

THE SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 19, 2020

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

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling Setting: Paul Manz*

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #700 *Love Divine, All Love Excelling*

- 1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heav'n, to earth come down!
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,
All Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, Thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love Thou art;
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter ev'ry trembling heart.
- 2 Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
Into ev'ry troubled breast;
Let us all in Thee inherit;
Let us find Thy promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.
- 3 Come, Almighty, to deliver;
Let us all Thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Nevermore Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.
- 4 Finish then Thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in Thee,
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heav'n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise!

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. O God,

so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of Your final judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with You in perfect joy hereafter; 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 44:6–8

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
“I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.
Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.
Let him declare and set it before me,
since I appointed an ancient people.
Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.
Fear not, nor be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?
And you are my witnesses!
Is there a God besides me?
There is no Rock; I know not any.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 119:57-64

The LORD is my portion;
I promise to keep your words.
I entreat your favor with all my heart;
be gracious to me according to your promise.
When I think on my ways,
I turn my feet to your testimonies;
I hasten and do not delay
to keep your commandments.
Though the cords of the wicked ensnare me,
I do not forget your law.
At midnight I rise to praise you,
because of your just and righteous decrees.
I am a companion of all who fear you,
of those who keep your precepts.
The earth, O LORD, is full of your steadfast love;
teach me your statutes!

**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 13:24-30, 36-43

[Jesus] put another parable before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' So the servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" . . .

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed is the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

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 8:18-27

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts

knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

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 our second week of reading from Romans chapter eight. Last week we mentioned how this chapter brings special messages of comfort to help us, especially as we endure the struggles detailed in the previous chapter. Those struggles may be ongoing, at least in this life, but God does not leave us to struggle on our own.

In the verses we read last week, Paul comforts us by describing our identity in Christ. He tells us that even while we are still debtors to God, we are seen primarily as his children. And because we are God's children, we are also his heirs. This status – made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – guarantees our salvation and gives us God's ever-present help.

Paul speaks of this status of ours as being "in the Spirit." Through Christ, God dwells in us through his Spirit. And because God dwells in us, we are not dead in our sinful flesh but alive - in the Spirit.

Paul makes many references to the Holy Spirit in this chapter. And we will explore some of these in today's sermon. But first, we should note that Paul has more to say on another subject – one he started in last week's verses.

At the conclusion of last week's reading, Paul made what we would call a qualifying statement. While speaking of our status as heirs of God, he then adds the words: "provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." Suffering is the subject he addresses next.

You may recall that in addressing these words last week, I brought up a particular kind of suffering suggested by the parable of the prodigal son and the forgiving father. We had mentioned this parable as a means of thinking about what it means to be a son and an heir of God. Later in the sermon, when the subject of suffering was mentioned, I pointed out that the father's forgiveness of his son was actually a cause of some suffering on his part. His suffering came about because of the humiliation it brought him in the eyes of the community – a humiliation evidenced in the reaction of his other son. The suffering was, of course, a price the father was willing to pay. But it was suffering nonetheless.

Today's verses from Romans move us to look at the subject of suffering in some different ways. Here Paul places the suffering of the individual within the context of the world's suffering. Paul reminds us that the "the creation was subjected to futility," and that because of this the world is now in "bondage to corruption." Here Paul is referring to the curse of death which came into the world at the time of humanity's first sin. God had created the world as a paradise, but human sin brought death and pain. We recall how Genesis 3 describes the effects of this curse in very vivid terms through God's words to Adam, Eve and the serpent. Not only will people die according to this curse, but they will suffer – in their work, in their relationships and in their health. The peaceful world God made would now be a place filled with many dangers.

Paul further describes this state by saying: "the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." The use of childbirth as an image here is profound. Childbirth is an event where life is joyfully going forward and yet at the same time filled with great physical pain. Furthermore, the image also recalls for us words that Paul had spoken earlier, and now repeats. All this pain causes us to "wait eagerly for adoption as sons." We've been born into this dangerous world, and we will not survive unless adopted into the family of our heavenly Father.

And here I want us to pause and think about that idea of adoption a little more. Earlier Paul said that we had already been adopted – through our faith in the salvation offered by Christ Jesus. Now Paul says that we are waiting for adoption. This might seem like a contradiction. But Paul’s second use of the metaphor speaks more specifically to the *fullness* of our adoption. His words here are another case of the “now, not yet” paradox that is so prevalent in scripture. Yes, we have been adopted into God’s family. That has been done. That is finished. But we are not yet realizing the full effects of that adoption. Someday we will – when we have finished this life and have entered into heaven and the new creation. Notice how Paul clarifies this distinction by adding the words: “the redemption of our bodies.”

But back to the subject of suffering. To the image of childbirth, Paul adds the word “groaning.” “The whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth.” And then Paul repeats the word, saying: “And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait.” Just like the creation groans because of the pain taking place, so we also groan individually because of the pain in this world.

A few months ago, before the pandemic hit, I sat at a table with a mom and her son in order to give mom communion. She had not been able to join us at church for a while because of her health. After the communion and a very nice visit, I stood up to leave. And as I did, the woman asked me if I was okay, noting that I seemed to be getting up rather slowly. I don’t think I groaned... although now I’m wondering if I did. “He’s just getting old, mom,” joked the son – who could say that, because he’s my age, and my friend. I think I was just kind of stiff from sitting there a while. But I notice this happens to me a lot these days. And sometimes I do audibly groan. It’s one of those things that just happens with age.

Yes, we groan as we endure the pains of life – whether audibly or internally or by the look on our face. We groan as we deal with the physical pain. And we groan, too, as we deal with emotional pain. I find myself groaning about how frequently people hurt others, and all the sly and back-handed ways people do it. It seems to me that as we get older, we become even more perceptive of these things. And some might then think we’re becoming grumpy. And maybe we are. But I wonder if it’s really just groaning.

In the face of our pain and suffering, Paul teaches us to endure. He does so by reminding us that we are just waiting... waiting until the day when the suffering is gone. Paul says: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.” And again, this is a sentence we need to examine closely, for it’s a little confusing at first. The key to understanding it is the word “revealing.” We hear it as a verb, but it’s actually a verbal noun. We are waiting for the revelation – meaning the time when God will reveal his full kingdom to us. Again, this is the new life to come – the day when the children of God will emerge from their hiddenness, their shame and suffering and stand revealed as justified men who need not shrink from him who judges, but stand before him and see him face to face.

We can wait patiently because we have a glorious future ahead. Paul refers to this knowledge as our hope. “For in this hope we were saved,” he says. And then he adds: “Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

Being patient is hard. We will continue to suffer. There will be plenty to groan about. Paul makes two points here which are meant to help us as we wait.

The first point comes right at the beginning. He says: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Notice the word “revelation” again (“revealed to us”). And notice how it points toward the same time – the time of the new creation, when paradise is restored. That new creation is going to be so great it will easily overshadow our present sufferings. There’s no comparing the two. So, we should hang in there and wait. The prize to come will make all our efforts of endurance worthwhile. We have our justification

and the promise of our salvation – the “firstfruits of the Spirit” – as Paul calls them here. We just need to wait.

That’s point number one. Point number two tells us that we don’t have to endure by ourselves. God is regularly sending us help. As Paul explains: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

We should think about what kind of help this is. Martin Luther famously summarized the work of the Spirit as “calling, gathering, enlightening and sanctifying” us. The Spirit does all these things indeed. Here, Paul describes the Spirit’s help as interceding for us. This interceding is a communication with God – like he is praying for us. He is communicating to God on our behalf.

And unlike our prayer, the Spirit always knows what to say. We, in our weakness, often don’t know what to pray for. But the Spirit knows. That’s because the Spirit and God are of the same mind and same will. Paul explains this in the next verse when he says: “And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

We might not feel this help. The Spirit’s intercession goes on behind the scenes, so to speak. It won’t necessarily make us feel any stronger or happier or more optimistic.

But the Spirit is helping us, nonetheless. That’s what we need to know.

And at the same time, perhaps we will feel that help on occasion. A quick look back to verse sixteen reminds us that “the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” The Spirit is certainly connecting with us according to this verse. Why wouldn’t we feel this? At the very least, we should know that the Spirit is guiding us in our prayers – helping us to pray more in line with God’s will and helping us to pray with a greater faith. Martin Franzmann says of this verse that the Spirit “puts his power into our praying.” There will be times when we feel the power of God in our Spirit-led prayer.

Perhaps further evidence of the Spirit’s leading in our prayer is the use, yet again, of that word “groan.” The Spirit, says Paul, helps us “with groanings too deep for words.” Surely this word was duplicated here to connect our need with the Spirit’s help. In our times of painful groaning, God’s Spirit leads us to pray. His groanings, through prayer, overcome our groanings.

The seventh chapter of the Book of Mark (v.34) tells us about a time when Jesus healed a man who was deaf and mute. According to that account, as he was ready to heal Jesus “looked up to heaven and groaned.” We often translate with the word “sighed” instead, but it’s the same word. Jesus paused for a brief prayer. And this prayer was done with the mind of God, in the Spirit. Through it, Jesus helped the man. And in the same way, Jesus helps us too.

Next week we will read the concluding verses of Romans chapter eight. In them we will find beautiful messages about God’s love and grace.

For today, let us conclude by being thankful that God helps us in our suffering and has given us his Holy Spirit. The Spirit intercedes for us each day – helping to release us from our groaning, even as God has released us from our bondage to sin. Knowing this, we can now wait with patience until the fullness of our adoption as children is realized. We can do this because of the hope that is ours in Christ Jesus.

In his holy name. Amen.

- 1 O God, O Lord of heav'n and earth,
Thy living finger never wrote
That life should be an aimless mote,
A deathward drift from futile birth.
Thy Word meant life triumphant hurled
In splendor through Thy broken world.
Since light awoke and life began,
Thou hast desired Thy life for man.
- 2 Our fatal will to equal Thee,
Our rebel will wrought death and night.
We seized and used in prideful spite
Thy wondrous gift of liberty.
We housed us in this house of doom,
Where death had royal scope and room,
Until Thy servant, Prince of Peace,
Breached all its walls for our release.
- 3 Thou camest to our hall of death,
O Christ, to breathe our poisoned air,
To drink for us the dark despair
That strangled our reluctant breath.
How beautiful the feet that trod
The road that leads us back to God!
How beautiful the feet that ran
To bring the great good news to man!
- 4 O Spirit, who didst once restore
Thy Church that it might be again
The bringer of good news to men,
Breathe on Thy cloven Church once more,
That in these gray and latter days
There may be those whose life is praise,
Each life a high doxology
To Father, Son, and unto Thee.

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.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Brief silence

Almighty God, we are too quick to judge Your ways and too bold to presume upon Your wisdom. Grant us grace so that we may trust in Your Word and fulfill our baptismal vocation of worship, witness, prayer and works of mercy, both to our families and to our neighbors in need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Blessed Lord, we are stewards of Your creation, but we have often squandered its goodness and wasted its resources. Guide us to use wisely and for the benefit of all people the fruits of this good earth, and preserve its goodness for those to come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, we have been given new birth in Baptism. Help us to confess Your Son before the world, reflecting the glory of Your kingdom to all people. Bless all pastors, missionaries and church workers, that they may be faithful in their callings. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, we enjoy great freedom and blessing in our land. Bless Donald, our president; the Congress of these United States; Ralph Northam, our governor; and all those who make, judge and administer laws in our land. Give them wisdom in their actions for the protection of life and livelihood. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we give You thanks for the gift of health, which we must never take for granted. Hear our prayers on behalf of the sick, the aged, the infirm, those who mourn and those near death. Grant them healing in accord with Your will and grace to sustain them in their need. Hear us especially for _____. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, we too easily forget those in nursing homes, assisted living and the homebound. Give us grace so that we may bring them Your consolation and peace, and give them the aid and comfort of Your Word and our fellowship in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we are wounded by the sufferings of this life, and we need Your grace to sustain us in hope and equip us with patience. Give to us all that we need to pass through the day of trouble and be found faithful when Christ comes in His glory at the Last Day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gentle Lord, we ask You to visit the homes of Your people, that they may be places of blessing and love, where faith is nurtured and we learn to live out our new lives in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, hear us on behalf of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Grant that what we pray for, we may work toward, under the guidance of Your Holy Spirit, that at the Day of Judgment we may be found worthy to join the saints and enter into Your gift of eternal light and life forevermore; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **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 #829 Christ the Eternal Lord

- 1 Christ the eternal Lord,
Whose promise here we claim,
Whose gifts of grace are freely poured
On all who name Your name;
With thankfulness and praise
We stand before Your throne,
Intent to serve You all our days
And make Your glory known.**

- 2 Christ the unchanging Word
To ev'ry passing age,
Whose timeless teachings still are heard
Set forth on Scripture's page;
Transform our thought and mind,
Enlighten all who read,
Within Your Word by faith to find
The bread of life indeed.**

- 3 Christ the redeeming Son,
Who shares our human birth,
And by His death salvation won
For ev'ry child of earth;
Inspire our hearts, we pray,
To tell Your love abroad,
That all may honor Christ today
And follow Him as Lord.
- 4 Christ the unfading Light
Of everlasting day,
Our Morning Star in splendor bright,
The Life, the Truth, the Way;
That light of truth You give
To servants as to friends,
Your way to walk, Your life to live,
Till earth's brief journey ends.
- 5 Christ the ascended King
Exalted high above,
Whose praise unending ages sing,
Whom yet unseen we love;
When mortal life is past
Your voice from heaven's throne
Shall call Your children home at last
To know as we are known.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE Christ the Eternal Lord Setting: Sondra K. Tucker

Acknowledgments

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