

Worship Service: 13th Sunday after Pentecost

September 6, 2020

GATHERING AND ANNOUNCEMENT

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS (ELW p. 116)

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Most merciful God, we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. In the name of ✠ Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith. **Amen.**

GREETING

P: The grace of Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. **All: And also with you.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY (ELW p. 124)

Let us pray. **O Lord God, enliven and preserve your church with your perpetual mercy. Without your help, we mortals will fail; remove far from us everything that is harmful, and lead us toward all that gives life and salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

WORD

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 33:7-11

A reading from Ezekiel.

God appointed Ezekiel as a sentinel for the house of Israel. Ezekiel must faithfully convey God's warnings to the people. Remarkably, God—who is about to attack Jerusalem—gives a warning with the hope that repentance will make the attack unnecessary.

⁷So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ⁸If I say to the wicked, "O wicked ones, you shall surely die," and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked

shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. ⁹But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life. ¹⁰Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: “Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?” ¹¹Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM: Psalm 119:33-40

I desire the path of your commandments. (*Ps. 119:35*)

³³Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end.

³⁴**Give me understanding, and I shall keep your teaching; I shall keep it with all my heart.**

³⁵Lead me in the path of your commandments, for that is my desire.

³⁶**Incline my heart to your decrees and not to unjust gain.**

³⁷Turn my eyes from be-holding falsehood; give me life in your way.

³⁸**Fulfill your promise to your servant, which is for those who fear you.**

³⁹Turn away the reproach that I dread, because your judgements are good.

⁴⁰**Behold, I long for your commandments; by your righteousness enliven me.**

SECOND READING: Romans 13:8-14

A reading from Romans.

The obligation of Christians is to love one another and so fulfill the heart and goal of the law. Clothes make the person as we “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” and live today in light of the future God has in store for us.

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. ¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

CHILDREN'S SERMON

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (ELW p. 124)

Alleluia. In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,* entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. Alleluia. (2 Cor. 5:19)

GOSPEL: Matthew 18:15-20

The holy gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Jesus offers practical advice to his disciples on how individuals—and the church as a whole—should go about restoring relationships when one member has sinned against another.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

SERMON (ELW p. 125)

The other week I found myself needing to make a phone call I didn't want to make. I knew my answer to a request would be a disappointment, and I worried the person and their family would become angry. I wasn't going to be able to give the person what they wanted. I worked on other tasks. I called trusted colleagues for advice (without sharing specifics, of course), I talked to my mom. I wrote down what I needed to say and why..... and then, finally, I picked up the phone and left a message. Thanks be to God, the person didn't answer so I could just say my piece and wait for the call back.

And then the call back came.

And the respondent, of course, was disappointed, but completely gracious and understanding.

I texted my mom and said, “Well, that went way better than I thought it would...”

Now we all know that's not always how it goes. Surely in the past few weeks I can point to conversations and phone calls that did *not* go better than I thought they would. I'm sure you can too.

I would imagine, too, though that most of you have had the former experience, too. You've drug your feet on a conversation or decision you needed to make, only to have it go far better than you expected. You wasted time and energy for no reason when, really, you should've just gone and talked with your neighbor.

Today, in the Gospel of Matthew, we are reminded of the power and importance of talking with our neighbor. I look around the world at the situations of unrest over racism and policing, the divisions we have about COVID, and the upcoming political election. You don't have to look very far to see disdain, animosity and even hatred amongst people. I feel like, each week, I see people more and more tightly forming their crews. Perhaps some of its unavoidable... it's an election year after all, and that's what elections are about.

But, I wonder what our world would look like if we really devoted more time to talking and listening to each other- and not just those who make us comfortable. Not just those who affirm our positions. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, there is a special concern

for the “little ones” or those who are vulnerable and neglected. Do we listen to the “little ones” or those who are cast aside in our world? Or do we think we know what they need, how to fix their problems and overlook the gifts they have to share because we haven’t talked to them enough to know what they are? Today’s Gospel passage should be understood in this greater context, the passage isn’t just calling us to reconcile with the powerful or our friends, but with everyone- even the despised and outcasts.

Jesus tells us that He came that we might have life abundantly. Part of that abundant life are good and right relationships with our neighbors. Today’s Gospel helps us to live that out. It’s a passage that is so painfully obvious and yet so painful to complete some days. But it’s vitally important and worth the anxiety.

Most pastors nowadays, when we do premarital counseling, use a tool called “Prepare and Enrich.” A questionnaire is sent to each individual in the couple with a variety of scenarios and questions. Afterwards, the program combines the answers to show areas of agreement, strengths and weaknesses. The categories include communication, finance, leisure activities, family and friends and more. The pastor and couple then work through the booklet together and talk about aspects of their similarities and differences and how these things shape a marriage for better or worse.

The truth is, though, that the categories do not affect a marriage all in the same way. Communication, for better or worse, is one of those trump card categories. It can help make even surmountable differences “work, out” and, if it’s not there, even a couple that agrees on many things is headed down a long and bumpy ... if not impossible... road.

Sometimes I think those of us who have been married a while should go back and do premarital counseling again. Because it can be easy to live with someone and not really talk- or more importantly listen- to them.

And, I think the same wisdom of today’s Gospel and the wisdom of the premarital counseling test is true for congregations. Churches are tough places. Parker Palmer writes, “Community is that place where the person you least want to live with always lives. And when that person moves away, someone else arises to take his or her place.”¹ Today’s Gospel calls us to not talk behind the backs of those who drive us up the wall, but rather talk with them in love. Listen to them in love. Recently, maybe the harder truth is that we have found ourselves at odds with people that... up until now... were beloved friends in our community- people we enjoyed speaking with. But, now, differences and stress have pushed us apart. It’s easier to practice conflict avoidance and not pick up the phone.

But we know this doesn’t lead to restoration. We know this isn’t what we are called to. Our churches and congregations can not survive if we can not talk to each other.

Audrey West writes, “Is there any ministerial leader today who has not known the destructiveness of secrets and hushed conversations when people refuse (or are unable) to speak honestly to one another about their interactions? Small issues become big; big

¹ <https://www.idlehearts.com/5397/community-is-that-place-where-the-person-you-least-want-to-live-with-always-lives>. Accessed August 27, 2020.

issues become catastrophic. One solution is clear and open communication, but that requires as much listening as it does speaking.

Listening is hard.

Perhaps that is why the process outlined in our ... [Gospel] involves hearing or listening at every step. Four times in the first three verses, Jesus makes reference to listening or refusing to listen. The repetition suggests that the call to hear one another, to listen closely to the truth of the other, is a vital component of a community grounded in the ways of Jesus."²

Similarly, whoever is elected in fall, our society will still be plagued with divisions and suffering if we can not learn to talk and listen to each other- especially the least of these. We will continue to have riots if we can not sit down with our brothers and sisters and talk about painful experiences and plans for the future. History will continue to repeat itself if we repeat the mistakes of avoidance and isolating ourselves with like-minded individuals. Today's Gospel passage calls us to listen to our neighbors, seek understanding and work towards reconciliation between ourselves and those around us.

Who do you need to talk to and listen to this week? Your spouse, your children, someone here at church, someone in the community? I encourage you to name someone specifically. And get rid of the excuses to not call them.

Back to school time maybe more than New Year's is always a time of resolutions for me. I think today's Gospel points to the resolution we really need. We need to talk more- and better- listen more- and better. When it's enjoyable and when it really, really, isn't.

Because we trust, as the Gospel points us to today, that we know God will be with us in these conversations. "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them," it says. As we ask for guidance, peace, wisdom and clarity in Christ's name, we hear Jesus' promise that we will receive those things in due time. This is hard work, but we don't do it alone.

Let us pray: Lord, we thank you for our brothers and sisters that are created in your image. Help us to talk with, listen to and love all we meet. Give us courage to have those conversations we'd rather push aside. Open our ears to hear new truths. Amen.

MEDITATION - Silence

How good it is to be alive!

Yes, we feel the beat of our own hearts,
the pulsing of life in our veins,
the rhythm of our breathing.

We come into the silence of this time with gratitude for this day.

(Silence)

We come with our needs.

² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4558. Audrey West. Accessed August 27, 2020.

And we come because we have gifts to share.
In our coming and in our going
may we be strengthened
in our bonds of love and peace.

(Silence)

APOSTLES CREED (ELW p. 126)

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.* On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Unite your church, O God. Grant us the gifts of repentance and reconciliation. Bless the cooperative work of churches in this community especially Love Inc. Strengthen ecumenical partnerships; guide the work of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Turn nations and leaders from ways that lead to death. Shape new paths toward peace and cooperation, teaching us to recognize one another as neighbors. Guide legislators, civil servants, judges, and police toward laws that protect the well-being of all. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Tend to all in need of your compassion. Hear the cries of those awaiting justice and those yearning for forgiveness. Give community to the lonely and neighbors to the outcast. Shelter all who are vulnerable in body, mind, or spirit.... Judy Selberg, Charlene Wachter, Bob Dieter, Mary Kraft, Marilyn Frisch, Julie and Denny Christensen, Dianne Sanderson, Gene Wachter, Betty Nelson, Lois Gruis

*Prayers for Members in Nursing Homes: Sandra Marsh, Arlene Muse, Lois Gruis

*Members in Care Facilities: Bobbie Elvin, Joan Doeden, Jean Bender

*Family Members and Friends: Myril Ferguson (Mary Ferguson's husband), Lee Morrison (Terry Morrison's son), Karoline Wiebe, Ryan Lien (Lon Lien's son), Henrietta Lais, Tom Morgan (Sandy Randall's dad), Peggy Kobold (Norma Radenbaugh's daughter), Brad Martens (Valerie Veen's son) and Josh Hanson (Mary Ingenthorn's son) Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we pray for the schools as they begin again this week. Give them joy. Keep them safe. Help their plans to go smoothly. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord, we pray for our scientists who are working hard on a COVID 19 vaccine. Prosper the work of their hands. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We remember with thanksgiving those who have died in faith. As you equipped them, equip us with your protection and power, until with them we see your salvation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

MEAL

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

OFFERING AND CGC MOMENT

OFFERING PRAYER (ELW p. 129)

Let us pray. God of mercy and grace, the eyes of all wait upon you, and you open your hand in blessing. Fill us with good things at your table, that we may come to the help of all in need, through Jesus Christ, our redeemer and Lord. **Amen.**

GREAT THANKSGIVING

DIALOGUE (ELW p. 129)

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

PREFACE (ELW p. 130)

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ; who on this day overcame death and the grave, and by his glorious resurrection opened to us the way of everlasting life. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (ELW p. 130)

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest.

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE (ELW p. 130)

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

LORD'S PRAYER (ELW p. 134)

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

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.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION (ELW p. 134)

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

COMMUNION (ELW p. 134)

The body of Christ, given for you. The blood of Christ, shed for you. Amen.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION (ELW p. 136)

Let us pray. O God, we give you thanks that you have set before us this feast, the body and blood of your Son. By your Spirit strengthen us to serve all in need and to give ourselves away as bread for the hungry, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

SENDING OF COMMUNION (ELW p. 136)

Gracious God, loving all your family with a mother's tender care: As you sent the angel to feed Elijah with heavenly bread, assist those who set forth to share your word and sacrament with those who are *sick, homebound, and imprisoned*. In your love and care, nourish and strengthen those who will receive this sacrament, and give us all the comfort of your abiding presence through the body and blood of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

BLESSING (ELW p. 136)

The God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The God of all grace ✠ bless you now and forever. **Amen.**

DISMISSAL (ELW p. 137)

Go in peace. Share the good news. **Thanks be to God.**