

Faith Lutheran Church

Sunday, November 15, 2020
24th Sunday after Pentecost



Welcome

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

Friends, we are beloved and broken at the same time. Let us confess to God and one another the sins that have kept us apart.

Prayer of Confession (please join in confessing our sins)

Lord of Creation,

we confess that we have squandered Your gifts and used them as if they had been given for us alone. We have not loved You with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done Your will, we have broken Your law, we have rebelled against Your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness

Hear the Good News: We have not been faithful in all things. But our God still welcomes us with patience and kindness. Therefore, as people of God's promise, let us receive forgiveness, embrace hope, and faithfully respond, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Glory be to God! We are forgiven. We have hope. We will respond. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Please join me in the Prayer of the Day:

Righteous God, our merciful master, You own the earth and all its peoples, and You give us all that we have. Inspire us to serve You with justice and wisdom, and prepare us for the joy of the day of Your coming, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Readings and Psalm

- **Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18** *The day of the Lord*
- **Psalm 90:1-12** *So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.*
- **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11** *Be alert for the day of the Lord*

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 25:14-30

Jesus tells a parable about His second coming, indicating that it is not sufficient merely to maintain things as they are. Those who await His return should make good use of the gifts that God has provided them.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁴“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; ¹⁵to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each

according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. ¹⁷In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. ¹⁸But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. ²⁰Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' ²¹His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' ²²And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' ²³His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' ²⁴Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' ²⁶But 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? ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return, I would have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. ²⁹For to all 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. ³⁰As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

The Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon

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

October and November are typically the months congregations focus on stewardship. Probably more so in October but, because of the pandemic this year, many plans were delayed.

Stewardship committees prepare presentations that hopefully will encourage congregational members to support the ministries of the church. On one or more Sundays, members share their personal testimonies on how God has blessed their lives and, therefore, they pledge to return a portion of their blessings to God – to the church. And they encourage others to do the same.

A part of the stewardship program involves members receiving a card or piece of paper asking them to commit a portion of their resources to the church. The traditional “standard” was to tithe or give ten percent of your income. The Bible says that people should decide *in their hearts* what to give and then give it *cheerfully*.

Stewardship is *more* than just about money. It is also about using the physical gifts God has given us and contributing our time to help one another to further the kingdom of God.

However, without financial support, ministries struggle. Many churches have realized this, *especially* over the past eight months due to the pandemic. Some members believe that, since in-person worship services were suspended for a while, then the church must have saved a *lot* of money; no electric bill or water bill to pay, no bulletins or newsletters to print (look at all that copy paper just sitting on the shelves), no salaries or compensation packages to cover, and so on. The building must have been locked up tight. That, we know, is far from the truth.

The church *has continued* to provide ministry throughout these past eight months and has a determination to continue in whatever manner it can for however long this pandemic may last.

This year, my three congregations have adopted the theme “Count Yourself Blessed” as the stewardship theme. The letter the members received or will receive begins with a question, “*Why do you give to your church?*” The letter continues, “We each have different motivations and capacities for giving, and every gift and pledge is gratefully received. Your (church leadership’s) one hope is that your support for our ministries comes from a profound sense of gratitude and joy for all you receive through your relationship with God and the members of our church.”

The letter states, “We are blessed. We share a strong faith with each other. We celebrate the joyful events in each other’s lives and comfort each other in times of trial and sorrow. We welcome everyone and anyone to join us, and we change the lives of people in our community – people who may never have set foot in our church – simply because they have no one else to turn to, and we are here, and we count ourselves blessed.”

The church – your church - has ministered faithfully for many years, “*not* because members have given year after year out of duty, obligation, guilt, or fear.” That type of reasoning is not one that can sustain any institution for as long as some of our churches have been alive. “Our church is still here, still strong and vibrant, because generations and generations of members have counted themselves blessed and have therefore supported its mission with generous gifts of gratitude and joy. Now it’s up to us.”

The church is much more than a building that requires money to keep going. I think that has been very evident for these past eight months and counting. The pandemic has caused us – or challenged us – or invited us – to look outside of the building’s walls to *see* the church. The people. The ministries that continue to happen even though the building was or is still is closed.

You know, I’ve always cringed when hearing someone say the church is *closed* or the service is *anceled*. I probably have even said this in the past. But the church is never *closed*. The *building* may be closed or limited to essential staff. But the church is never closed. Never has been. Never will be. Because WE are the church. I’ve said this many times before. WE are the body of Christ, sisters and brothers brought together through our baptism. WE are members of the church which is the body of Christ.

And, anymore, service is *never canceled*. Pastors and church leaders quickly figured out how to record and post services on Facebook or websites or YouTube. A lot of churches live-stream their services. Many churches have a radio broadcast service. Members receive emails or mailings of the services. I recently celebrated my ninth year of ordination and I don’t think I have ever worked as hard as I have the past eight months! Well...

Dave Ramsey, financial guru, writes, “In 1 Peter 4:10, we’re called to use our gifts to serve others as faithful stewards of God’s grace. Now, in that context, Peter was specifically talking about spiritual gifts, like prophecy and healing.” Ramsey says, “Those are supernatural abilities God gives each Christ-follower, but the general idea of blessing others also carries over to talents. God doesn’t give us anything just for our own benefit. After all, we’re blessed to be a blessing (Genesis 12:2)!”

Of course, it is important to support the ministries of your church. But it is more than just the electric bill or the heating bill or paper or salaries. Your support reaches people around the world.

It is also important to support your fellow being; your family member or friend, neighbor or stranger.

And now we are coming upon the time of the year when we all try to be a bit more generous - maybe more than usual (though our generosity *should* continue throughout the year).

I've seen various posts online about generosity and sharing the gifts we have. In one recent post, the suggestion was made to "put money towards an elderly relative's heating bill this holiday season and skip(ped) the ceramic duck or whatever gift." Imagine the surprise on someone's face when they realize their heat or their electricity has been paid for the month or so!

Another post I saw recently online said that when you're in the grocery store and you see those two-for-one sales, even though you may not need the second item for sale, purchase it anyway. Take, for instance, a bag of potatoes or carrots or choose any number of food items that are often advertised as buy-one-get-one-free or buy-one-get-one-half-off. Take advantage of the deal and, if you don't need the extra item, give it to the person behind you in the store who may appear to need that little extra. A mother with kids. A person who may appear to be struggling with finances. I'm sure you know someone who could use a little extra help. You may even donate it to a food pantry.

I could have gone a few different ways with the gospel reading for today. However, I thought it might be a good time, as we approach Stewardship Sunday or Black Friday shopping or holiday gift-giving, to point out that it's a good time to think about what we do with the gifts God gives to us. The resources we are blessed with. Think about and pray about what God is encouraging you to do.

As we hear in 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Go and do likewise. **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

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need. *A brief silence.*

Lord of the church, ignite Your people with the passion of Your love. By the fire of Your Holy Spirit, unify us across ministries, congregations, and denominations, and refine us to participate in Your activity throughout the world.

Lord of creation, we stand in awe at the works of Your hands and praise You for the beauty of nature. Bless the earth for Your glory and restore its integrity where exploitation has caused ruin.

Lord of the nations, sound forth Your justice in the ears of all leaders. Increase concern for those who are most vulnerable, especially as international leaders forge trade agreements and cooperate to end human rights abuses.

Lord of all peace, instill in us the desire to work together, even in these tumultuous times. Let Your Spirit guide our hearts, our tongues, and our actions in these times ahead.

Lord of all in need, search out all who cry to You in distress. Scatter the heavy clouds of depression, chronic illness, unemployment, and loneliness with Your radiant light. Send us as encouragement and signs of Your healing.

Lord of compassion, we continue to pray for all those who are affected by the coronavirus. We pray for those suffering in any way this day, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices at this time.....(please name your prayer concerns).

Lord of the stranger, stir up holy restlessness in us to extend love to those at the margins. Release our desire for control and open us to learn from the perspectives of others.

Lord of the living and the dead, we give You thanks for all the saints at rest from their labors. Rouse us to live by their example, that saints yet to come may also know Your love.

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when You gather all creation around Your throne where You will reign forever and ever. **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 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

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)*

God, whose giving knows no ending, we offer up the treasures that You have entrusted to us; we offer up the skills and time that You have graciously given to us; we offer up ourselves in service and praise. Receive these gifts by Your grace. Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. 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 to love and serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sources:

www.presbyterianmission.org

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<https://re-worship.blogspot.com/search/label/Proper%2028%20A>

<https://www.daveramsey.com/blog/using-your-god-given-talents>

ANNOUNCEMENTS

❖ **In-person Worship Services at Faith are suspended through November.** ❖

At a specially-called Church Council meeting via Zoom with Bishop Katherine on November 4th, the Council determined that one of the benchmarks to deciding *if/when* in-person worship services would be suspended was *if/when* the Sault Ste. Marie Area Public School system closed. I don't know that anyone had an inclination that that would happen. Well, it happened the next day! Therefore, in another specially-called Church Council meeting via Zoom with Bishop Katherine on November 5th (meeting to discuss other items), it was determined to suspend in-person worship services through the end of November. This is in line with the school's announcement that they are closed for the month. This will also mean that your next in-person worship service will be led by your new pastor! Praise God!

Be safe. Be healthy. Peace+

Pastor Melinda

❖ **Pastor Melinda's email HAS CHANGED! It is now:** orlcrev@jamadots.com

❖ **Watch Faith's Worship Service Live on Sundays at our Facebook page!** - You can catch our Service at 10:30am every Sunday at www.facebook.com/FaithLC1966 . You can also find us online by searching for **FaithLC1966** in any browser. If you have any questions or comments, please call the church office at (906) 632-7246.

❖ **Community Thanksgiving Project 2020** – Chippewa County Department of Health & Human services has partnered with United Way of the EUP to secure a mobile pantry from Feeding America on **Thursday, November 19, 2020 from 10am - 12 noon**. Food distribution will be outside at the Norris Center of LSSU, vehicles will pull up, where the food will then be loaded into the vehicle and then pull away. The event will provide more than 300 families & individuals with shelf stable food, in-season fruits/vegetables and a turkey. In 2019, this distribution assisted 345 households! The average cost for a turkey is \$10, so please consider donating the cost of 1 or more turkeys. **We will be collecting donation until Sunday, November 15th**. Checks can be made out to Faith Lutheran Church with a memo of: "Feeding America". Also if you would like to volunteer to help, more information is available by contacting Sean in the office.



❖ **Youth Wreath Fundraiser** – It's that time of year again! You can now place an order for Christmas Wreaths. The cost is \$25.00/wreath and orders need to be in by November 29th. Wreaths will be available for pick up the week of December 6th. More details will be forthcoming about the pick-up procedure. Proceeds from this fundraiser will go to support Faith Lutheran's youth.