

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Toledo, Ohio

A congregation of the Northwestern Ohio Synod

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Sunday, October 18, 2020

Introduction & Welcome

Welcome to worship, God's gift to us because God is Good all the time and all the time God is good.

In today's first reading God uses the Gentile ruler Cyrus to accomplish divine purposes. When the Pharisees try to trap Jesus, he tells them to give the emperor what belongs to him and to God what belongs to God. To gather for worship reminds us that our ultimate allegiance is to God rather than to any earthly authority. Created in the image of God, we offer our entire selves in the service of God and for the sake of the world.

Confession and Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation.

Amen.

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

Silence is kept for reflection.

Faithful God have mercy on us.

**We confess that we are captive to sin
and cannot free ourselves.**

**We turn from your loving embrace
and go our own ways.**

**We pass judgment on one another
before examining ourselves.**

We place our own needs before those of our neighbors.

We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves.

**Make us humble, cast away our transgressions,
and turn us again to life in you**

through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

God hears the cries of all who call out in need,
and through his death and resurrection,
Christ has made us his own.

Hear the truth that God proclaims:

Your sins are forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ.

Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness
to do God's work in the world.

Amen.

Prayer of the Day

Sovereign God raise your throne in our hearts. Created by you, let us live in your image; created for you, let us act for your glory; redeemed by you, let us give you what is yours, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Isaiah 45:1-7

The prophet announces that Cyrus the Persian emperor is the one the LORD has anointed to end Israel's exile. The LORD makes this choice so that the whole world will recognize this LORD as the only God. Persia had a god of light and a god of darkness; the LORD claims sovereignty over both light and darkness.

¹Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus,
whose right hand I have grasped
to subdue nations before him
and strip kings of their robes,
to open doors before him—
and the gates shall not be closed:

²I will go before you
and level the mountains,

I will break in pieces the doors of bronze
and cut through the bars of iron,
³I will give you the treasures of darkness
and riches hidden in secret places,
so that you may know that it is I, the LORD,
the God of Israel, who call you by your name.
⁴For the sake of my servant Jacob,
and Israel my chosen,
I call you by your name,
I surname you, though you do not know me.
⁵I am the LORD, and there is no other;
besides me there is no god.
I arm you, though you do not know me,
⁶so that they may know, from the rising of the sun
and from the west, that there is no one besides me;
I am the LORD, and there is no other.
⁷I form light and create darkness,
I make weal and create woe;
I the LORD do all these things.

Psalm: Psalm 96:1-9 [10-13]

Ascribe to the LORD honor and power. (Ps. 96:7)

¹Sing to the LORD| a new song;
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
²Sing to the LORD, bless the name of the LORD;
proclaim God's salvation from day to day.
³Declare God's glory among the nations
and God's wonders among all peoples.
⁴For great is the LORD and greatly to be praised,
more to be feared than all gods.
⁵As for all the gods of the nations, they are but idols;
but you, O LORD, have made the heavens.
⁶Majesty and magnificence are in your presence;
power and splendor are in your sanctuary.
⁷Ascribe to the LORD, you families of the peoples,
ascribe to the LORD honor and power.
⁸Ascribe to the LORD the honor due the holy name;
bring offerings and enter the courts of the LORD.
⁹Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness;
tremble before the LORD, all the earth.
¹⁰Tell it out among the nations: "The LORD is king!
The one who made the world so firm that it cannot be moved will judge the peoples
with equity."
¹¹Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;
let the sea thunder and all that is in it; let the field be joyful and all that is therein.
¹²Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy at your coming, O LORD,
for you come to judge the earth.
¹³You will judge the world with righteousness
and the peoples with your truth.

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Most likely this letter is the first written by Paul. Paul gives pastoral encouragement and reassurances to new Christians living in an antagonistic environment. Their commitment of faith, love, and hope makes them a model for other new Christian communities.

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace.
²We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly
³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and
steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by
God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our message of the gospel came to you not in word
only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what
kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us
and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy
Spirit, ⁷so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For

the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. ⁹For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia. Shine like stars in the world,* holding fast to the word of life. Alleluia. (Phil. 2:15, 16)

Gospel: Matthew 22:15-22

After Jesus begins teaching in the temple, religious leaders try to trap him with questions. First, they ask if God's people should pay taxes to an earthly tyrant like Caesar.

¹⁵Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap [Jesus] in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" ²¹They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

Meditation by David O'Brien

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord.

When Paul wrote his first letter to the Church in Thessalonica, they were facing a time of crisis in their world. The city they lived in was a Greek port of commerce. Tensions were everywhere and war was on the horizon. Soon, Titus would lay siege to the city of Jerusalem. The Jews there would be taken captive and their temple destroyed. Their whole world must have seemed to be in chaos.

Paul begins his letter by trying to encourage the Thessalonians. He starts his letter by praising the strength of their faith and that the Gospel came to them, not just in word, but in power and the Holy Spirit. Paul talks about how when he, Silvanus and Timothy were among them, they set an example for them about how to act and what kind of persons they were. The Thessalonians were impressed and became imitators of Paul and thereby set an example for those around them.

Like the Thessalonians, our world seems to be in chaos. Institutions, which we've long relied on to provide guidance, are no longer trusted. Our news, we are told, is fake. The advice of our medical professionals is dismissed as though they are pushing an agenda. Our political leaders get on a stage to have a thoughtful discussion about policy and what direction this nation should take and instead spend an hour and a half trading insults and being rude to each other. Armed thugs make threats to overthrow one of our neighboring states and hatch a plot to kidnap and possibly murder its governor and her family. And in our own congregation, instead of working together to find a way to praise the Lord in this time of pandemic, we spend more time bickering about details of our services and how things should be or how they used to be, when we should be finding ways to encourage each other in Christ.

Just the same, we try to set an example for those around us. We have our food bank to minister to the poor. We continue to minister to persons held captive by addiction and alcoholism. We try, as best we can during this pandemic, to give God praise. At one point, in the Church's history, it was considered that the only appropriate language in which to worship God was Latin. Then, for some others, it became German. This community worships Him in English and worshipers all over the world praise Him in whatever their local language may be. I think Jesus would agree that it really doesn't matter what language or style we use to praise Him. The important thing is that we praise Him. Though we don't always agree about how to do that, we continue to come back to being a community of faith and of the Lord.

The Pharisees of Jesus time liked to argue about how things should be. Jesus was more concerned about things, not of this world, but of his Father's. This week, they are trying to get him in trouble over the authority of Rome and payment of taxes. To the Jews of that time, paying taxes was an insult (I can relate to that). They ask Him if it's legal to pay taxes, knowing that if He says "no", they can get the Roman government to declare Him a criminal. If He says

“yes”, however, he falls out of favor with the people and becomes less of a threat to them. But Jesus knows what they are plotting and throws a them a curve ball that they didn't anticipate. Give to Caesar, those thing which are Caesar's, He says, but give to God those things which belong to God. That says to me that the things of this world are really not that big of a deal. Giving God our praise and thanksgiving, trying to do God's work with our hands, no matter how we do it, is more important. I think that the reading from Isaiah also speaks to this. God is telling Cyrus, the Persian emperor, who was certainly not part of the house of Israel, that he is and will be doing God's work with his own hands. God wasn't concerned if Cyrus made the appropriate sacrifices in the appropriate way. God wanted to show that He can work through anyone to accomplish His goals. God will continue to work through this congregation in His own way so that we can continue to Bless this world and be Gods Grace.

Prayers of Intercession

With confidence in God's grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

Gracious God, you call us by name and invite us to share your good news. Send your Holy Spirit among preachers, missionaries, and evangelists. We give thanks for the witness of your servant Luke, the evangelist, whom the church commemorates today. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of praise, the heavens and all creation declare your salvation. From the rising of the sun to its setting, may the whole universe show forth your goodness. Raise up devoted stewards of all that you have made. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of all, may your word of justice sound forth in every place. Restore divided nations and communities with reconciling truth. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of light, we pray for those living with pain, illness, isolation, grief, anger, or doubt especially those mentioned in our prayer list and those we hold in our hearts. Join their voices in a new song, assuring them that you call them each by name. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of truth, you show no partiality. May your spirit guide the work of justices, magistrates, court officials, and all vocations of the law, that your promise of restoration may be known. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Living God, as you raised Jesus from the dead, so raise up those who have died in you. We give thanks for their witness, confident of your rescuing welcome for all. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Listen as we call on you, O God, and enfold in your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

And now, as our Savior, Christ has taught us, we boldly 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, for ever and ever.
Amen.**

Blessing

Nurturing God,
Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life.
Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Remember the poor.
Bless the world and be God's grace!
Thanks be to God!