

Faith Lutheran Church

Sunday, July 26, 2020
8th Sunday after Pentecost



Call to Worship

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, whose steadfast love is everlasting, whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. Amen.

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Prayer of Confession (please join in confessing our sins)

Reconciling God, we confess that we do not trust Your abundance, and we deny Your presence in our lives. We place our hope in ourselves and rely on our own efforts. We fail to believe that You provide enough for all. We abuse Your good creation for our own benefit. We fear difference and do not welcome others as You have welcomed us. We sin in thought, word, and deed. By Your grace, forgive us; through Your love, renew us; and in Your Spirit, lead us; so that we may live and serve You in newness of life. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness

Beloved of God, by the radical abundance of divine mercy we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus, through whom we have obtained grace upon grace. Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope. For hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of Your Son You bring us into Your kingdom of justice and mercy. By Your Spirit, give us Your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Readings and Psalm

- **1 Kings 3:5-12** *Solomon's prayer for wisdom*
- **Psalm 119:129-136** *When your word is opened, it gives light and understanding. (Ps. 119:130)*
- **Romans 8:26-39** *Nothing can separate us from God's love*

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Throughout Matthew's gospel, Jesus and His disciples proclaim the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near!" Here, Jesus offers several brief parables that explore the implications of this announcement for people's lives.

³¹[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

³³He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” ⁵²And He said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ok, true confession here. I finished my sermon about 9:30pm on Wednesday evening. My sermon is usually done by late afternoon. Actually, for a couple of weeks lately, my sermon has been done by Tuesday so that I can record it a day earlier due to various circumstances. It's been doable.

Until this week.

But let me stop first and say – I am NOT complaining! Even if it may sound like I'm complaining, I'm not. I am not complaining about my job. And actually, this isn't a job. Being a pastor isn't my job. It's my calling. It's my life. And I am ever so blessed.

My life, my calling, has been pretty busy lately. I now have to look at my calendar even to see what I did the day before.

Monday of this week, I spent several hours preparing for a memorial service. I didn't have a personal connection with the man who walked on but I was honored when his family asked me to preside at his service. As I shared in his service later that same afternoon at a baseball field, I checked out his Facebook page to get an idea of who he was. To see comments he had made in the past and what comments people shared about him. By the time I gathered with his family and friends for his service, I felt like I had known him for a very long time. I grieved with his family and friends. A fellow brother in Christ.

I am not complaining.

Tuesday I was up long before my alarm usually goes off. I left the house about 7:35am. I knew it was going to be a long day so I stopped at McDonald's for a cup of coffee. Medium coffee black with ice in the bottom. I was on my way!

First on the agenda was an early Church Council meeting followed by a heartfelt face-to-face visit with a grieving couple outside their home while practicing social distancing, with family and friends popping by to say "hi". Next was a Zoom Gathering with our Synod's bishop and many colleagues, a quick Walmart stop to pick up an order I had placed online, some office work, another Council meeting with a different congregation, and a sixty-seven-mile drive back home only to unpack the Walmart order and realize I left the windows open at one of my churches. I drove a couple of blocks to close them up. That completed my day. Thirteen-plus hours later.

I am not complaining.

Wednesday was another early day that started with my husband and I taking a member to the emergency room. Because of COVID-19, we had to wait out in a vehicle, with raindrops falling softly on the roof, only to be awakened when hospital staff tapped on the window. Through a series of travels to the member's home and some errands, I worked quite extensively on some emails and congregational letters. And, at 6:00pm, I finally started typing this sermon.

I am not complaining. But I wondered what to say about Matthew's gospel for today without spending overnight in my office.

Jesus is telling the crowds a series of parables. "The kingdom of heaven is like..." That's how Jesus begins His parables.

- "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field..."
- "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in..."
- "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field..."
- "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls..."
- "The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind..."

For me, for these past couple of days, the kingdom of heaven is like meeting people where they are in life; in a church fellowship hall socially-distanced around tables discussing the business of the congregation. It is having those hard conversations about finances and how best to encourage members to continue their support of the ministry, even if they aren't able to participate in in-person services right now or they don't feel safe gathering. It means knowing that all the decisions you jointly make affect the faithful members of your congregations but also knowing the decisions aren't about you – they are to further the mission of Jesus Christ in the world. It means treating one another with grace and love even in times when you may not always see eye-to-eye.

The kingdom of heaven is like visiting a couple in their yard, agonizing with them in their grief, sharing the love of Christ with them, comforting them, praying with them. It means being with them in spirit and prayer as family and friends gather in a ballfield or around a sacred fire to share their grief, stories, love and the promise of eternal life with Christ.

The kingdom of heaven is like being awakened early in the morning and rushing to help someone who is in need, whether it is at their home, in the hospital, in an assisted living facility or anywhere in God's creation. It is watching with admiration the many volunteers who pack hundreds of boxes of food to be distributed to one vehicle after another lined up for blocks, waiting to receive food through Feeding America, knowing that there are so many who go hungry every day and praying that they will find relief in the box of food they pick up that day.

The kingdom of heaven is realizing that you're tired but, in that tiredness, you realize your sermon has been writing itself every day. It is knowing that, what you and others have been doing in response to someone's needs, whether near or far, has been the kingdom of heaven at work.

The kingdom of heaven is about hearing the voice of Jesus in these parables in Matthew and in our everyday lives.

I am not complaining about these past few hectic days. I am extremely thankful that I have been a part of so many people's lives *especially* in these past few days.

Take a moment and think about your week. Then finish this sentence: The kingdom of heaven is like _____.

Because the kingdom of heaven is like this and so much more. Thanks be to God! **Amen.**

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need. *A brief silence.*

Merciful God, Your reign is revealed to us in common things: a mustard shrub, a woman baking bread, a fishing net. Help Your church witness to the surprising yet common ways You encounter us in daily life.

When Your word is opened, it gives light and understanding. Increase our understanding and awe of Your creation; guide the work of scientists and researchers. Treasuring the earth, may we live as grateful and healing caretakers of our home.

As the birds of the air nest in branches of trees, gather the nations of the world into the welcoming shade of Your merciful reign. Direct leaders of nations to build trust with each other and walk in the way of peace.

Your Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for the saints according to Your will. Help us when we do not know how to pray. Give comfort to the dying, refuge to the weary, justice to those who are oppressed, and healing to the sick. We especially pray today for those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices....(please name your prayer concerns).

You show steadfast love and direct us to ask of You what we need. Help this congregation ask boldly for what is most needed. Refresh us with new dreams of being Your people in this place and time.

In You our lives are never lost. Strengthen us by the inspiring witness of Your people in all times and places. Embolden our witness now and one day gather us with all your saints in light.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from Your love, we offer these prayers to You; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name,

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen

Offering

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following this service, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

Offertory Prayer *(please join in prayer)*

Loving God, we present now what we have brought to You. Things that are both visible and invisible.

The coins and paper represent our work, and express in a clear and visible way our love and thanks.

But we also bring as an offering the fragile dreams and hopes that we have. These invisible gifts are

what sustain our lives. Receive all that we have brought in love, O God. Amen

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is with us!

Thanks be to God!

Sources:

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Faith Lutheran Church

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*A Congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Northern Great Lakes Synod*



Per the Church Council on June 16, 2020:

- Please stay home if you are feeling ill, have been around anyone that isn't feeling well, or you have underlying health issues.
- Please stay home if you have tested positive for the COVID-19 within two weeks before attending worship.
- Please follow any directions provided at the door by the Council.
- All persons entering the church must wear a mask or face covering. Masks will be available at the door if you forget yours. Please remember to bring your mask each Sunday.
- Hand sanitizer will be available at the door and you are required to use it upon entry.
- Please refrain from hugging or shaking hands.
- Please choose a seat away from everyone excluding family that you have been with for at least two weeks maintaining a 6-foot social distancing requirement. Please sit only where there is a bulletin. Additionally, when entering the church or leaving afterward, please, again, maintain the 6-foot social distancing requirement.
- Please put your offering in the collection plate upon entry or exit from the sanctuary.
- The water fountain, kitchen, fellowship hall, and nursery are cordoned off. Please refrain from using these areas.
- Fellowship in the building will continue to be suspended at this time. Weather permitting, please feel free to gather outside while maintaining a 6-foot social distancing requirement.
- Singing has been suspended at this time.
- Holy Communion will continue to be suspended at this time.
- There is no nursery care available at this time. The Sunday School room and Nursery are not available for use.
- Services will be approximately 30 minutes in duration.
- Please note that cleaning supplies will be provided in the restroom. You are asked to wipe the surfaces you touch when you are finished.

We thank you for your assistance in keeping one another safe through these loving acts.

If you feel that you are not able to abide by the Council-approved requirements, we invite you to continue listening to the services on the radio or online. Radio broadcasting will continue. The service will continue to be mailed/e-mailed to you each week as well as being posted on the church's Facebook page and website.

We continue to pray for you, your family, and our community during this time of coronavirus pandemic.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact a member of the Church Council or Pastor Melinda.