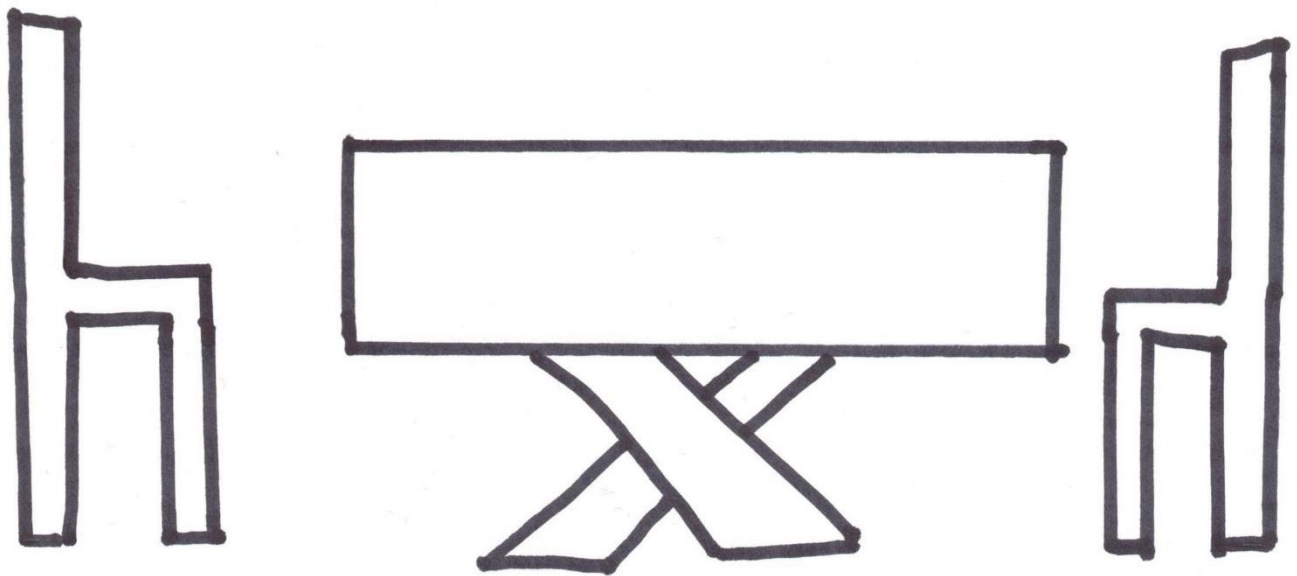
Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes. **Amen.**

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 11 , 2020



NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 11 , 2020

Call To Worship

The Lord is my shepherd,
I shall not be in want

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
I shall not be in want

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life
I shall not be in want

(adapted from Psalm 23)

Prayer of the Day

Holy God and gracious king, you invite all to your banquet. Help us to put on the robe of your faithfulness, grace, and love, living into our baptismal covenant by the power of your son Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ² “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³ He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴ “Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵ “But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶ The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷ The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ “Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹ So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰ So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ “But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹² He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless. ¹³ “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the

darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ "For many are invited, but few are chosen."

Sermon - Rev. Kjersten Sullivan, Pastor, Trinity Lutheran, Church, Battle Creek, MI

Not going to lie, my first read through of this one I thought, geez, I drew the short straw on this text! Last week's was a bit of a doozy as well. But at least last week's parable didn't end with Matthew's trademark "weeping and gnashing of teeth." Fun fact: If you're ever trying to guess which Gospel a verse came from, if the verse involves "weeping and gnashing of teeth," it's Matthew.

But traditionally Matthean or not, it's a tough phrase to deal with. Especially as Lutherans, we, well I can't speak for all of you but I, struggle with the judgmental God this parable seems to portray. It may have something to do with how much I dislike shopping, but I'm not always sure what to make of a Jesus who is so particular about clothing.

But Pastor Nadia Bolz Weber talks about how we tend to read parables as prescriptive, if this then that. But parables are more often descriptive, they describe the kingdom of heaven. So what if this parable isn't about how Jesus is judging your outfit? What Jesus was just telling us how things are?

This parable is the last in a series of parables Jesus told in response to the Pharisees questioning his authority to teach in the temple. This one, last week's parable on the wicked tenants, and the one the week before about the two sons, are all meant to build on each other. Jesus told them to the Pharisees after he asked them what they thought about John the Baptist and they refused to take a side. So, when we hear this parable, we have to resist the habit we'd developed over the summer of putting on our disciple hat to hear it, instead we have to put on our Pharisee hat. This parable is meant to challenge the parts of us who are insiders, who gain power from our association with Christianity, and who use that power to exclude others.

Dr. Eugene Boring pointed out that Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven not to the king, but to the situation of the king who threw a wedding banquet to which no one came.ⁱ He kept sending slaves to bring in the guests, but still they refused. And not only did they refuse, but they killed the messengers. Eventually the king got fed up, sent his troops out, and destroyed the cities. So, what's the message here? If the parable is prescriptive, the message seems pretty clear. You better come to the party God is throwing, or God will destroy your city. But what if the parable is not prescriptive? What if, as Pastor Bolz Weber thinks, it is descriptive? After all, what is the Old Testament but a story in which Israel turns away from God, God sends a prophet to call them back, they ignore and/or kill the prophet, and then they get conquered. But even as the prophet is warning them of the danger, the prophet also promises God's presence with them, and even after they are conquered, the prophet promises God is still with them, and eventually, God leads them back from slavery to freedom. And then the story repeats itself. Like last week's parable, we once again have two sets of slaves who are allegories of the prophets.

I want to be a little careful here, because I'm not saying that God destroyed the people because they didn't listen to the prophets. It's like the story of the man sitting on his roof as the flood waters rose and every time someone offered to help him out, he said, no, God's going to save me. Eventually he drown, and when he went to heaven he asked God, why didn't you save me. To which God replied, I tried. Who do you think all those people offering to help were? The history of redemption following the destruction doesn't line up to be a sign of God's wrath. But if this parable is descriptive, it is a pretty good summary of the events of the Old Testament.

Then the parable goes on. Because the king still had the problem of not having any guests for his party. So he sent his slaves back out to gather up anyone they could find. And soon the hall was filled with guests, both the good and the bad. But when the king entered the hall, he found a guest who was not wearing a wedding robe. And the king was so enraged by the guest's failure to live up to the dress code, that he had his attendants bind the man and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Let's pause here to notice a few things. First, when a king threw a banquet, he often provided wedding robes for his guests. Part of the purpose of such a banquet was for the groom to prove how wealthy and powerful he was. And what better way to show wealth than to literally dress all your guests. So, while an extreme response, it was not unreasonable for the king to expect the guests to be wearing the clothes he gave to them when they entered.

But second, and more important, in the early church, "putting on the robe" was a metaphor for becoming a follower of Jesus. It was a reference to the white robe that new converts would put on after their baptism. This man's refusal to "put on the robe" at the banquet of the kingdom of heaven was not about God having a strict dress code. Rather it was about those who want all the benefits without having to pay any of the costs.

Because there is, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said, a cost to discipleship. There is not a cost to salvation. Salvation is free. It is a gift we receive from Christ by grace, there's nothing we have to do to receive it and nothing we possible could do to earn it. But when we take that gift, it changes us. We become new people, and that change can be costly. The prophets of Israel paid the cost. Bonhoeffer paid it at the hands of the Nazis, Martin Luther King paid it in Memphis, and in maybe less dramatic ways, we pay it too. Being a disciple of Christ is life-giving, but it is not without cost. The promise is not that we will never suffer, but that our suffering is always followed by life.

And maybe this is my snarky millennial side coming out, but I got to thinking about the state of American Christianity. In mainline churches, it sometimes feels like we are pining for an earlier era. When churches were the social gathering space, when the pews were packed, and confirmation classes were huge. Now bear with me. Many of you got your grounding in faith in that environment, and it is a ground that has stood you well long into the future. Who we are is built on the faith poured into you in that period. But it is also the case that the time we remember was a weird anomaly in church participation. We remember it as being "the way things always were," because human memory only lasts back a couple of generations

at best. It wasn't the way things always were before that. In the 60s, Trinity, the congregation I serve, was worshipping three hundred on a Sunday. This is the attendance we remember, and the attendance our building was constructed around. But in the early 1900s, the congregation that was founded by forty-two charter members was down to eight. The forty-odd average worship attendance we have in 2020 is not the smallest we've ever been, we just don't have anyone around who remembers when Trinity called a pastor to serve eight of us.

This is not unique to Trinity either, it may also be the story of your congregation. This is basically the story of almost every mainline congregation in America. In the fifties and sixties, church membership grew exponentially. And sociologists posit communism was the cause of that growth. During the Cold War, when Joseph McCarthy was making a name for himself by accusing anyone and everyone of being a spy for the Russians, Americans, and especially high ranking Americans, flocked to churches to prove loyalty to America and distance from the atheist Communists. This is also when "In God We Trust" started showing up on our money, and when the phrase "under God" entered the pledge of allegiance. Before then, such phrases would have provoked memories of the state churches from which the colonists had originally fled. But in the fifties, Russia replaced the Church of England as the greatest threat to democracy, and our society responded accordingly.

And for many people, it worked. Many of you are a testament to the great faith formation a culture of churchgoers can produce. But it didn't work for everyone. My generation's lack of church connection can also be traced back to a time when church was mostly about making sure you were seen in the right social circles, to get the right promotions and have the right credentials. Like the parable demonstrated, when you invite everyone to the party, some people show up just for the food.

And I am beginning to believe that this pendulum swing is actually good news for us. While it is tempting to look back at the past and lament, I think this parable should help us look forward with joy to the new future God is calling us into. Because the people who were only coming to the party to gain power, aren't coming anymore. That was Jesus' challenge to the Pharisees, if you're only coming to eat the free food, you're taking up a space at the table. Come and be changed.

And if we look at back at the church's history, we notice a startling trend, and that is that we as the church are not at our best when we are the center of society. Constantine's Rome, not our best moment. The Crusades, not our best moment. The medieval church, not our best moment. We as the church do our best work from the margins. The early Church under Roman persecution was known for its care for widows, orphans, and the marginalized. Luther was an upstart monk from rural Germany who argued God's grace was not reserved for those who could afford it. Bonhoeffer's underground church challenged Hitler and helped Jews escape to safety. The black church under Jim Crow fueled the Civil Rights Movement. We do our best work when we do it from the edges. And maybe, just maybe, that's what's happening now. A bishop once said to me maybe it's not that the church is dying but that, like a boxer before a fight, it's cutting excess weight and getting ready to move.

So put on your robes, dear people of God. Don the robe of Christ and enter into the work. Many are called, but few are chosen, and we know from the promises made in our baptism that we have been chosen. We stand at the edge of a new Reformation, and I cannot wait to see how God, through us, is going to change the world. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Gracious host, empower your church with a commitment to welcome and hospitality. We pray for bishops, pastors, deacons, teachers, lay leaders, and all the baptized as they invite others to your table of forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

Lord of east and west, north and south, there are no boundaries to your transforming love. Help and equip diplomats, mayors, governors, and all elected officials to set a table for peace. Open clear lines of communication and understanding so that justice and relief for the oppressed and marginalized prevails. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

God of healing, bring your grace and comfort to all who are tired or ill. Especially all those we hold close in our hearts who hunger for a special measure of your grace. Strengthen and equip doctors, nurses, first responders, and caretakers with the resources they need to bring lasting healing for all in need. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, generous God, for your holy Word that welcomes all to yourself. Your Word crosses every boundary and barrier to proclaim your abundant life. For your Word of new life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your timeless Word has formed and reformed your Church throughout the ages. As we celebrate this good news, continue to set us free by your Word, O God, **that we might always be reformed to live out your love through our lives!**

Jesus is your Word into which we are welcomed in baptism to bear the fruit of your love. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **send us to welcome others and form the world by your love!**

In thanks and praise for your reforming Word to change the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

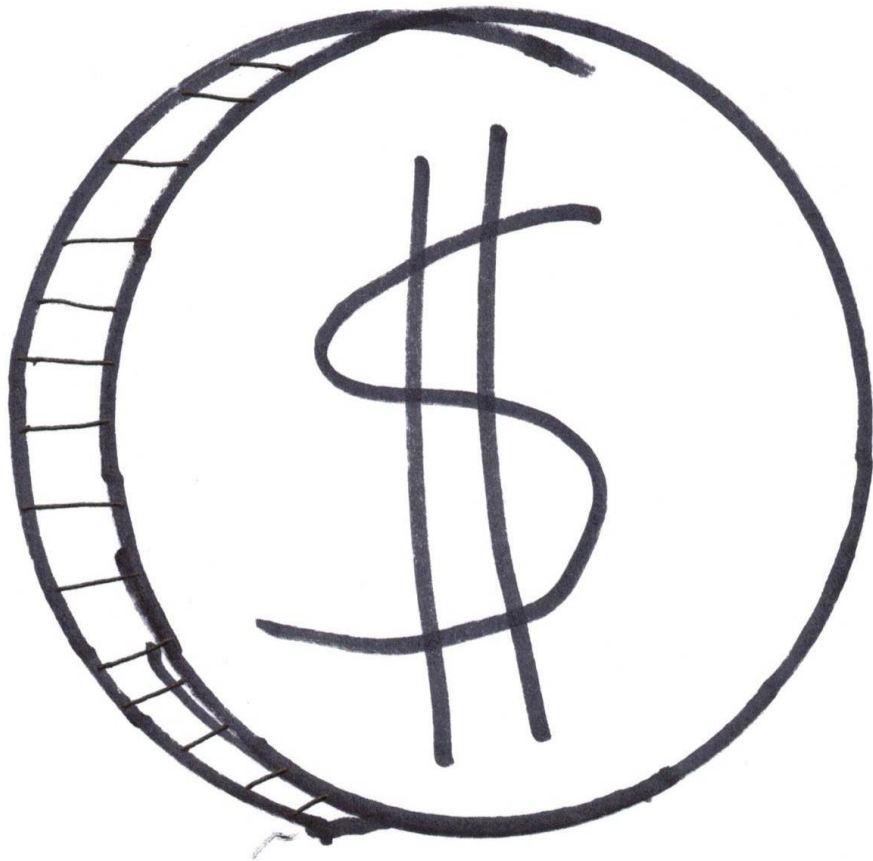
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 11, 2020



TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

October 18 , 2020

Call To Worship

Worship the LORD in holy splendor
tell of his salvation from day to day.

Sing to the LORD, bless his name
tell of his salvation from day to day.

Say among the nations, "The LORD is king!
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.
tell of his salvation from day to day.

(adapted from Psalm 96)

Prayer of the Day

God of all time and space, you created the light and the dark, taking joy in both of your creations. Give us the strength to trust your love for us, that we may accept your love for our whole selves, especially the parts of selves that we seek to hide from the world. Through your Son help us to see ourselves as people wholly loved by you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

Amen.

Reading - Isaiah 45:1-7

"This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut:

²I will go before you and will level the mountains^[a]; I will break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron.

³I will give you hidden treasures, riches stored in secret places, so that you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who summons you by name.

⁴For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honor, though you do not acknowledge me.

⁵I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me,

⁶so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none

besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other.

⁷ I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

Gospel - Matthew 22:15-22

¹⁵ Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶ They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷ Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax [\[a\]](#) to Caesar or not?" ¹⁸ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹ Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, ²⁰ and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" ²¹ "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." ²² When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Sermon - Rev. Carolyn Albert Donovan, Pastor, Peace Lutheran Church, Austin, TX

"Treasurers of darkness"... "riches hidden in secret"...

I admit that these words from Isaiah have not been part of my Biblical language vocabulary for very long. They escaped my awareness for many years.

This phrase was first lifted out of Scripture for me...and offered as the gift that it is...by my siblings in faith who know the beauty of darkness better than I do. I am not fluent in the language of darkness as beauty. I am fully formed by a world where the heroes wear white and the villains wear black. And things go bump in the night. And the light at the tunnel is always a sign of hope...and never, in fact, an oncoming train.

Except that sometimes the light actually is a harbinger of a collision. Sometimes it pierces. Sometimes it hurts.

I know. And yet, I forget. Even as one who is visually impaired...who knows how harsh light can be on delicate retinas...who knows how much richness I have found, personally, in perception that lies somewhere beyond sight.

Darkness is full of treasure. And sometimes what is put out into the light of day isn't worth nearly so much.

Think of the fertile soil where the magic of chemistry releases life from inside the husk of a seed...where it's not what is seen but what is felt...heat and coolness...molecules unlocking each other in a microscopic embrace...the whispering dance of life...

We are waiting now...like God's people in the time of Isaiah...whether we know it or not...for the treasures of darkness.

This is where the virus's undoing will be unlocked...in invisibly small places...hidden from our sight. It won't be a fanfare, really, not the moment of its undoing...It will be in the midst of a long...into the night...repetitive...monotonous...unglamorous road...littered with failures...reaching for the treasure in the dark that can help us find the way to fuller life...to undo this death-dealing monster.

Again, we don't act like this is true most of the time...but we do know that the things that happen in broad daylight are sometimes the least important...the least true.

This was certainly true in the time of Jesus. The Messiah moved about in hidden places. Held his identity a precious secret in so many ways. While the ones who entered cities with fanfare did not bring life with them.

Today in Matthew, we hear how the religious leaders speak, but dissemble...They have shiny, presentable, respectable (though not remotely respectful) words. But what they parade in the daylight is bankrupt and empty. And Jesus calls their bluff...showing them the very thing they value...and dismissing it. You can give the emperor back his stamped bit of metal, Jesus says. You can return vanity to where it came from...Ego is the snake eating its own tail. I don't care about that at all. That's not why I am here.

Jesus knows that the most precious treasure doesn't sparkle in the sunlight...because you can't put a price on the strong embrace that wraps around you after nightfall and tells you that you are precious and never alone. You can't tax love. And you can't extort a pure heart.

I expect if you sit for awhile and examine your life, you can find the treasures of darkness...the thing that don't sparkle and shine...but that are the very breath of life...the most precious things of all. You can, can't you?

You know this truth...even if...like me...it's not always something you realize because it's not something you have practiced knowing.

But, what if I told you that it is not only what is hidden within your life that is the treasure of darkness...but what is in the darkness of your very self that is a treasure, too?

The shiny, curated version of you that you put out into the light of day...on social media or among friends...or in your Christmas card...the way you frame up your camera in the zoom meeting so the disaster is just off screen...

God didn't come to live our life and die our death and defeat death so we could be with God always...to just have that part of you...that version of you.

The God who knows you fully...treasures the parts of you that you keep in darkness.

What is in the light...when it isn't real...when it isn't complete...isn't where God's treasure is.

Now I'm not saying that venturing into the darkness and hiddenness of ourselves isn't complicated...or scary.

When you start exploring your darkness...you can stub your toes...

When you have spent so much time in the light...your eyes take while to adjust...

And when they do...you may be confronted with things that you put in the darkness for a reason. But they are still there...and coming to peace with all our darkness...both the things we lost there that are beautiful and the things that we hid there out of shame...this is the journey to finding the treasure that is our own life.

In John Bell's beautiful hymn *The Summons*, he opens with the line "Will you come and follow me if I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?" But it's at the fourth verse that my voice always catches...because Bell has us sing to ourselves, in the voice of God, "Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name? Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?"

We are in the midst of great struggles in our world. Struggles of fear as mortality stares us in the face even more than ever before each day. Struggles of unrest as those with power due to race or gender or wealth are called to account by those disempowered and oppressed across generations. Shame stalks the edges of all things...as we fear not doing enough...or being enough...to be worthy of life and love in the midst of a world in pain.

And the only way to the other side of all these fears is through them. The treasure is in the darkness...in places still hidden...beyond the manipulation of the Pharisees...beyond the ego of the empire...within each human life and heart. Within your life and heart. And Jesus is walking with us...into the very darkest places where we fear meeting the things that go bump in the night...or maybe even more...where we fear meeting ourselves.

And he is revealing to us the life that takes root in the hidden darkness. When you find yourself there, friends...know that you are not alone. Breathe...even if the air feels thin. Let your eyes adjust. Don't be afraid.

God is Lord. There is no other. No virus...no emperor or president or power will be able to claim you from the God who creates you. Hold this treasure in the darkest, most beautiful corner of your heart and let it grow.

You have all you need.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Merciful God, we pray for the whole of your holy and apostolic Church, where it is in error, reform it. Where the Church speaks truth, strengthen it. Where the Church is divided, bring us together and unify it. Empower and strengthen us with your Holy Spirit that we may boldly proclaim the liberating good news of your unconditional love. Lord in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of all creation, renew and inspire leaders of every walk of life so that we may work together for the well being of all people created in your image. In a world suffering from conflict and division guide us to be peacemakers and agents of grace. Lord in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of healing, restore and renew all those wrestling with doubt, pain, or addiction. Give your healing touch to all those who are ill (especially...) and those whose sighs are too deep for words. Empower us to meet the days ahead with courage and a life-giving faith. Lord in your mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, generous God, for your holy Word that welcomes all to yourself. Your Word crosses every boundary and barrier to proclaim your abundant life. For your Word of new life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your timeless Word has formed and reformed your Church throughout the ages. As we celebrate this good news, continue to set us free by your Word, O God, **that we might always be reformed to live out your love through our lives!**

Jesus is your Word into which we are welcomed in baptism to bear the fruit of your love. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **send us to welcome others and form the world by your love!**

In thanks and praise for your reforming Word to change the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

Lord's Prayer

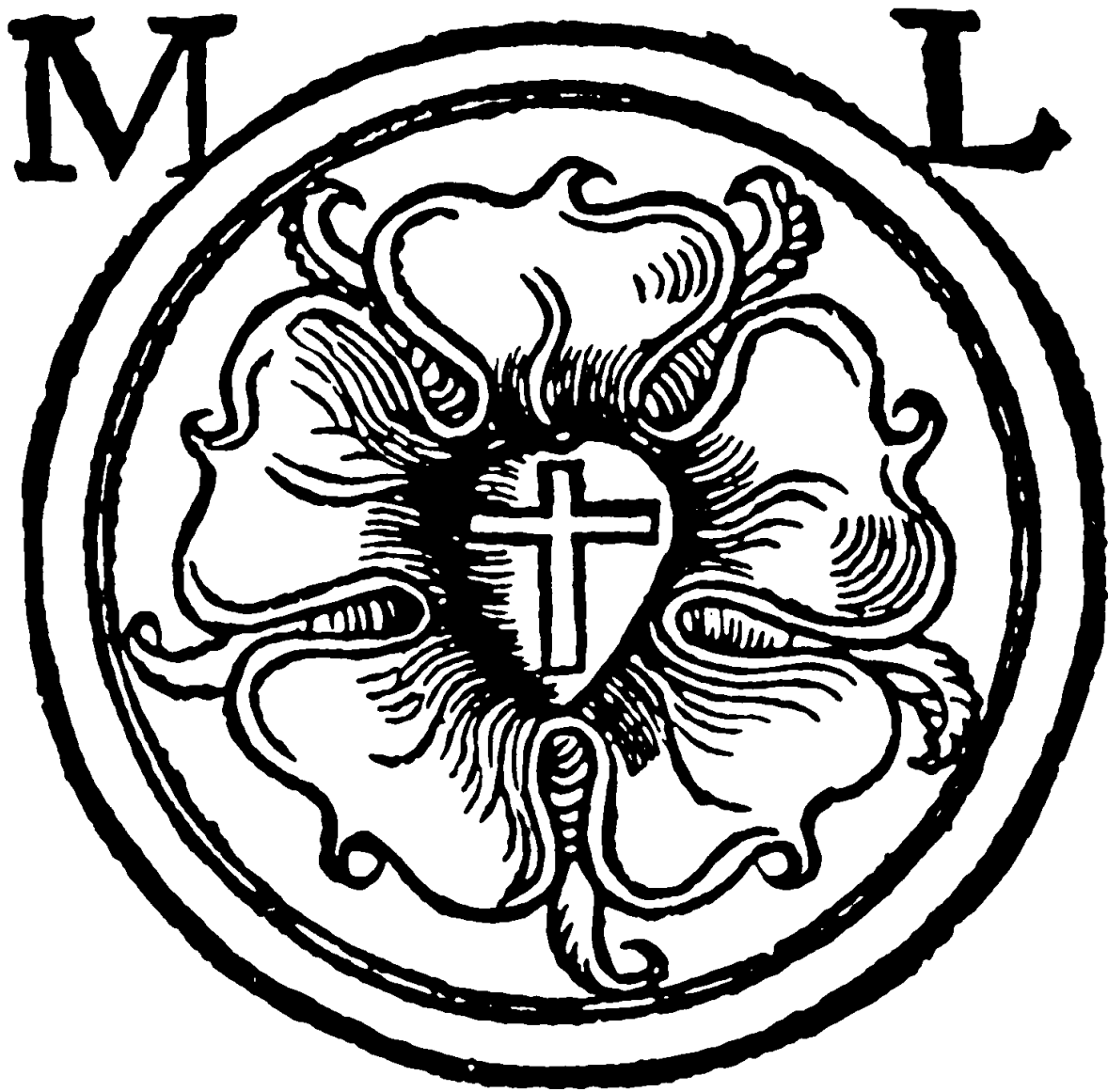
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the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

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.
Amen.

REFORMATION SUNDAY

October 25 , 2020



REFORMATION SUNDAY

October 25 , 2020

Call To Worship

The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

(adapted from Psalm 46)

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and sovereign God, it is by your gifts of grace and faith that we find security, comfort, and courage in the face of a scary world. Embolden, enliven, and inspire us to do your work in our communities knowing that your love is leading us, and your Spirit is supporting us, through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Reading - Psalm 46

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- ³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging. [\[C\]](#)
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
- ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
- ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

⁸ Come and see what the LORD has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields^[d] with fire.

¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Sermon - Rev. Darryl Thompson Powell, Pastor, Associate Director for African Descent Ministries, ELCA and Pastor, Resurrection Lutheran, Elk Grove Village, IL

Today I want to take a moment to look at our Psalm for the day, and for a moment – with your prayers – I want to talk about **"Being Secure in an Unsafe World."**



No story for you today, but I do have some warning signs to show. You know you see them all over the place. They'll warn you about immediate dangers, like this one that says "Danger – Slippery Surface"

They'll warn you about potential dangers, like these from one of my favorite places – Hawaii – that warns of the potential for falling rocks AND flash floods.

Because of lawsuits, some places that serve coffee have to warn you "Caution: Beverages are extremely hot. Please make sure lid is secure and do not hold over or between lap."



I'm still not sure how you can hold something between your lap since it is the top of your legs, but don't do it with a hot beverage!



Some people think "Do not touch" is a suggestion so signs have to be explicit like this one:



"DANGER: Do Not Touch. Not only will this kill you, it will hurt the whole time you are dying."

Some have to state the obvious like this one at a pool:

"Do Not Breath Underwater." Thanks! If you hadn't warned me I would have tried it.



Some realize that people don't really read signs unless you get their attention. "CAUTION: This sign has SHARP EDGES! Do not touch the edges of this sign. Also, the bridge is out ahead."

With other you wonder, "Really?" "Caution, Drunken People Crossing."





While with others you just wonder what they really mean. Does this mean “Dancing deer ahead?” If so, that would be something to see!

These signs remind us that we live in an unsafe world. Our news media reminds us of that every day as they tell us of new things that we eat or do that could possibly kill us. Plus, there are the headline stories about wrong-way drivers on the road, increased gun violence, and of course, COVID-19!

9/11 shocked many people not because of how many people died but because it shattered the sense of safety that folks had. I'm not going to sugar coat it: we live in an unsafe world. It's no wonder that people are constantly looking for ways to be secure living in an unsafe world.

It's nothing new, though. The psalmist – probably David – tells us through his own experience: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” That's where we can find true security and peace.

I love this psalm because David reminds us that **our security is in God, not in this world**. It's a simple thing but one that we miss. David tell us that we are to look to the Creator, not the creation. We are to love the Giver, not the gifts. There are towering trees, beautiful mountains, splendid oceans, animals, birds and plants. But when it comes down to it, this world has little to offer us. The earth can give way, the mountains can fall into the sea, and the waters can roar and foam as the mountains quake.

We've got to turn to God because God alone can be our refuge and strength. God is our ever-present help. God is our hope, and nothing else. We have only one source of security and it's not the FDIC, the U.S. military or the local police; it's God. When the stock market drops and terrorism rises... When natural disasters destroy our homes and corrupt politicians destroy our state... When COVID-19 and street shootings threaten us... When our health fails us and friends betray us, faith in God is the only place we can find security. Our world, with all its advancements and the scientific miracles that exist, isn't any safer today than it was thousands of years ago. Sadly, we feel more unsafe today than those days when people live in villages or wooden huts.

In this day and age, we are not guaranteed safety. Let me share this with you: According to several preachers, about forty years ago an older couple, who were about to retired, became alarmed at the threat of a nuclear war. They wanted to find the location that would give them the best chance of survival in the event of an atomic catastrophe. Eventually they did find such a place. That Christmas they sent their ex-pastor and friends a card from their new home. They had found their ark of absolute security in some islands off the coast of Argentina in the South Atlantic. When people got the card, nobody had any idea where these islands were. Less than a year later everybody knew when Argentina and

Great Britain, who both claimed to own these islands, were engaged in a war there and everybody knew about the Falkland Islands.ⁱⁱ

Anything can happen, at any second. We need to have disaster, anti-terrorism, and COVID-19 drills because we are at the whim of circumstance. But there is no guarantee. There is no security UNLESS we've placed ourselves in the hand of the one who holds eternity, who is in control of all things.

Martin Luther reminded the church that we need to turn to God, more so in these last days. Only when we seek God, can we find rest for our soul. David wrote, "Be still, and know that I am God!"ⁱⁱⁱ

The psalmist also said, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm."^{iv}

God is waiting to hear us call to the creator of all for help. And if we call, God will respond. I think that's important to hear because too often when Christians feel insecure, they stop coming to church. When you are secure in God, you don't need the security of other things. God is still in control and seated firmly on the throne. That's why we can say: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea."^v Our security is in God and not in this world.

David also reminds us that **our security comes from our faith, not from our circumstance.** David was facing all kinds of problems when he wrote this psalm. Most likely he was being attacked on all sides by Saul or some other king and had found a place of relative safety. But the psalmist was able to feel secure and happy despite the turmoil around him. He says in verse 5, "God is within [the city], she will not fall,"^{vi} and in verse 7, "The Lord Almighty is with us..."^{vii} David's faith is in the presence of God, and that gives him hope and security. Not because the city has huge walls or strong gates... Not because he has the best trained military with incredible weapons... Not because they've established security checkpoints to keep out all the terrorist and killer diseases, but because God is with them.

Too many people pray for the wrong things: good life, good car, good job, more money. No doubt, God can bless us materially with riches. I'm sure God wants us to enjoy the good gifts we receive just as we want our children to enjoy what we give them. But God doesn't want us to depend on the created. God wants us to depend on the Creator! Our trust is not in things, but in God.

What we need to pray for is strong faith. Pray that in the midst of a changing world we'll continue to trust that God is with us. God's presence should be our peace and joy. We want to have faith in God no matter what happens. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."^{viii}

We know that there are folks who live with great prosperity – they have lots of money and possessions - but they are consumed with worry and fear. On the flip side, there are those in

our world today who live in very difficult and dangerous places but have a great sense of security because they have placed their faith and hope in God.

Job lost everything around him, but he chose to place his trust in God. Job was shaken but he didn't fall. The 125th Psalm says, "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever."^{ix} So let's be clear here: security isn't the absence of trouble but the confidence and courage we have in the midst of trouble. And that confidence and courage comes from faith in God. It's this faith that gives David the courage to say, "We will not fear."^x

We need to have the same courage today. Jesus said, "I've told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world."^{xi} Our confidence can't be shaken, because we have a God who's in complete control! We have courage not because we are strong but because our God is strong! God is powerful and rules over all. God hasn't changed and God's love will see us through.

We are secure in an unsafe world because of our faith and not our circumstance, knowing that the One who loves us is with us.

Finally, David reminds us that **our security is in eternity and not in the present**. "Come and see the works of the Lord." In other words, ultimately God wins. I have to remind you that this world isn't our home. If you're looking just at your present circumstances you will be shaken, you will tremble. But if your life is grounded in eternity, you can stand firm.

As Christians, our lives have an eternal dimension. We must remember that nothing that happens here can harm or change the things that matter most: our relationship with God through Jesus and our promised home in heaven. Nothing can change those things. No one can take them away.

The articulate African Apostle Paul said "...that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good."^{xii} God works in every situation of our lives to bring about divine good. God doesn't cause them, but God does use them.

The COVID-19 pandemic isn't the will of God. God didn't send the disease to punish the people of the world, but God will use it for God's eternal purpose.

The killing of unarmed Black and Brown people that have happened across our country hasn't been the will of God. The people who have done it have gone against God's will. God had nothing to do with it...but God will use these things for God's eternal purposes.

Our confidence doesn't go up and down with this year's roller coaster stock market. Our security isn't in how good the news is on television. God says through the psalmist, "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth."^{xiii}

There is evil in the world. The devil is active! But God is in the world also. The Creator's heart is for the created. Jesus tells us that God will still judge the evil in this world and ultimately good

will triumph over evil, truth will be victorious over the lie, and love will trump hate. Thanks to Jesus, we know the end of the story: God wins.

In this world, there are no guarantees for any of us. We're not immune to the harms of this world. But – Hallelujah! – we are loved! God the Father watches over God's children and that is our security. The song says, "This world is not our home, we're just passing through. Our treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue."^{xiv}

Beloved, despite all the dangers around us, we can still feel secure in this unsafe world. We can feel secure because we know our security is in God, not in this world. We can feel secure because we know our security comes from our faith, not from our circumstance. And we can feel secure because we know our security is in eternity and not in the present.

God is good...all the time...and God will lead us safely back to our eternal home. No matter where our journey takes us, God takes our hand and walks beside us. That's good news! And that's great security.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

As members of the Body of Christ, gathered here and across the world, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Gracious host, empower your church with a commitment to welcome and hospitality. We pray for bishops, pastors, deacons, teachers, lay leaders, and all the baptized as they invite others to your table of forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

Lord of east and west, north and south, there are no boundaries to your transforming love. Help and equip diplomats, mayors, governors, and all elected officials to set a table for peace. Open clear lines of communication and understanding so that justice and relief for the oppressed and marginalized prevails. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

God of healing, bring your grace and comfort to all who are tired or ill. Especially all those we hold close in our hearts who hunger for a special measure of your grace. Strengthen and equip doctors, nurses, first responders, and caretakers with the resources they need to bring lasting healing for all in need. Lord in your mercy,

Hear our Prayer.

Gracious Spirit, intercede for us with sighs too deep for words; keep us in true faith; and gather us with the whole church on earth, into the communion of the triune God.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, generous God, for your holy Word that welcomes all to yourself. Your Word crosses every boundary and barrier to proclaim your abundant life. For your Word of new life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your timeless Word has formed and reformed your Church throughout the ages. As we celebrate this good news, continue to set us free by your Word, O God, **that we might always be reformed to live out your love through our lives!**

Jesus is your Word into which we are welcomed in baptism to bear the fruit of your love. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **send us to welcome others and form the world by your love!**

In thanks and praise for your reforming Word to change the world, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

Adapted from a sermon by Ken Klaus, www.lutheranhour.org/sermon.asp?articleid=1764

Psalm 46:10

Psalm 20:7-8 (NIV)

Psalm 46:1-2 (NIV)

Psalm 46:5 (NIV)

Psalm 46:7 (NIV)

John 14:27 (NRSV)

Psalm 125:1 (NIV)

Psalm 46:2

John 16:33 (The Message)

Rom 8:28 (The Message)

Psalm 46:10

This World is Not My Home (paraphrased)

ALL SAINTS DAY
November 1, 2020



ALL SAINTS DAY

November 1, 2020

Call To Worship

You are God my stronghold

Send me your light and your faithful care.

Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked

Send me your light and your faithful care.

I will praise you with the lyre, O God, my God

Send me your light and your faithful care.

(adapted from Psalm 43)

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, you have knit your people together by the waters of Baptism, and sustained them through the power of the Eucharist from generation to generation. Be with us this day as we remember all those we have loved who have gone before us. Hold us close and remind us that either separated by death or distance, you are our God who brings life to all, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 5:1-12

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ²and he began to teach them.

He said:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Sermon - Rev. Dominic V. Guido, Pastor, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, Crestview Hills, KY

I did my required part-time field work during my second year of seminary in the south suburbs of Chicago. I served at a small, aging congregation, where my field work supervisor: the pastor, was the only full-time person on the payroll. And, many folks would joke about that congregation that it only continued to exist so that "the old Swedes" could have their high church liturgies with bells and incense and all the trappings. And, what trappings they were. There was an entire wall of the worship space that was filled with votive candle holders, which could be changed out depending on the liturgical color. There was a shining, polished golden gospel book that was carried to the altar in procession every week. There was quite possibly the largest beeswax paschal candle that I have ever seen, replaced new each and every Easter. And, all of these trappings were placed within an aging, dated worship space, which was growing more and more in need of repair each day. Every All Saints Sunday, they would bring in extra choir members from nearby college music programs. Every All Saints Sunday, they would light the incense and have a gospel procession. Every All Saints Sunday, they would sing the Litany of the Saints (changed from "Pray for us," to "Pray with us," so as to make it more confessionally Lutheran and less Roman Catholic).

Every All Saints Sunday that I spent in that congregation, I would watch the light from the votives on the wall stream through the smoke from the incense, all while the professionally enhanced choir intoned: "All you holy men and women, pray with us." And, in the sensory experience of the smell, and the sight, and the sound, I found myself momentarily transported. I imagined the holy ones of God mentioned in the litany: Saint Mary, the mother of Christ; Saint Elizabeth, her cousin and the mother of John the Baptizer; Saint John the Baptizer himself; as well as the Apostles: Peter and Paul, Andrew, James, John and all the rest. I imagined them as they are so often depicted in the Renaissance Era art that so often serves as the touchstone for my imagination, even as I know that its depictions don't match historical reality. But, that was the image in my head. We were surrounded in that moment by the saints of God: resplendent looking, holy, and powerful, joining us in lifting up prayers to the Almighty. I felt drawn out of myself, and into something larger. But, like the smoke of the incense in the thurible, I could only perceive it for a moment, and then it was gone, and I was back in the aging, crumbling worship space. And, I would just spend the rest of the

service wanting to get back to wherever it was that I had found myself with all those saints for that beautiful moment.

And, that is a trap that is so easy for me to fall into. It is all too easy for me to think that the place to find the Holy Ones of God is distant, and far away: removed from this reality. I longed so deeply to be pulled out of where I was. I longed to find God. I longed to experience that reality that St. Matthew's gospel calls the Kingdom of Heaven. And so, when the Word of God encounters me today in these well-know Beatitudes from Matthew, it sort of hits me like a splash of cold water, reminding me of that fundamental truth that this gospel account repeats over and over and over that the Kingdom of Heaven is not far away: the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.

Because when Jesus proclaims these blessings, he is doing something radical. When Jesus says that the meek are blessed and that the peacemakers are children of God, business as usual is flipped on its head. When Jesus announces comfort for those who mourn and invites the persecuted to rejoice and be glad, he is not saying something that makes a whole lot of sense from our normal point of view.

The places that we so often look for blessing, the places that we expect to notice the presence of God, the places where we look for holiness, the places where we (like I did back in my field work congregation) want to try and find God's saints: these places are so often places that we imagine are far removed, distant (either by time or place) somehow closer to God than our present realities. And, I think that's because so often we don't think that we are particularly close to God ourselves.

Now at this point, the comparison that almost every sermon that I've ever heard on All Saints' Day using this Beatitudes story draws, is to compare the suffering of the groups that Jesus names to be blessed, and the lives of (generally speaking) ease that the assembled congregation leads. The preacher will usually tell their primarily white, primarily affluent congregation that the people who are truly blessed are the ones who understand the beauty in having little, the simple joys present even in a life of hardship, and no second boat, no vacation timeshare, no expensive watch is going to provide the sort of blessing that Jesus describes in these words from the Sermon on the Mount. The antidote therefore is to stop and smell the roses, to appreciate what we have, to see the blessings in our lives. But, I'm not sure that's really what Jesus is saying here. Remember, I just said that I think the problem is that we think that God, can't possibly be near to us. But, Jesus says quite the opposite: the places that you think Jesus can't or won't or shouldn't come near are precisely the places where Jesus goes.

Jesus seeks out the hurting places in our world. Jesus seeks out the hurting places in our lives. Jesus finds the middle-aged parent anxiously awaiting the COVID-19 test results, mourning with anticipation and anxiety and unable to make peace. Jesus searches for the elder begging for God's mercy in the midst of chronic illness and pain. Jesus pursues the young person hungering and thirsting for a world that is more just, more peaceful, more righteous than the world they have thus far known. Jesus finds those places, where everything seems wrong, and those are the places to which Jesus himself comes.

This is in many ways one of the major notes that the gospel of Matthew hits again and again, that Jesus is Emmanuel: God with us. In the incarnation of Christ, God finds us. When we feel as though we are separated from God, Christ comes to be with us. When we think that we could not possibly be holy, when we think that the saints of God must have left the building, we are reminded that in the holy waters of baptism **we ourselves** are God's saints: whether we gather together in a crumbling building, whether we join with others online, or whether we seek out the presence of God in solitude (chosen or forced). On this All Saints' Day, as every day, we are all God's saints. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

Holy God, we thank you for your presence in our world. Through good times and bad, you are our constant rock, our fortress, and salvation. Thank you for holding us when we are scared, mending us when we are broken, and finding us when we are lost in the darkness of night. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God Of All Time and Space, on this All Saints Sunday we remember all those we love that have gone before us. Especially we remember those who have died in the last year. Lord we pray your light, your compassion, and your care for all those who ache with the sadness of loss in their lives. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of hope and wholeness, you speak to your saints of all ages, calling, caring, and loving your children of many tribes. Be with all those around the world suffering & in pain; those drawing to the end of their life's journeys; and those entombed by the pressures of the world. Those we name before you now, both silently and aloud. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, God of hope, for your holy Word that endures forever. Your Word has inspired the faithful saints before us, among us, and beyond us to proclaim your glory. For your everlasting Word, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your powerful Word is justice for the poor and oppressed, food for the hungry, and life for the dead. Continue to call us by your Word, O God, **that we may bring your kingdom near!**

Jesus is your Word present from the beginning of all time; in all time; for all time. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **hold us close as you send us to proclaim your justice and peace in the world!**

In thanks and praise for your faithful Word through all generations, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENECCOST

November 8, 2020



TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENECCOST

November 8, 2020

Call To Worship

Hasten, O God, to save me;
come quickly, LORD, to help me.

May all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who long for your saving help always say,
"The LORD is great!"
come quickly, LORD, to help me.

You are my help and my deliverer
come quickly, LORD, to help me.

(adapted from Psalm 70)

Prayer of the Day

Eternal God, Alpha and Omega, you speak to your people across time, calling us to be ready and prepared as we face unknown challenges. Grant us persistence, resilience, and faithfulness as we seek to spread your word during these challenging days, by the power of you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.
Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 13:1-13

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹Whoever has ears, let them hear." ¹⁰The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" ¹¹He replied, "Because

the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

Sermon - Rev. Jeff Schlesinger, Pastor, Heart of Illinois Lutheran Parish (First Lutheran, Lee IL and Immanuel Lutheran, Compton, IL)

I remember the day well. It was February 1, 2015. It was the 17th anniversary of my ordination. In those 17 years as a pastor I had not once had to cancel a worship service. And that included six years of ministry in northern Wisconsin where the winters could be quite harsh.

But on that Sunday in 2015 (Super Bowl Sunday actually) I woke up to find ten inches of snow already on the ground. But, the stubborn German that I am, I set off for church – which for me, at that time, was one of our Lutheran camps as I was a developing pastor for a new congregation which met at the camp. Though it was only two miles away, that drive made the decision to cancel easy. It took 25 minutes to traverse those two miles, even though there was no traffic - I don't believe I saw another car. In fact, at one point I had to bring the car to a stop on the highway due to complete white out. When I got back into town, I sat in McDonalds sipping a hot cup of coffee, texting and emailing the congregation to "stay home and stay safe." When I arrived back to the apartment where I was staying, I had to "shovel myself in" as it had snowed so much since I left.

Little did I know then, that just five years later I would be sending that same message to my congregations, but in an entirely different and unforeseen context. In 2015, the unspoken part of that message was pretty clear, "stay home and stay safe... until we can dig out of this blizzard." But in 2020, the unspoken part of that message remains unspoken, "stay home and stay safe until... who knows?"

"Stay home and stay safe. Someday this will be over. Someday there will be a vaccine and a treatment. We're not sure when. But some day." It is in the context of the corona virus pandemic that we hear Jesus' parable of the ten bridesmaids.

I like to call this parable "the first of the last." It is the first of three parables that are essentially Jesus' final teachings as Matthew tells the gospel story. You will hear the other two parables next week and the week after as we bring this church year to its conclusion. I once had a speech teacher tell me that the first and last words of your speech are the most important, for those are what people remember the most. Therefore, brothers and sisters, pay attention these next few weeks, for these are Jesus' last words.

And the point of the first of these last words is quite plain: "Keep awake. Be ready. Be prepared."

This message of course comes in the midst of a story about a wedding. A rather strange story at that. Now, I could go off into a historical explanation of weddings during Jesus' time but I won't – I want you to keep reading. (If I were preaching to you in-person, I'd say, "I won't because I want you to stay awake.") In fact, I'm not sure it is that important. Quite honestly, I think Jesus is probably using the wedding context for his parable to add some entertaining absurdity to the story. Even given the wedding practices of the day, it seems rather absurd that bridesmaids would show up without the one thing they needed for their job, that the bridegroom would be so delayed for his own wedding, or that they would begin the wedding proceedings at midnight.

No, I don't think Jesus expects us to dig deeply into the metaphor of the wedding itself. I'm not sure if he tells the story of the wedding to add comic relief or for its shock value. But in either case, he is using it to bring home his point: keep awake, be ready, be prepared.

Through your baptism, you have been called, brothers and sisters, to be part of God's kingdom. And you have a job to do in that kingdom. Just like the bridesmaids in this wedding were charged with carrying the lamps (that led the procession perhaps), you have been charged with specific tasks as part of God's kingdom. Those tasks may be different than those of your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, but you have been called to use your gifts and talents for the good of the kingdom. Keep awake. Be ready to use your gifts. Be prepared.

But the thing is, life throws curveballs. Sometimes the bridegroom is delayed. Sometimes blizzards come. Sometimes pandemics disrupt life as we know it. When that happens, it is not time to throw in the towel. Nor is it time to go find a merchant to purchase some oil, as it is probably too late anyway. When things aren't going according to plan, it's time to adapt and be creative. The charge to proclaim the good news, to love God and love your neighbor – those don't go away when life goes awry. Keep awake. Be ready. Be prepared to try something new and different.

I remember that Sunday when we first suspended worship due to corona virus. It was an excruciating decision. Not because it wasn't the right thing to do, but due to how ominous it was. Unlike cancelling one week of worship due to a blizzard, on March 15th we suspended worship indefinitely. When we began, I was keenly aware that it was highly likely that we would not be gathering for Easter worship. The facts directed us to the correct decision to suspend worship, but my heart did not want to do it.

But, I realized immediately that my call to provide worship and keep my congregations connected with their savior was not suspended. I needed to adapt. That first Sunday morning I was the only one in the church and I recorded as much of the service as I could. I figured I'd record during the normal worship times, throw the video together, post it to YouTube and have it to my people Sunday afternoon. I was foolish in my timeline, but not in my persistence. I worked all morning and afternoon recording and putting together the

video. And then that evening I learned that rural internet service is very, very, very slow in upload speeds. It literally took all night to upload that first worship video. Finally, on Monday morning, my people had their first opportunity to worship in their homes.

My worship videos have gotten much more sophisticated and their production is much more efficient. And we continue to make them almost eight months later even though we have begun to gather for in-person worship again. But there are many who don't feel safe returning in groups even though we've limited it to 50 worshippers at a given service. And we affirm that as no one should feel unsafe when they are in worship. So we do our best to adapt and provide as needed. We do our best to keep awake; to be ready; to be prepared.

The story of First Lutheran in Lee, IL and Immanuel Lutheran in Compton, IL (the congregations of Heart of Illinois Lutheran Parish where I serve) is probably not all that different from the story of your congregation. Congregations all over the country have figured out new and varying ways to continue their ministry. Bishop Eaton said it well when she responded to a question from the media, "The Church has never been closed. We've found different ways to gather, mostly digital. But we're also continuing all of our work of prayer, Bible study, and serving our neighbor." (May 27, 2020 interview on CNN) The fact that you are reading this message in an in-home worship package is one way in which the Church remains open – continuing to proclaim the good news of Christ. The doors to our buildings may be closed, but our mission is not.

Keep awake. Be ready. Be prepared. That is the point of the first of Jesus' final three stories he tells. Hold on to those words, brothers and sisters. For next week as you hear the story of the talents, and the following week when Jesus shares the story of the sheep and the goats, he wants this to be echoing in your ears: keep awake, be ready, be prepared.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

Holy God, Master of the Universe, when we look at the heavens, we see the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you established. Thank you for the joy of this creation that we share and grant us the peace and serenity to share it with one another. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Most Holy Trinity, we ask you to bless our nation with understanding, patience, and tolerance. With the election behind us, may all who inhabit this great land work together for the betterment of all humankind. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of hope and wholeness, we thank you for sending you Son to heal all those who suffer, we thank you for the gift of comfort that the Spirit that brings as we wait for your return. We pray for all those we know, those in need of your care & companionship, your wholeness & your presence. Be with all those we name before you now, both silently and aloud. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, God of hope, for your holy Word that endures forever. Your Word has inspired the faithful saints before us, among us, and beyond us to proclaim your glory. For your everlasting Word, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your powerful Word is justice for the poor and oppressed, food for the hungry, and life for the dead. Continue to call us by your Word, O God, **that we may bring your kingdom near!**

Jesus is your Word present from the beginning of all time; in all time; for all time. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **hold us close as you send us to proclaim your justice and peace in the world!**

In thanks and praise for your faithful Word through all generations, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

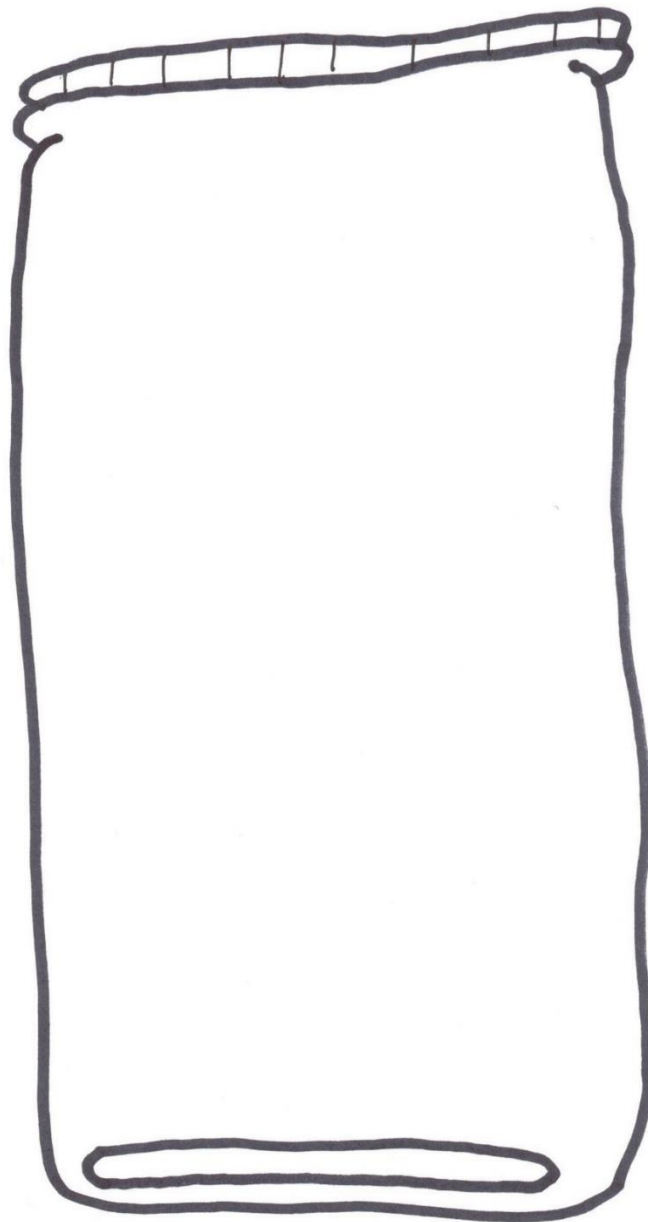
Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENECCOST

November 15, 2020



TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENECCOST

November 15, 2020

Call To Worship

You have shaken the land and torn it open;
mend its fractures, for it is quaking;
now restore us!

But for those who fear you, you have raised a banner
to be unfurled against the bow;
now restore us!

Save us and help us with your right hand,
that those you love may be delivered;
now restore us!

(adapted from Psalm 90)

Prayer of the Day

Almighty and compassionate God, we implore you to hold us, strengthen us, and guide us as we remain faced with the hard choices of life. Grant us the courage to make hard decisions knowing that you love is supporting us, and your Spirit is guiding us, now and forever.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 25:14-30

¹⁴ "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, ¹⁶ each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' ²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ²² "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.' ²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been

faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' ²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' ²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. ²⁸ "'So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Sermon - Rev. Louise C. Hilbert, Pastor, North Carolina Synod, Durham, NC

RISK AND REWARD

As we come to the end of the church year, we often hear hard words from Jesus. None of really likes to hear such things. We would much rather hear about God's love and forgiveness. Yet Jesus tells us these stories in his last days before his Passion and we need to listen to them and wrestle with their meaning and purpose.

Today's reading from Matthew is a story of wealth and risk. We live in a society that values wealth, that sees it as a sign of success. If you are doing well financially, you may like the parable of the talents. After all, it says to those who have much, more will be given. You may read the words and think, yes, that is me. I am doing well, and God blesses me even further. You may be a person who believes what the prosperity gospel preachers on TV say. You know, things like, "God wants you to be rich. God wants you to have all your needs met. God wants you to be rewarded. If you have such things, it is because God loves you more."

On the other hand, if you are struggling, you may be appalled at this parable. You may identify with the servant who was given little, who faithfully kept what he had, but did not increase it. So, the harsh master took away even what he had been given and gave it to one who already had much. You may be horrified at the words of the master in this parable when he says, "For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

This seems to be at odds with many other things Jesus says about caring for the poor, for the least and the lowly. In fact, if you read on in this chapter, you will find just such words in the parable of the sheep and goats. We need to look beyond the surface of the words used, for this parable is more complicated than it may seem.

First, this has often been used as a text for a stewardship sermon because it comes during the season of the year when we ask folks to fill out pledge cards and time and talent sheets. These words have been used to suggest that if you give your money freely, you will be

blessed in return. Think about it, Jesus did not ask for a pledge from us. He asked for us to give our whole lives to him which includes what we have and who we are, all of it.

Second, the word "talent" does not refer to our abilities as we now use it, but to a standard of money, worth about 15 years of labor for an everyday worker. So, the first servants in this parable were given an absolutely extravagant amount of money to manage, but even the one given a single talent was given a fortune. How much each of these servants received was a decision the master made for reasons we do not know.

The servants did choose how to manage the gift over which they were stewards. Two of them acted as financial investment brokers taking risks and one, in his fearful caution, kept and protected his portion. It is interesting to wonder what the master would have done if the investments had not prospered and the money had been lost. Then the one who had kept all he had been given, even though he buried it, might be a hero.

This story was told by Jesus in the last few days of his earthly life. The very next chapter in Matthew is the beginning of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Does this flavor his words? Is Jesus talking about risk taking for the sake of the kingdom of heaven? Surely, he takes risks by speaking out and acting in ways that are at odds with the religious and political establishment and he ends up dying for his risk-taking.

Perhaps this parable is told so that the followers of Jesus are aware of the need to take risks in following him. Just sitting around and saying you believe in Jesus but doing nothing is rather like the servant who did nothing with the treasure he was given while his master was away. The gifts of forgiveness and salvation were not given for us to bury or hoard or keep to ourselves.

God's gift of new life was given to be proclaimed and used. In other words, risks are to be taken with the extravagant gift we have received. We are to tell everyone about Jesus. We are to give of ourselves. We are to speak for those who have no voice. We are to see others as worthy of our attention. We give our love which we have first received from God. As good stewards we invest our resources and our very selves in the mission and ministry of the church and the community where we live.

This difficult parable told in Jesus' last days is one we need to ponder. For what we do know is that Jesus gave himself away for us. His sacrifice was given for us so that as we are marked with his cross and claimed by his limitless love, we in turn give ourselves away for the sake of our sisters and brothers who need to know and experience God's love.

Think about what risks you are willing to take to share God's love. Are there things that you need to do to work for justice? Are there people who need your time and energy? Are there folks who you could share your money or other resources with? Can you invest what God has given you in others? These are questions I think we might all do well to ask ourselves today.

May God guide your asking and your answering such questions.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

God Almighty, you bless us with so many things, our selves, our times, and our possessions. Thank you for the many blessing in our lives, and the people we get to share them with. Lord, help us to remember that all we have comes from you, as we join in the thanksgiving of worship here today. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of All People, we thank you for the opportunity to help those around us. We thank you for the spirit of generosity that inspires us to help those caught in hard times. We thank you for the confidence you give us to invest ourselves in you. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

God of wholeness and peace, we pray your spirit of healing on all your children around the world. May the lost and lonely find comfort in you, may the sad and depressed find hope and direction through you, and may the sick and the dying find wholeness by you. Be with all those we name before you now, both silently and aloud. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Thanksgiving for the Word

We bless you, God of hope, for your holy Word that endures forever. Your Word has inspired the faithful saints before us, among us, and beyond us to proclaim your glory. For your everlasting Word, O God, **we give you thanks and praise!**

Your powerful Word is justice for the poor and oppressed, food for the hungry, and life for the dead. Continue to call us by your Word, O God, **that we may bring your kingdom near!**

Jesus is your Word present from the beginning of all time; in all time; for all time. Through your Word of Jesus, O God, **hold us close as you send us to proclaim your justice and peace in the world!**

In thanks and praise for your faithful Word through all generations, Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

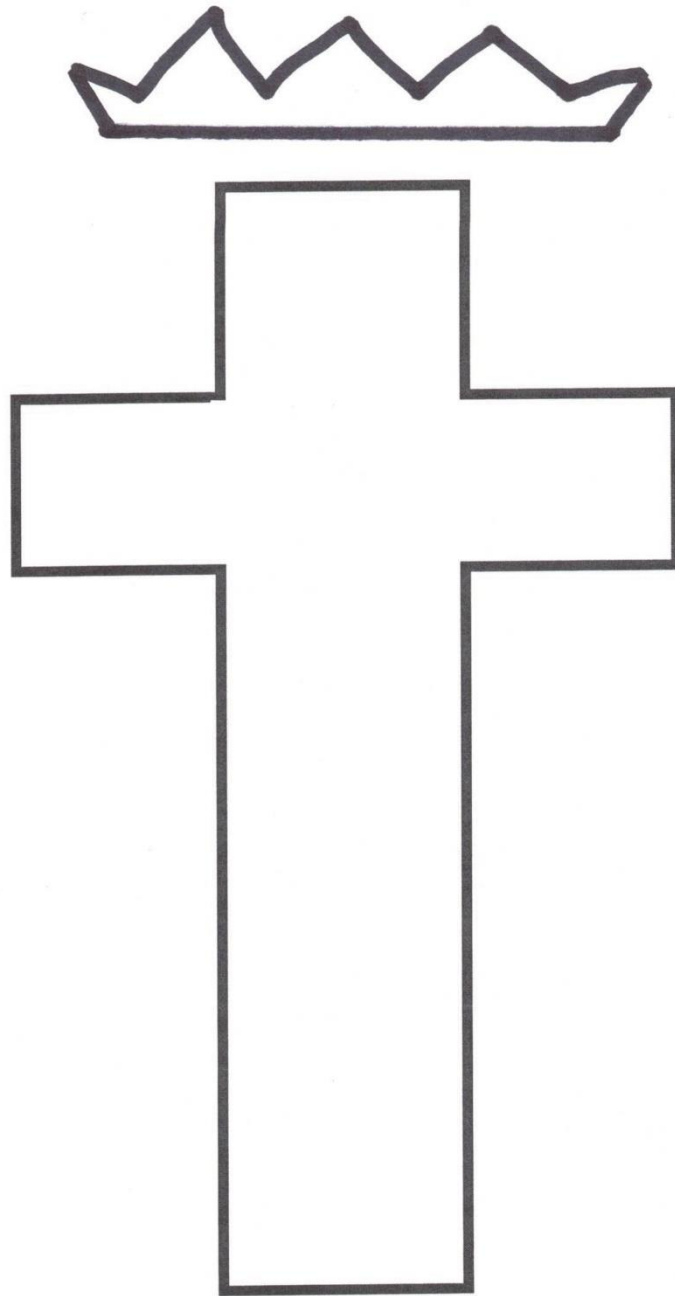
Amen.

Closing Prayer

As we move from this time of worship, we rejoice O Lord that your peace abides with us. May it give us the patience and resilience to faithfully serve you with acts of love for our brothers and sisters even from our homes.

Amen.

CHRIST THE KING
November 22, 2020



CHRIST THE KING

November 22, 2020

Call To Worship

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

Let us bow down in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

For the Lord is the great God,
the great King above all gods;
let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

(adapted from Psalm 95)

Prayer of the Day

Christ you are our Savior, our Lord, and our King. As this church year comes to an end, empower us to continue being an outpost of the kingdom of heaven in the year ahead. Strengthen us to live into your covenant to the best of our abilities by the power of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 25:31-46

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to

me.' ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Sermon - Rev. A. Wallace Anderson, (Retired), St. Martin Lutheran Church, Malvern, OH

OUR CONTRACT WITH CHRIST THE KING

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord, Jesus Christ, amen.

Aren't you glad the election season is over?! We have a newly elected President, and maybe he's the one you voted for, and maybe not, but now we are entering into a period of transition from one administration to another. It's a period in which we demonstrate once again how the smooth transition of power makes America the shining example of democracy that it was meant to be. In a democracy everyone has a chance to voice their opinion through the ballot box—whether you voted in person or by absentee ballot. Now all the votes have been counted, and our differences and divisions have all been aired. What happens next? I believe that according to the social contract which makes us a democratic republic we should all draw together in support of the majority, put our differences aside, and strive to work as a united United States of America.

We bear a contract—a covenant, an agreement that we make to three entities: our government, to one another, and to God. A contract creates a relationship between two people, and whether it be for good or for evil, it doesn't matter—that relationship needs to be honored, or the contract is broken. In biblical times there was a word that described a relationship that was honored, and that word was "righteous". In order for us to be righteous, we need to honor the contracts we make, whatever the cost. Take a moment to consider, "What is our contract and what must we do to be righteous with our government, with one another, and with God?"

For the sake of clarity, let's begin with that word "righteous". Biblical righteousness was not defined as being good, even though it may have appeared that way in Sunday school classes. I know that I always wondered how Abraham could be considered righteous in the book of Genesis (Gen. 15:6) when he sold his wife off twice (Gen. 12:10-16; 20:1-3), or when he sent Hagar away with her son Ishmael when it was Sarah who offered her to him when she was barren (Gen 16:6). And what about Jacob, who stole his brother's birthright by following his mother Rebekah's advice to deceive his father Isaac out of Esau's birthright blessing (Gen. 27:5-10)? David, greatest king of all Israel and forefather of our savior Jesus

Christ was guilty of adultery with Bathsheba, impregnating her, and then arranging for her husband's death on the battlefield (2 Sam. 11). And Rahab the harlot, who sheltered the Israelite spies from the leaders of Jericho, betrayed her city, resulting in the deaths of everyone except her family (Jos. 2:2-6; 6:24-25). These people were not without fault, not without blood on their hands, and yet somehow they were called "righteous" and "faithful". How was that so? It was because righteousness in the biblical sense meant being faithful to your promise, upholding your end of the contract, and doing whatever you had to do to preserve the relationship created by the contract. Abraham sinned—yes—but he promised to trust God and to do what God asked him to do—even if he did it badly. Jacob may have stolen the birthright, but he honored it, trusting God to care for him and his family in spite of his treachery, conniving, and his failure to treat his own children fairly, which led to his sons selling off Joseph to slave traders while claiming that he died at the hands of wild beasts. David confessed his sin and begged forgiveness when Nathan the prophet confronted him. And Rahab recognized the authority of the God of the Israelites to conquer the land of Canaan, even at the cost of her own people.

Are we righteous when we honor our contract to the government, to each other, and to God on this Christ the King Sunday? If not, maybe we should reconsider our actions. After all, today is a day of transition from one Church year to another. Today we celebrate a king. Next Sunday we begin looking again for a King, first in his Second Coming to judge the world in the season of Advent, then in the birth of a king at Christmas. We are preparing for a transition to a new government administration. In times of transition we have the chance to begin again, as it were, to start over. Hopefully it will be an opportunity to reflect on the year past—what we have accomplished, what we have learned, what we can do better. What will we do differently in this new administration? What have we learned from the mistakes of the past year and the past administration? How can we treat one another better? What is God calling us to as his children, as heirs of eternal grace, as a people forgiven for their sins? Are we repentant, eager to start anew, to do things better this year, or are we content with the way things are? Which brings me back to the question about contracts. Are we honoring our "contract" to the government, to each other, and to God?

Our *social* contract is not always clear, is it? In fact it's confusing because it's so many things to so many people—one thing to conservatives, another thing to liberals. It's one thing to whites, another thing to Blacks, and another thing to Latinos, to Native Americans, or to Asians. It's one thing to Christians, another thing to Jews, to Muslims, to Buddhists, to atheists, to Wiccans, or to Hindus. Our country is made up of all kinds of people, and it's hard to satisfy everyone. Like Abraham Lincoln said one time, "You can satisfy some of the people some of the time, but you can't satisfy all of the people all of the time." We live in the midst of a diversity of races, cultures, sexual orientations, abilities, and income levels, and finding unity in the midst of diversity is an awesome demand. I can assure you that it is not possible to satisfy our thirst for unity by eliminating those who are different, or by polarizing the populace into those who are right and those who are wrong. And it will not come by creating laws that give rights to one group and taking them away from another. If we claim

that God has endowed us with 'certain unalienable rights', that 'all men are created equal', and that we are 'one nation, under God, indivisible', then the responsibility falls on us to find a way to fulfill that contract, to live up to the relationship we have with one another regardless of whether we find it easy or not. Otherwise, in the words from our Gospel lesson for this Christ the King Sunday, we face the consequences of our king.

Perhaps the question needs to be "Who is our king?" To whom do we owe our righteousness? The people of Israel claimed God of Israel as their king. God, speaking through Isaiah, said, "...For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, (Isaiah 46:9)" and not a host of gods in heaven serving different groups of people or different regions of the earth. God established government according to Paul (Rom. 13:1-7), and although those governments are all different—Democratic, autocratic, plutocratic, communist, socialist, monarchy, and anarchy—God has established them all to maintain peace on the earth, to uphold the law, to punish the offender, and to bring justice. We don't agree on which system is the best in the world, but we know which system is best for us in the United States, and so we strive to support it as best we can. But government won't decide how we treat one another. That's up to us. How I treat you and how you treat me was supposed to be summed up in Jesus' words "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31) or "But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Matt. 5:39), but that's not always an easy thing to do, especially if you are the one who is suffering, if you are the one being hurt, if you are the one bearing the brunt of the injustice.

At the time that I am writing this message our country—our world—is in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. Millions are infected, hundreds of thousands are hospitalized, businesses are going bankrupt, people are out of work, and governments are scrambling to save their economies. We are looking for a 'king' to solve our problems economically, medically, and socially, and the 'king' is asking us to wear masks, remain socially distant from one another, and to avoid touching our mouths and noses before we wash our hands for 20 seconds. Not everyone is heeding the call, and social unrest is on the rise. How should we respond as citizens and as Christians?

Our first response should be to say we need help. We can't do it alone. (We even have trouble doing it together!) Our best hope is to turn to those with whom we have contracts for assistance. To begin with, we are looking to our government to restore our economy, to find a cure, and to maintain order. Sadly, while the United States has the greatest wealth of any nation, we can't find a way to share our personal wealth with one another in our time of greatest opportunity. We expect the government to print more money and to pay our bills. Next, we can look to each other to care for our neighbors by wearing a mask in public, to stay indoors, learn indoors, and work indoors until this pandemic is passed. Sadly, however, many choose to demand their right to go without masks, expecting others to deliver food, clothing, furniture, and medicine at their own risk, and take the government to court when it infringe on "our rights". Finally, we can look to God to send a cure, to stop the violence and

injustice we perpetrate against each other, and to prosper our political point of view. Sadly, again, we don't want God to spoil our fun on vacation, to call us to repentance for social injustice, or to bear the taxes that make government bail-outs possible.

If our first response is to ask for help, then we need to let God help us the way we need it most—on the inside. We need help with our own sinful nature, and it begins with inviting Jesus Christ to be the Lord of our lives. We need to confess that we are in bondage to sin in ways that we cannot even begin to imagine, which explains why there is as much suffering as there is in the world. The contract began between us and God. Now God wants to help us keep our end of it because God knows we can't do it on our own. We never could fulfill all righteousness to government, one another, or to God.

God promised to help us by sending us a savior, a savior who would bear our suffering with us, not just take it away. He sent us a savior to break the power of sin that blinds us to our own shortcomings, our selfishness, our greed, and our narcissistic attitudes so that we could admit our need for God and embrace the faith he bestows as a gift. He sent a savior to pay the price for our sin so that we could lay the punishment for offenses against us on him instead of on one another. And he invited us to yield ourselves to the power of his Holy Spirit so that we could serve God.

Ah, but there's a catch. (There always is, isn't there?!) There's nothing that God needs from us. We can't do anything for God that God can't do for himself. Shocked? Stay with me here! While we make Jesus Christ the Lord of our lives through faith in his redemption of our lives from sin on the cross, while we must humble ourselves and submit to his will for our lives, while we seek his will through prayer, worship, and studying his promises in the Bible, there is something God expects of us. We can love one another as he has loved us (Jn. 13:34). We can have a relationship with the people that God has created and put into our lives. What does that accomplish? "And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'" (Matt. 25:40) Plain and simple, there's the contract. To be righteous with God means to be righteous with one another.

Caring for one another doesn't mean giving away everything you own to the poor. Caring for one another doesn't mean let the world walk all over you. And caring for one another doesn't mean taking over people's lives when they can't seem to take care of themselves. What it means is that we protect the relationship we have with them in the same way we protect our relationship with God. In other words, your relationship with God won't grow unless you are doing your best to grow your relationship with your family, your neighbor, your community, your country, and your world. Loving them does not mean loving their sin, but it does mean joining with them in their fight against sin, and doing it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is King, and you are Christ the King's ambassador. You aren't here to run everyone's life, but you are here to help them know the love of God through your deeds, your words, your accompaniment, and if need be, through your suffering. You know what God has done for you—what God is doing for you—and now you are bringing that Good News to those around you because those are the people to whom God is sending to you. You support the government that God has established when you vote to care for all the citizens of this country, not just for those who are like you or who agree with you or who you want to be like. You support the government when you uphold just laws, when you pay your fair share of taxes from the blessings God has bestowed on you, and when agree to abide by the vote of the majority. In each these instances you are doing it unto God, and that's the way God is going to evaluate your righteousness towards the contract between God and you.

Finally, you are not accountable for the sins of others, but you are accountable for your failure to care about what sin does to others. Indeed, as God's ambassador you are also God instrument to redeem the world from sin. I have heard that the Jews say our purpose in the world is to heal the world, and we cannot do that unless we recognize that we have a relationship with the world. Such a burden would be too great for us to attempt if it were not for God's promise to uphold his part of the contract, to be with us always, even to the end of the world (Matt. 28:19-20). God's contract with us is that we are never alone, and as long as sin is in the world we will never be without something to do. So let us embrace Christ as our King, rejoicing that he has made us his people through the blood of the everlasting contract, until that day when he receives us into his eternal presence with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master." (Matt. 25:21b) Amen

And the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord, unto life everlasting.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

Jesus you are our Savior, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Thank you for banishing darkness with light, erupting through loneliness with hope, and destroying death with life everlasting. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Master of the Universe, as this church year comes to an end we pray that you bless us with patience, endurance, and faithfulness for the year and challenges that lay ahead. Remind us, when the road seems long and the burden seems heavy, that we can do all things through Jesus Christ who strengthens us. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Almighty and ever-living God, you deal in hope and wholeness, in life and serenity. We pray that your spirit of solace enshroud all those who long, all who suffer, and all who need you in any way. Rain your grace and mercy down on all those in need. Be with all those we name before you now, both silently and aloud. Lord In Your Mercy.

Hear our Prayer.

Trusting in your mercy and goodness, we bring before you these prayers and whatever else you see that we need, in the name of the one who sets us free, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

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Thanksgiving for the Word

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as we forgive those
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and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
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and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever.

Amen.

Closing Prayer

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Amen.
