

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 12, 2020

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



*PRELUDE*    *These Are the Holy Ten Commands* BWV 679    Setting: Johann Sebastian Bach

*WELCOME*

*ENTRANCE HYMN*    #    *sts. 1, 8-12*    *These Are the Holy Ten Commands*

- 1    **These are the holy Ten Commands  
God gave to us by Moses' hands  
When high on Sinai's mount he stood,  
Receiving them for our good.  
Have mercy, Lord!**
  
- 8    **"You shall not steal or take away  
What others worked for night and day,  
But open wide a gen'rous hand  
And help the poor in the land."  
Have mercy, Lord!**
  
- 9    **"Bear no false witness nor defame  
Your neighbor nor destroy his name,  
But view him in the kindest way;  
Speak truth in all that you say."  
Have mercy, Lord!**
  
- 10    **"You shall not crave your neighbor's house  
Nor covet money, goods, or spouse.  
Pray God He would your neighbor bless  
As you yourself wish success."  
Have mercy, Lord!**
  
- 11    **You have this Law to see therein  
That you have not been free from sin  
But also that you clearly see  
How pure toward God life should be.  
Have mercy, Lord!**
  
- 12    **Our works cannot salvation gain;  
They merit only endless pain.  
Forgive us, Lord! To Christ we flee,  
Who pleads for us endlessly.  
Have mercy, Lord!**

## CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the aid of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that, attentive to your Word, we may confess our sins, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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

*(Silence for reflection and self-examination)*

Gracious God,

**have mercy on us. In your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, things done and left undone. Uphold us by your Spirit so that we may live and serve you in newness of life, to the honor and glory of your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life. Amen.

## KYRIE

In peace let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.**

For the gift of divine peace and of pardon, with all our heart and with all our mind, let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.**

For the holy Christian church, here and scattered throughout the world, and for the proclamation of the Gospel and the calling of all to faith, let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.**

Help, save, comfort and defend us, gracious Lord.

**Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy; Lord, have mercy.**

## HYMN OF PRAISE

**To you on high be glory and peace to all the earth;  
Goodwill from God in heaven proclaimed at Jesus' birth!  
We praise and bless You, Father; Your holy name, we sing –  
Our thanks for Your great glory, Lord God our heavenly King.**

**To you, O sole begotten, the Father's Son, we pray;  
O Lamb of God, our Savior, You take our sins away.  
Have mercy on us, Jesus; receive our heartfelt cry,  
Where You in power are seated at God's right hand on high.**

**For You alone are holy; You only are the Lord.  
Forever and forever, be worshiped and adored;  
You with the Holy Spirit alone are Lord Most High,  
In God the Father's glory. "Amen!" our glad reply.**

*THE PRAYER OF THE DAY*

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray. Blessed Lord,

**since You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**



*FIRST LESSON* Isaiah 55:10–13

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.  
“For you shall go out in joy  
and be led forth in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall break forth into singing,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall make a name for the LORD,  
an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 65:1, 9–13

Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion,  
and to you shall vows be performed.  
You visit the earth and water it;  
you greatly enrich it;  
the river of God is full of water;  
you provide their grain,  
for so you have prepared it.  
You water its furrows abundantly,  
settling its ridges,  
softening it with showers,  
and blessing its growth.  
You crown the year with your bounty;  
your wagon tracks overflow with abundance.

The pastures of the wilderness overflow,  
the hills gird themselves with joy,  
the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,  
the valleys deck themselves with grain,  
they shout and sing together for joy.

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning,  
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

*SECOND LESSON* Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.

“Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*CHILDREN’S SERMON*

*ALLELUIA VERSE*

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

**These things are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.**

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

*SERMON TEXT* Romans 8:12–17

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children,

then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

This is the Word of the Lord.  
**Praise to You, O Christ**

### *SERMON*

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.  
Dear friends in Christ:

This is now our third week in a row of sermons on the Book of Romans, and the first week in a new chapter – chapter eight. Chapter eight is filled with all kinds of inspiring messages and concludes with one of the most beautiful paragraphs in all of scripture. Martin Luther said that Paul took extra steps to show us comfort in chapter eight, especially after describing our struggles in chapter seven.

You may have noticed that we did not read the first eleven verses of the chapter. That’s because these verses are mainly summary and transitional. They repeat the concept of Christian identity introduced in the last chapter – namely, that our identity consists of two different forces or personalities struggling within us. One of these is our old sinful nature, which we have had from birth. The other is our new Spirit-led nature. Both now dwell within us together. In chapter eight, Paul speaks of this distinction as being either of the flesh or of the Spirit.

Like he did in the last chapter, Paul encourages us to live according to the Spirit and not the flesh. This means listening to God and refraining from sin. Using the language of earlier chapters, Paul urges us to “put to death the deeds of the body.” He then adds that we will do this better as we put our mind on things of the Spirit, not on the flesh.

And, like he has done throughout his letter, Paul also reminds his hearers that ultimately, they are in the Spirit, not the flesh, for the Spirit of God dwells in them. The Spirit’s presence is the dominant and decisive reality of their existence – and the Spirit prevails. This is because “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.”

As Paul moves on to the verses we are considering today, he introduces three new terms to describe the Christian identity. He first says we are debtors. Next, he says we are sons. And finally, he says we are heirs. Today’s sermon will address each of these.

“Debtors” is not a word which Paul uses frequently. But we see why it makes sense for him to use it here. In the last chapter, Paul described his condition as being “wretched.” At the same time, he knew he was also delivered from the sin which caused his wretchedness. Using the word “debtor” captures the fact that even though he is free, he owes his freedom to God. Thinking of this as a debt will remind him to live the way God wants – and that’s one of the points which Paul has been emphasizing in these chapters.

Paul’s use of the word also reminds him of his sinfulness, lest he forget. Jesus had taught his disciples to pray to God saying: “forgive us our debts.” Debt was a common way of talking about sin, as was the related term “trespasses,” which Jesus also used.

Furthermore, when Paul says that we are debtors, he clarifies that we are not debtors to the flesh. And this may seem like an obvious point, but it’s one worth contemplating. There’s a note in the Lutheran Study Bible which reminds us how we like to use the phrase: “I owe it to myself.” This is an example of believing that we are debtors to the flesh. When we adopt such a belief, we can easily convince ourselves to go ahead and gratify the flesh, even in those ways we know we shouldn’t. And from there, it can be a short step to being ruled by the flesh.

It seems to me that Paul’s use of the word “debtor” also serves one other purpose, and that is to lead us into the next description of our identity in Christ. In the ancient world, those who were in debt often became slaves. Paul uses the idea of a slave identity to contrast with the much better identity a

Christian has. He says: “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

Yes, we are sons of God. And this is the identity Paul really wants us to understand. Being a son means we are a part of God’s family. It means God loves us, as his own child. That’s huge!

By the way, the use of the word “son” here does not imply any kind of male exclusivity. “Sons” was the legal term in the adoption and inheritance laws of first-century Rome, and Paul is using the idea of adoption and inheritance here in his teaching. “Sons,” as used here by Paul, refers to the status of all Christians, both men and women. All people who are adopted into God’s family enjoy the privileges, obligations, and inheritance rights of God’s children. If there’s any question about this non-exclusive use of the word, we have only to recall that Paul begins the epistle by addressing it “To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.”

When we are children of God, we enjoy opportunity, security and ongoing support. We are blessed beyond measure. We have the greatest identity one could ever have.

Notice that our status as a child only comes through our adoption. God had to adopt us, because by nature we are children of a fallen humanity, born into sin. God had to choose to take us into his family and take certain steps to make our adoption legitimate.

And these things he did. God chose us by sending us Christ. And Christ made our adoption legitimate by paying for our sins on the cross.

Because of our status as a son, Paul tells us that we no longer need to live in fear. We will not be enslaved because of our debt. We have God as our Father.

This idea is taught to us by Jesus in his parable of the prodigal son and the forgiving father. In that parable, the son wastes all his money and finds himself without means, so he says to himself: “I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”” But before he can even say this, the father runs to him and embraces him and kisses him. The father forgives his son and welcomes him back.

Paul emphasizes this approaching of God without fear by adding that we can say: “Abba, Father.” Abba is the affectionate word that children would use for their father – like our use of “dad.” Jesus himself had once cried out to his father with this word – when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.

In his catechism, Luther reminds us that we are to “fear, love and trust in God above all things.” This echoes the Biblical teaching that the “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” But Luther also knows that we can approach God *without* fear - because of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus, in fact, taught us to address God in prayer by saying “Our Father.” And of this, Luther says: “With these words God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear father.”

Tenderly. Dearly. Confidently. Our relationship with God is to be one of affection. Paul highlights this close relationship by saying: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

Paul then goes on to say: “and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”

To be an heir means we will inherit what belongs to our Father. Think about that! All things belong to God... so we will inherit all things!

We are not to see this inheritance with eyes of greed, of course. Rather, we are to see this as the glorious future which awaits.

Paul will go on to say more about our inheritance in the next verses. But since that is our text for next week, we will wait to explore this idea more until then.

Today, let us conclude as Paul does in the text – by adding a word of qualification. Paul says that we are heirs, “provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

We must ask ourselves, then... what does it mean to suffer with him?

Jesus, we recall, suffered in a number of ways, including rejection, insult and, above all, the physical sufferings he endured when he went to the cross. But I'd like us to think about a particular suffering that Jesus in his divine nature endured, and still does – one suggested by that great parable of his mentioned earlier.

In that parable, the forgiving father suffers a great loss – not only in the share of the inheritance which his prodigal son has wasted, but even more, in his status and dignity within the community. To welcome back his wayward son would have gone against the code of honor upon which that community was built. This code of honor is evidenced by the reaction of the father's other son – the one who did not act in a wasteful manner. That son, you recall, greatly resented the fact that his father welcomed back his brother. He was not willing to suffer the indignity of welcoming back a prodigal.

But the father was. And what about us? Are we willing to suffer the indignities of the faith?

Jesus calls us to love and forgive. Can we do that? It might make us look weak. And feel weak too. There will be many who look down upon us when we live the way of Christ. Can we suffer that pain?

Paul and the rest of the scriptural writers call us to endure. They call us to welcome back sinners... and suffer the consequences. They call us to believe that this is in fact not the way of weakness but the way of strength... and the way of life. True life.

Paul will have more to say about suffering, too, in the verses ahead. For now, we simply hear our call... and pray for God's help. We do this remembering all that God has done for us. We remember that – despite being debtors – we are also sons and heirs. And we remember that in Christ we can put away all fear, because we know that God is caring for us.

May God, then, give us courage and strength in our suffer. And may he give us, even more, joy in being his children. Amen.

*HYMN OF THE DAY #577 Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast*

- 1 Almighty God, Your Word is cast  
Like seed into the ground;  
Now let the dew of heav'n descend  
And righteous fruits abound.**
- 2 Let not the sly satanic foe  
This holy seed remove,  
But give it root in ev'ry heart  
To bring forth fruits of love.**
- 3 Let not the world's deceitful cares  
The rising plant destroy,  
But let it yield a hundredfold  
The fruits of peace and joy.**
- 4 So when the precious seed is sown,  
Life-giving grace bestow  
That all whose souls the truth receive  
Its saving pow'r may know.**

## APOSTLES' CREED

**I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

OFFERING    *The Law of God Is Good and Wise*    Setting: Scott Hyslop

## PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Almighty God, hear the prayers of Your people, grant to us all things needful and beneficial, and keep from us all things harmful.

### *Brief silence*

Holy Lord, mighty God, You are the strength of the hills and the hope of the ends of the earth. Give to our hearts Your perfect peace, that we may not be anxious nor live in fear but rest all our hopes, dreams and desires upon Your merciful goodness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, mighty God, You send forth water upon the earth, that it may bring forth abundant fruit and feed our bodies with all that we need. Help us to be wise and faithful in the use of the rich bounty of the earth, that the poor may be supplied and that we never fail to give thanks to You for all You have given us for this body and life. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, mighty God, Your Word will not return to You empty but will accomplish Your purpose in sending it. By Your Holy Spirit, make our hearts good soil for Your Word to be planted, that we may give evidence of a sturdy faith and show forth in our lives the good works You have called us to do. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, mighty God, Your Spirit accompanies the witness of Your people who speak Your Word before the world. Grant success to the missionary and mission planter and to every pastor and church worker, that those who hear may believe and those who believe may bear the good fruit of faith in their lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, mighty Lord, You have given power to the nations and those who govern to act for the good of Your people. Bless our president, the Congress, our governor and all those elected and appointed to lead us, that justice may prevail and Your people may be free to live at peace with all people. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, mighty Lord, You know how weak and frail we are. Give to those afflicted in mind, body or soul the fullness of Your healing grace, that according to Your will they may be restored to health. Hear us for all those suffering or recovering from the pandemic's ravages, for those who have requested our prayers [*especially \_\_\_\_\_*], and for those we name in our hearts. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, mighty Lord, You have granted us great riches and gifts. Keep our hearts from being overburdened by the things of this mortal life, whether in time of plenty or in time of want. Deliver us from persecution and sustain us from all tribulation, that our hearts may ever be fixed upon the true treasure of Your grace. Accept the tithes and offerings we bring as part of our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for all Your goodness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In Him, with Him and through Jesus Christ, our Lord, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all honor and glory is Yours, almighty Father, both now and forevermore. **Amen.**

#### *THE LORD'S PRAYER*

**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.**

#### *BENEDICTION*

The Lord bless us and keep us.  
The Lord make His face shine on us  
and be gracious to us.  
The Lord look upon us with favor and ☩ give us peace.

#### *SENDING HYMN #921 On What Has Now Been Sown*

- 1 On what has now been sown  
Thy blessing, Lord, bestow;  
The pow'r is Thine alone  
To make it sprout and grow.  
Do Thou in grace the harvest raise,  
And Thou alone shalt have the praise!**
  
- 2 To Thee our wants are known,  
From Thee are all our pow'rs;  
Accept what is Thine own  
And pardon what is ours.  
Our praises, Lord, and prayers receive,  
And to Thy Word a blessing give.**

**3 O grant that each of us,  
Now met before Thee here,  
May meet together thus  
When Thou and Thine appear  
And follow Thee to heav'n, our home.  
E'en so, amen, Lord Jesus, come!**

*ANNOUNCEMENTS*

*DISMISSAL*

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*POSTLUDE On What Has Now Been Sown* Setting: J. Wayne Kerr

**Acknowledgments**

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