

GRACE ENGLISH EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Toledo, Ohio

A Congregation of The Northwestern Ohio Synod

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Sunday, August 2, 2020 – Time after Pentecost – Year A
Lectionary 18 - The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION to TODAY'S CELEBRATION

Welcome to this weekly celebration of Jesus' death and resurrection. Gathering on the first day of the week - the day Jesus rose from the dead - is a fundamental expression of our faith. After being closed to limit spread of coronavirus Grace has resumed public worship, but some of us are unable to gather in-person. Despite being physically separated we trust in the power of the Spirit to gather us together with all God's people throughout all space and time. As the book of Hebrews says, we are "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses."

This resource is provided for your personal devotions and family or household prayers Sunday, August 2nd and through the coming week.

I have included a brief introduction to both readings and gospel. With respect I have no intention of turning the liturgy into Sunday School, but I worry about the small number of adults who do participate in religious education. I hope these brief introductions will make the readings and gospel more understandable and encourage you to further Bible study.

The church uses a special calendar as a reminder that we are passing time until God's kingdom comes and annually review important events in the story of our salvation. On our church calendar today is the Ninth Sunday in the Time after Pentecost. Depending on the date of Easter this Time after Pentecost – the last and longest part of the church year – includes up to twenty-eight Sundays. This time represents the present, the time between Jesus' ascension and his return when the church remains on earth as a sign of God's coming kingdom.

CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS

While we observe physical separation to limit spread of the coronavirus it is important to remember that what really separates us from one another, God and all creation isn't distance, but sin. Despite physical separation we are gathered by the grace of God through confession and forgiveness. Please use this rite for private confession, or with your household.

✠ *Silence for reflection and self-examination.* ✠

For ignoring the gift of baptism and believing ourselves worthless or seeking our worth and meaning in our own righteousness, achievements and possessions.

FORGIVE US. DROWN OUR SIN AND RAISE US UP TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

For ignoring and excusing the evil within us while condemning others. For responding before hearing, judging without knowing, and correcting others to commend ourselves.

FORGIVE US. DROWN OUR SIN AND RAISE US UP TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

For ignoring the poor and powerless and blaming them for their plight. For silence in the face of prejudice, ignorance, violence and hate.

FORGIVE US. DROWN OUR SIN AND RAISE US UP TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

For asking God to do our will instead of seeking to do God's will and for expecting to be served instead of serving.

FORGIVE US. DROWN OUR SIN AND RAISE US UP TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

For being too proud to forgive or seek forgiveness. For punishing those who hurt us and loving only those who love us.

FORGIVE US. DROWN OUR SIN AND RAISE US UP TO NEW LIFE IN CHRIST.

Our sins - known and unknown, intended and unintended - are all known and already forgiven by God. God loves us for Christ's sake and will never let us go. May God grant us grace to trust we are forgiven and power to forgive all others as God has already forgiven us. Amen

PRAYER of THE DAY

Glorious God, your generosity waters the world with goodness, and you cover creation with abundance. Awaken in us a hunger for the food that satisfies both body and spirit, and with this food fill all the starving world; through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

SCRIPTURE READINGS (LECTIONARY)

First Reading.....Isaiah 55:1-5
Psalm.....Psalm 145:8-9, 14-21
Second Reading.....Romans 9:1-5
Gospel.....Matthew 14:13-21

INTRODUCTION to FIRST READING

Isaiah 55:1-5

The Bible contains 66 books; 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament. The last 17 books in the Old Testament are named for prophets. There are additional prophets in the Old Testament who do not have books named for them. The 17 books at the end of the Old Testament are traditionally divided into two groups: 5 major prophets and 12 minor or later prophets. These labels have nothing to do with content or importance. They refer only to length – the 5 major prophets are longer books. The first of these 17 books is the book of Isaiah. Our book of Isaiah contains the work of several prophets by that name, each reflecting a different period in Israel's history. In 587 B.C. the Jewish kingdom of Judah was conquered by Babylon. Many Jewish people were taken captive into exile in Babylon. Today's First Reading was originally addressed to those exiles calling them to trust in God who still provides for them and all people.

INTRODUCTION to SECOND READING

Romans 9:1-5

21 of 27 books in the New Testament are epistles or letters. 9 of the 21, named for their destination, were written by St. Paul to churches he founded or visited on his three missionary journeys around the western Mediterranean. On these journeys St. Paul received offerings from largely Gentile churches for the relief of the church in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church, made up of former Jews, was suffering famine and persecution. St. Paul hoped this offering would help heal divisions between Gentile and Jewish Christians. After delivering the offering to Jerusalem Paul planned a fourth journey all the way to Spain, then the end of the earth. Paul planned to visit the church in Rome on the way to Spain. He wrote to Rome introducing himself and his beliefs. Today's Second Reading begins a new section of this letter in which Paul deals with Israel's place in history.

INTRODUCTION to GOSPEL

Matthew 14:13-21

The selections from the Bible we hear each Sunday and festival are called the lectionary. These selections are arranged to follow the church calendar reviewing important stories of our salvation. Our lectionary follows a three-year cycle, successive years based on a Gospel from Matthew, Mark, and Luke with readings from John included in all three years. This year the Gospels are predominantly from Matthew's Gospel which portrays Jesus as the promised messiah of Israel and the church as the renewed people of God. Matthew portrays John the Baptist as the last prophet who announced the coming of the Savior, Jesus. Jesus' identity as messiah is confirmed by feeding the people just as Moses did in the wilderness.

MEDITATION

This Sunday's Gospel includes two stories that could not be more different. It begins with the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist and ends with the miracle of feeding the five thousand. The contrast between them could not be more extreme.

St. John the Baptist, the last prophet, represents or personifies all Old Testament prophets who preceded him. His brutal execution symbolizes this world's rejection of every prophet. St. John's beheading is our final and definitive "No!" to God's messengers and message. Silencing the prophets is evil doing its worst. Voices of hope crying out in the wilderness are silenced.

By contrast the Old Testament connects messiah's coming with a messianic feast (please don't let big words intimidate you – just think "messiah's feast"). When the savior comes a party

breaks out. That's what today's First Reading is about – God inviting everyone to a sumptuous feast. Earlier Isaiah describes messiah's feast in these words:

⁶ On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. ⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; ⁸ he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. ⁹ It will be said on that day, Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. (Is. 55:6-9)

That is why Jesus' first miracle is saving a marriage feast in Cana. It is why Jesus ate with outcasts and sinners. It is why Jesus fed the five thousand. And most of all it is why Jesus transformed a Passover meal from commemorating the past to celebrating the future. The Last Supper becomes the first holy communion.

The prophets, culminating in St. John the Baptist, were heralds or forerunners of messiah. Think of them as God's "save the date" announcement for the savior's great feast. King Herod, St. John's executioner, represents all the powers of this world rejecting both the prophets and the messiah they predicted.

So what will God do now that his prophets are rejected and silenced and sacrificed? In the face of such evil, in the Feeding of the Five Thousand, the messianic feast breaks out. Evil's worst cannot undo God's promise to send a savior.

During the Holocaust, when Springtime came to Nazi death camps, Rabbi's were asked if Passover – a meal celebrating the Jews freedom from slavery in Egypt – could be celebrated in such a place. After fervent prayer and long deliberation, the Rabbi's decided that not only could Passover be celebrated, Passover must be celebrated there. Indeed, the Rabbis decreed that there is no better place to celebrate Passover than in the face of evil and death. Just so, Jesus fed the five thousand in the face of St. John's beheading. No matter how ugly evil cannot win. No matter how powerful evil does not win.

Some fifty years ago when I began my service at the Columbus State School large state institutions were the norm in caring for those then labeled mentally retarded and mentally ill – state hospitals for the former, state schools for the latter. Both were so overpopulated with those with little or no disability that there was a state-wide athletic league of institutions playing each other in baseball, basketball, and other sports. In addition to being the pastor or chaplain yours truly was one of the coaches of the Columbus State School Rebels basketball team.

We were terrible, no doubt due more to lousy coaching than the players' disability. We were soundly defeated by all the other state schools and we were simply humiliated by the teams from the state hospitals. Truth be told we did not win a single game.

But I tell you of my coaching experience with the Columbus State School Rebels because of my team's reaction to defeat after defeat and loss after loss. This would absolutely drive our victorious opponents crazy, but at the end of every game my defeated, disgraced guys would break out into the most uproarious, yelling, high-fiving, jumping up and down celebration you've ever seen. I know our triumphant foes thought we were just too stupid to know we lost, but my guys did know the score. It's just that I think the Columbus State School Rebels were so happy just to be playing they had to celebrate. They really did know the score.

As we meet week after week, Sunday after Sunday to celebrate Jesus' death and resurrection I wonder if the world thinks we're just too stupid to know the score. Except we do. We really do know that in spite of the worst evil can do, life will triumph over death; love will prevail over hate; mercy will win over revenge. We know that regardless of how bad things get in this world there is absolutely nothing that can put Jesus back in the tomb. There is nothing that can stop God's kingdom from coming. The world thinks we lost. But we really do know the score.

Amen

PRAYER

These prayers especially prepared for August 2, The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost, are shared by your sisters and brothers throughout our Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Please refer to the list of prayer requests and needs provided by Grace's Prayer Ministry for special intentions in these prayers.

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.

You take resources that appear to be meager, bless them, and there is enough. May your church trust that what you bless and ask us to share with the world is abundantly sufficient. Bless Elizabeth and Daniel, our Bishops and Howard and Brian our Pastors as they inspire us to share all you give us. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Your bountiful creation offers sustenance and life for all creatures. Protect this abundance for the well-being of all. Reverse the damage we have caused your creation, especially the waters of the Maumee River and Lake Erie. Replenish ground water supplies, provide needed rains in places of drought, and protect forests from wildfires. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You offer yourself to all the nations and peoples of the earth, inviting everyone to abundant life. Bring the prophetic vision to fullness, that all nations will run to you and that nations who do not know you will find their joy in you. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing. Hear the anguish of tender hearts who cry to you in suffering and satisfy their deepest needs. Bring wholeness and healing to those who suffer in body, heart, soul, and mind (*especially*). Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You offer freely the fullness of salvation. Give our Grace Lutheran Church such a welcoming heart, that our words and actions may extend your free and abundant hospitality to all whom we encounter. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

You gather your saints as one, united in the body of Jesus. Bring us with all your saints to the heavenly banquet. We remember with love and thanksgiving the saints we have known, especially Pastor James VanBrussel. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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

Conclude by joining the faithful in every place and time praying the words our Lord 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.

BLESSING PRAYER

May Almighty God send us light and truth to keep us all the days of our lives. May the hand of God protect us; the holy angels accompany us; and the blessing of almighty God, the Father, the † Son, and the Holy Spirit, be with us now and forever. Amen

Go now in peace and serve the Lord.