

Faith Lutheran Church

Sunday, August 23, 2020
12th Sunday after Pentecost



Call to Worship

We gather together in the name of the Father, and of the Son+, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You and worthily magnify Your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. May we take a moment to go before God in open and honest confession.

Prayer of Confession *(please join in confessing our sins)*

Most merciful God,

we confess that we are in bondage 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

Declaration of Forgiveness

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by His authority alone, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the † Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Opening Prayer

Please join me in prayer:

O God, with all your faithful followers of every age, we praise you, the rock of our life. Be our strong foundation and form us into the body of your Son, that we may gladly minister to all the world, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Readings and Psalm

- **Isaiah 51:1-6** *The enduring foundation of God's salvation*
- **Psalm 138** *O Lord, your steadfast love endures forever. (Ps. 138:8)*
- **Romans 12:1-8** *One body in Christ, with gifts that differ*

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 16:13-20

At a climactic point in Jesus' ministry, God reveals to Peter that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the living God," and Jesus responds with the promise of a church that will overcome the very gates of Hades.

¹³Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." ¹⁵He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. ¹⁸And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. ¹⁹I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." ²⁰Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

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.

"But who do YOU say that I am?" This is kind of a follow-up question Jesus gives to His disciples in our gospel reading for today from Matthew 16.

Jesus initially asked His disciples, "Who do *people* say that the Son of Man is?" Jesus wanted to know if people made the connection that HE is the Son of God; what was being said about Him and what people thought of Him. And the disciples answered with very prominent Biblical figures: John the Baptist; the great prophet, Elijah; Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets.

"But who do YOU say that I am?" This was a very important question Jesus posed to His disciples. I want to know who *you* think that I am. After calling you to leave everything behind and follow Me, after everything that you heard Me preach and teach about on mountaintops and in valleys, after witnessing the healings and miracles I have performed – who do YOU say that I am?

This is a big *faith* question for the disciples – and you and me. We know Simon Peter's answer, "YOU are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

How would you answer that question? Of course, the first thing that comes to my mind is the Second Article of the Apostle's Creed and its meaning:

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord..... I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father in eternity, and also a true human being, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord. And everything else in-between.

That may be the quickest way to answer the question, but how would you describe who Jesus is, say, to a neighbor or another family member or a friend?

Realize there can be a lot at risk for you in your answer. What you say will not only identify who you believe Jesus is but also who you are and how you want to be known. Your words will say a lot about *your* character. You risk being ridiculed, judged, and rejected. Yet, your answer must be honest and portray your conviction and be a reflection of how you live your life.

This is a tough time in our lives. 2020 is a year that seems to be going very fast and I think most of us are ok with that. We don't *want* to rush time. We just want to see how we will fare after this year is over.

First and foremost, in our lives, we have the coronavirus. The death count consistently rises every day in many places throughout the United States and around the world. The Newberry Area Correctional Facility here in town recorded a total of 116 positive cases from August 1st to date. While most of these cases are confined within the prison walls, some are staff members who are a part of our communities and who are now quarantined. I constantly check the number of positive tests in our neighboring counties of Chippewa and Mackinac.

Another huge issue in our lives right now is the reduction of services of the postal service, an organization that millions depend on not only to receive and cast ballots but to deliver prescriptions and checks and packages and important documents. The good news is that the services that were suspended have reportedly been reinstated for the next few months.

And then there are the politics. This is certainly a huge issue that we are contending with every day. This week one major political party is holding their national convention and next week the other major political party will hold theirs.

My dad once told me there are two things to never discuss: how much money you make and who you vote for. I took my dad's advice early on and never mentioned to coworkers when I would receive a raise or a bonus. Talking about your financial benefits is one of the quickest ways to start an uproar in the workplace. Now, I work for churches so every member *should* know how much I make as it's posted in budgets and financial reports, and that is just fine with me!

Regarding my dad's second topic to never discuss is that I have never come out and publicly declared allegiance to any political party. And to be honest, I don't know in my forty-three years of voting that I've voted straight party ticket very often, if ever.

As a pastor, I am not allowed to preach about politics from the pulpit and I can honestly say that I don't believe I ever have. Pastors are not supposed to preach in the church about specific candidates and the pros and cons each one brings to the position. I can't tell you and I won't tell you who you should vote for. I won't even try to persuade you to change your mind.

I *will* talk about social justice issues and such that affect the vast majority of us. You may not agree with me on everything – I mean, who does agree on everything? - and for that, I welcome having an open and honest conversation.

Oh, believe me, I know I'm not perfect. I've probably posted a few too many political news articles on my personal social media page. I know some of the articles haven't always sat well with everyone. And I've probably pushed my opinion a bit too hard at times. And yes, sometimes I need to remind *myself* a little more often of what I'm preaching.

As a Christian, the words that come out of my mouth should reflect who I profess as my Lord and Savior. By talking with a neighbor or another family member or friend, they should be able to identify that I am a follower of Christ.

So again, Jesus asked His disciples, "Who do YOU say that I am?"

A colleague shared this: "Everybody needs to answer this question this week. Every parishioner. Every preacher. Because "who do you say that I am" has everything to do with who you are willing to be.

This really is the question of life, isn't it? Do you know who you are? Who you want to be? What are the demons that make reflecting on that impossible? Because there are many. The demons that tell you that you can't. The demons that tell you that you are not good enough. The demons that insist you aren't enough. Period."

This is a trying time for us. Let us not be shaken by the demons of the virus, the effects isolation and quarantine has had on us, the anger and resentment we feel, the jealousy in that someone might receive something free that we don't, the demons of social media and the different personalities that we sometimes exhibit behind our screens and phones. Let us focus on answering the question posed by Jesus, "Who do YOU say that I am?" And then see how our answer truly fits in our lives. **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.*

Lord our rock, You are our foundation in Jesus Christ, Your Son, whom we confess as the living God. Prepare Your church for its mission in bearing witness to Christ, both here at home and throughout the world.

You call forth praises from the far reaches of the universe to the smallest of creatures. Join our songs to theirs, that a spirit of praise and thanksgiving will arouse us to cherish this wondrous home You give us.

All the kings of the earth shall praise You, O Lord. Direct the leaders of countries, legislators and magistrates, mayors and councils, to walk in Your ways. Help leaders regard those in need with mercy and fulfill Your loving purposes in the governance of peoples.

Though we walk in the midst of trouble, You preserve us, deliver us, and fulfill Your purpose for us. According to Your steadfast love, grant healing and wholeness to those who are bereaved, in trouble or adversity, or sick and in need of care. We pray for those suffering in any way, lifting them up in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices at this time...(please name your prayer concerns).

You call us into this community, in which we, though many, are one in Christ. May we recognize in ourselves and in one another the unique gifts You have given us for the building up of the church for the sake of the world.

You are the everlasting Rock from which we were hewn, and You restore Your people to joy and gladness. In blessed memory and hope, we thank You for the lives of those who've walked on. Bring us with them to our heavenly home.

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)*

Blessed are you,

O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through Your goodness You have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to Your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all that You have made, for the sake of Him who gave Himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. 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 you!

Thanks be to God!

Sources:

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