

THE EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 26, 2020

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

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty* Setting: Raymond H. Haan

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #901 *Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty*

- 1 **Open now thy gates of beauty;
Zion, let me enter there,
Where my soul in joyful duty
Waits for Him who answers prayer.
Oh, how blessèd is this place,
Filled with solace, light, and grace!**
- 2 **Gracious God, I come before Thee;
Come Thou also unto me.
Where we find Thee and adore Thee,
There a heav'n on earth must be.
To my heart, O enter Thou;
Let it be Thy temple now!**
- 3 **Here Thy praise is gladly chanted;
Here Thy seed is duly sown.
Let my soul, where it is planted,
Bring forth precious sheaves alone,
So that all I hear may be
Fruitful unto life in me.**
- 4 **Thou my faith increase and quicken;
Let me keep Thy gift divine,
Howsoe'er temptations thicken;
May Thy Word still o'er me shine
As my guiding star through life,
As my comfort in all strife.**
- 5 **Speak, O God, and I will hear Thee;
Let Thy will be done indeed.
May I undisturbed draw near Thee
While Thou dost Thy people feed.
Here of life the fountain flows;
Here is balm for all our woes.**

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. Almighty and everlasting God,

give us an increase of faith, hope, and love, that, receiving what You have promised, we may love what You have commanded; 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 Deuteronomy 7:6–9

“You are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 125

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the LORD surrounds his people,
from this time forth and forevermore.

For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous,
lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong.

Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,
and to those who are upright in their hearts!

But those who turn aside to their crooked ways
the LORD will lead away with evildoers!

Peace be upon Israel!

**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: 44–52

[Jesus said:] “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

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: 28–39

We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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:

The verses just read from Romans chapter eight are much beloved by the church. And we can easily see why – for they speak with great power and articulate such beautiful promises!

One could spend a long, long time examining and celebrating the many ideas contained in these verses. For our time today, I'll do my best to cover the highlights – giving us a sense of why these verses are so beloved and applying them to our situation today.

Let's begin by recalling what has led up to these verses. In the previous section, Paul addressed our need to endure in faith amidst our struggles and our suffering. He details two reasons we can do this.

First, he points out that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the future glory that awaits us. We - and all of God's creation - may be groaning now, but someday we will be freed from our pain and given a glorious redemption in God's new creation.

Second, in our time of struggle, the Holy Spirit helps us. The Spirit does so, specifically, by interceding on our behalf, with groanings of his own, that are too deep for words.

Today's text goes on to give yet another reason why we can endure in faith. Paul tells us that, for those who love God and are called according to his purposes, all things work together for good.

I'm guessing you have heard these words of Paul before. They stand out to us by articulating an incredibly amazing promise of God. Somehow, in this crazy and ever-changing world, God shapes and moves all the events of nature and the decisions and actions of its creatures, for the purpose of good in the world, which includes the special assisting of God's people. Now that's an amazing promise indeed! And something only an all-powerful God could accomplish.

Understand that these words of Paul don't say anything different than what the rest of scripture already tells us. We know that God oversees the world – that nothing happens without his knowing and his permission. And we know that God loves his people and has promised to care for them as he leads them safely to the future he has prepared for them.

What this text from Paul does is put these thoughts together in one short, memorable phrase: God works all things together for good, for those who love him and are called according to his purposes.

It's nice to have a short, memorable phrase with which to summarize so much of scripture. If John 3:16 is the Gospel in a nutshell, this verse could perhaps be called God's care in a nutshell.

The downside of short phrases, however, is that they can sometimes seem trite. Too simple. And when they don't match the emotions of the one hearing them, they can be quickly dismissed. And maybe even make us angry. I think that often happens with this verse.

In times of pain and loss, we're usually in no mood for simple explanations. And that's understandable. We need time to mourn. We need our pain to be acknowledged. We need to heal.

These words of Paul demand a lot of faith. It's hard to believe them, for in this world we see people freely making their own choices, often with no regard for God and his laws. And we rarely see any consequence for this. Furthermore, we also see great suffering and great injustices, and we know that these happen to people of faith just as much or more than they happen to unbelievers.

Because of what we see, we tend to think that God must not really be in control. Otherwise, if he were, he'd be doing a better job.

However, at the end of the day, we will also need to make sense of the hurt. And the options are either that life is just random and difficult and that's all there is to it. Or, that God is in control, helping his people endure the pains of the world, and accomplishing his good purposes by working in ways that are known only to him.

I remind you that how God works things for good is a mystery that we will never completely see. And yet, sometimes we can see in part. We may discern a message or a lesson that we learned through a difficult time. Or we may discern that a certain hurt helped us avoid a greater one. Paul explained this to the Corinthian Christians by saying that in this life we see "in a mirror dimly" (13:12). Now we know only in part. But some day we will understand in full.

God does work all things together for good. And note that this is not just a general good for everybody, but for those who love him and are called according to his purpose. This doesn't mean that life will be easier for people of faith. But it does mean, as Jesus said, that people of faith will have their burdens lightened.

While we're thinking about people of faith, we should take note here of Paul's description. He lists two things. People of faith are the ones who love God and are called according to his purpose.

The first should remind us of the importance of our love toward God. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength," said the ancient commandment. This love is not primarily a feeling but a commitment. We are to commit ourselves to a life of loving God through our devotion, obedience and respect.

And then there's the fact that we are called by God. Paul began his letter to the Roman Christians by telling them that they were "called to belong to Jesus Christ." Now he expands on this idea of calling by stringing together a number of terms in one long sentence – beginning with God's foreknowing and ending with our glorification.

A full explanation of this sentence is not possible in this short time. We usually consider the ideas here of God's foreknowing and predestination under the so-called doctrine of election – using the term Paul uses as summary in the next verse. Paul will have more to say on these things in the coming chapters. Suffice it to say for now that the Lutheran Church has mostly been content to see Paul's words here as a means of encouraging us. His powerful sentence is meant to give us comfort by reinforcing God's love, not explain things such as why God seems to choose some and not others. This stringing of words might best be seen as Paul "waxing poetic" about God's deep feelings for us. Note how Paul continues his poetic language in the verses ahead.

Paul has told us that all things work together for good for us. And he is now ready to say more about what this "good" means. He does this by asking a series of questions. The first is: "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

No one can stand against God. God will always prevail. This means that God's favor brings the good of protection from any who would rise against us. We think of the teaching in Psalm 118 (v.6) which says: "The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

Paul presents as evidence of God's favor the fact that God did not spare his son, but rather gave him up "for us all." This favor of God comes to us very personally when we receive the Son's body and blood in the sacrament, which were given and shed "for you."

And while we're thinking of this, we should notice, too, that God worked something that seemed to be the greatest of all tragedies – the crucifixion of his innocent son – into the greatest of all goods.

God is for us. No one can be against us.

And this favor is more than just protection, too. The second question Paul asks makes this clear. "Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" "Who is to condemn?" he adds.

This question brings us back to earlier chapters of the book, where the case for the condemnation of humanity was made. The first chapters of the book tell in vivid terms how the world is in a sad state because of the great sins people commit. The seventh chapter then adds that even Christians still struggle with their sin.

Sin is to be condemned. We know this. People know this quite naturally, in fact. Think about how we love to condemn the sin of others. We see this when we read the headlines of the news each day. And people particularly love to condemn the sin of a Christian, where the label of "hypocrite" gets to be thrown on too.

The Devil himself is the ultimate condemner of sin. He seeks to accuse us every chance he gets.

In this face of our condemnation, Paul reminds us that we have a God who justifies. Paul has explained the great doctrine of justification to us already, so we know this is a powerful word of forgiveness and salvation. Here he draws out its meaning by reminding us that Jesus took our condemnation on himself. "Christ Jesus is the one who died," he says. We recall, too, that Paul had begun this chapter by saying: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Paul then has one more question to ask: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" And of all the questions asked here by Paul, perhaps this is the one which speaks to us most directly right now.

These days, the pandemic has us separated from one another in very definite ways. We are separated from the full gathering of believers at the church. We are separated from the conversation and the singing, and from the hugs, handshakes and touches of blessing. Most tragically, many of us are still separated from the sacrament.

We're doing our best to stay connected. We're utilizing the internet, the phone and the mail. We're making videos. We're trying some new things. But the separation is still there.

And yet, despite our separation from one another, we know that "nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Nothing. And here Paul is at his most poetic, because the Spirit knows how much we need the love of God.

"In all these things," he says, "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Beautiful. Powerful. Comforting beyond measure. What more needs to be said?

Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let us then go forward with this love in our hearts, trusting that God is working his good among us. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #574 Before the Throne of God Above



1 Be - fore the throne of God a - bove I have a
2 My name is grav - en on His hands, My name is
3 When Sa - tan tempts me to de - spair, And tells me
4 Be - cause the sin - less Sav - ior died, My sin - ful



strong, a per - fect plea: A great High Priest, whose name is
writ - ten on His heart; I know that while in heav'n He
of the guilt with - in, Up - ward I look, and see Him
soul is count - ed free; For God, the just, is sat - is -



Love, Who ev - er lives and pleads for me.
stands No tongue can bid me thence de - part.
there Who made an end of all my sin.
fied To look on Him and par - don me.

- 5 Behold Him there! The risen Lamb!
My perfect, spotless righteousness,
The great unchangeable I AM,
The King of glory and of grace!**
- 6 At one with Him, I cannot die,
My soul is purchased by His blood;
My life is hid with Christ on high,
With Christ, my Savior and my God.**

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 Before the Throne of God Above Setting: Paul D. Weber

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

O Lord, we are Your people, chosen by Your grace to be Your own possession and granted mercy upon mercy. Hear Your people who cry to You in need and remember us according to the favor You have shown to us in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Brief silence

That the Lord may open our hearts to prayer and guide us in this holy conversation so that we may know those things for which we ought to pray and seek them according to His grace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That God's people may recognize the true treasure of the cross and rejoice in the resurrection, pursuing with all their hearts, minds, bodies and souls the things of His kingdom, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That we may remember our Baptism into Christ and faithfully live our vocation as God's children within our families, in our neighborhoods and in our community, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Church may be faithful and bold in its witness, the good news of Jesus Christ go forth unhindered, and the Spirit bring many into the fellowship of the redeemed, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord may bless our nation and those who govern us, and that we may use the gift of freedom to live holy, upright and responsible lives, to the praise of His glory and the care of all, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord may bless all lawful occupations and professions, provide employment for those who need work, and that we may pursue honesty and virtue in all things, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the sick may be healed, the troubled granted peace, the grieving comforted and the dying kept in peace, *[and especially do we pray for _____,]* let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord may grant us generous hearts so that we may honor Him with the worship of our hearts and bring to Him the tithes and offerings that support His work, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

That the Lord may watch over our comings and goings and deliver us safely into the arms of His mercy, in the blessed rest of the faithful, to receive with all the dead in Christ the gift of life everlasting, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

Holy God, mighty Lord, endless is Your mercy and eternal Your reign. Hear the prayers of Your people who cry to You in their need and who plead to You in the name of 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 #818 In Thee Is Gladness

**1 In Thee is gladness
Amid all sadness,
Jesus, sunshine of my heart.
By Thee are given
The gifts of heaven,
Thou the true Redeemer art.
Our souls Thou wakest,
Our bonds Thou breakest;
Who trusts Thee surely
Has built securely;
He stands forever: Alleluia!
Our hearts are pining
To see Thy shining,
Dying or living
To Thee are cleaving;
Naught can us sever: Alleluia!**

**2 Since He is ours,
We fear no powers,
Not of earth nor sin nor death.
He sees and blesses
In worst distresses;
He can change them with a breath.
Wherefore the story
Tell of His glory
With hearts and voices;
All heav'n rejoices
In Him forever: Alleluia!
We shout for gladness,
Triumph o'er sadness,
Love Him and praise Him
And still shall raise Him
Glad hymns forever: Alleluia!**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

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

POSTLUDE *In Thee Is Gladness* Setting: Jon D. Vieker

Acknowledgments

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