

THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

August 23, 2020

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

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



*PRELUDE*    *How Wide the Love of Christ*    Setting: David Maxwell

*WELCOME*

*ENTRANCE HYMN*    #535    *How Wide the Love of Christ*

- 1**    **How wide the love of Christ!**  
      **It knows not class or race**  
      **But holds our one humanity**  
      **Within its broad embrace.**
  
- 2**    **How long the love of Christ!**  
      **Its patience will not cease**  
      **Until this broken world is bound**  
      **In everlasting peace.**
  
- 3**    **How high the love of Christ!**  
      **Beyond all thought it soars,**  
      **And yet upon our passing lives**  
      **Unmeasured mercy pours.**
  
- 4**    **How deep the love of Christ,**  
      **Descending to a cross!**  
      **He bears within His wounded hands**  
      **All human pain and loss.**
  
- 5**    **All praise to You, O Christ,**  
      **For love whose depth and height,**  
      **Whose length and breadth fill time and space**  
      **With endless life and light!**

*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 God,

**whom to know is everlasting life, grant us to know Your Son, Jesus, to be the way, the truth, and the life that we may boldly confess Him to be the Christ and steadfastly walk in the way that leads to life eternal; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.**



*FIRST LESSON* Isaiah 51:1-6

“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,  
you who seek the LORD:  
look to the rock from which you were hewn,  
and to the quarry from which you were dug.  
Look to Abraham your father  
and to Sarah who bore you;  
for he was but one when I called him,  
that I might bless him and multiply him.  
For the LORD comforts Zion;  
he comforts all her waste places  
and makes her wilderness like Eden,  
her desert like the garden of the LORD;  
joy and gladness will be found in her,  
thanksgiving and the voice of song.  
“Give attention to me, my people,  
and give ear to me, my nation;  
for a law will go out from me,  
and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples.  
My righteousness draws near,  
my salvation has gone out,  
and my arms will judge the peoples;  
the coastlands hope for me,  
and for my arm they wait.  
Lift up your eyes to the heavens,  
and look at the earth beneath;  
for the heavens vanish like smoke,  
the earth will wear out like a garment,  
and they who dwell in it will die in like manner;  
but my salvation will be forever,  
and my righteousness will never be dismayed.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*PSALM 138*

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart;  
before the gods I sing your praise;  
I bow down toward your holy temple  
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness,  
for you have exalted above all things  
your name and your word.  
On the day I called, you answered me;  
my strength of soul you increased.  
All the kings of the earth shall give you thanks, O LORD,  
for they have heard the words of your mouth,

and they shall sing of the ways of the LORD,  
for great is the glory of the LORD.  
For though the LORD is high, he regards the lowly,  
but the haughty he knows from afar.  
Though I walk in the midst of trouble,  
you preserve my life;  
you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies,  
and your right hand delivers me.  
The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me;  
your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever.  
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

**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 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

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 11:33—12:8

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?”

“Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?”

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Praise to You, O Christ**

### *SERMON*

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

Our Romans text today begins with the concluding verses of chapter 11. These verses are commonly labeled a Doxology, which is an expression of praise addressed to God. Many of our hymns end with a doxological stanza. Some hymns are all doxology – like that great hymn “Praise God from whom all blessings flow,” also known to us as the Common Doxology.

God is worthy of praise for many reasons. Paul’s verses here at the end of Romans 11 praise him for his wisdom. Specifically, they praise God for having a wisdom that is greater than ours.

This wisdom of God informs his judgments. It also informs his ways. Knowing this, we should refrain from questioning his judgments or ways. This doxology reminds us that God knows best.

These verses are also very beautiful in their poetry. And part of the beauty comes from how they draw from so many Old Testament verses, including Deuteronomy 29:29, Isaiah 40:13 and several verses in both the Psalms and the book of Job.

The beauty of this doxology from Romans has helped inspire the praise of others. The hymn “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” seems particularly based upon it – both in form and in subject matter. You’ll get a chance to think about that yourself when we sing it later as our Hymn of the Day.

As we think about this doxology, we ought to consider its context. What was it that caused Paul to express his praise in such a way?

We recall that the previous verses – in fact, the previous three chapters – were devoted to the struggle of understanding why some who were called to be God’s children rejected what he had done in sending the Christ. Paul had many things to say on this subject. We won’t review them here, except to note that he doesn’t really give a definite answer to the question. And while this might bother us, Paul is okay with it - since the answer is something only God can truly know. “How unsearchable are God’s judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” says Paul. Who are we to think we need to know?

These verses of doxology, then, serve as a very fitting conclusion to chapters 9 -11. But they also serve as introduction to the next chapter as well. As Paul's letter continues, he next proceeds to a section of addressing the Christian life as it is lived out under God's mercy and grace. The doxology serves as prelude and preparation. God's ways may be mysterious and unknowable, but they are also good. And because they are good, we live our lives under this goodness. Notice Paul begins the next chapter with the word "therefore." Everything he will next say flows out of God's grace.

Paul begins the chapter with an appeal: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Paul connects this appeal to the worship of God. Our living is to flow from our praise and be an act of worship itself.

And note, too, how Paul makes the appeal using language of the Old Testament faith. He asks the people to present themselves as a "living sacrifice." Under the old Law, the sacrifices of the people were

central. These sacrifices were often animals, sacrificed quite literally upon an altar. Paul's words highlight the contrast between this and Christian worship. The sacrifices of God's people, now, are to be good works and honorable living. The blood-sacrifices previously expected by God have been fulfilled through the sacrifice of Jesus when he died on the cross.

As Paul describes how we are to present ourselves as a sacrifice, he says: "Do not be conformed to this world." Christians are not to blend in with what's around them. The ways of the world are selfish and godless, geared only toward survival and pleasure in this world, with no thought toward the world to come. That was true in Paul's day. And it's true in ours.

We're not to be conformed. Instead, we're to be transformed. The shared root word in the English translation makes for an especially notable contrast. The original Greek isn't quite as poetic, but the thought is the same. Instead of the world changing you... be changed by God. Be changed by the renewing of your mind. Let your thoughts be made holy as you are taught by God's Word and taught by God's Spirit – which is done as you discern God's will through the testing he allows.

We mentioned the way of the world as being selfish – as a looking out for number one. Paul speaks to the root of this problem when he tells a person: "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has given." The Christian life will always be lived with humility.

And then Paul shows us what this focus on others should look like. As he does with the Corinthians and the Ephesians, Paul speaks of the gathered community of believers as a body. "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."

Our transformation has given us a new outlook. We do not look only at our own needs, but also the needs of others. We do this because of our humility. But also because of necessity. We need each other. We stand stronger when we stand together. We live better when we live together. There are some things I can't do that you can. There are other things I can do that you can't.

And then Paul goes on to talk about the gifts which are present in our gathered community. "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us," he says, "let us use them."

Paul lists seven gifts here. He's not giving us an exhaustive list. Rather, this is a list given to serve as a sampling; to make us think.

And the wording of this list is given in a way that focuses less on our talent and more on the simple act of doing the work itself. Some may indeed be gifted in an area – such as prophecy and serving. But the greater emphasis here is on the task and the calling: “The one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation,” etc. The message is: when you do these things as a selfless act of service, done in faith, you will give a gift to others - no matter how gifted you are at doing them.

As we said, the list is meant to spark our thinking. So, what is it for you? What are the tasks and callings through which you can gift others?

You may spend your working hours caring for children. That is a gift to both children and parents. Or you may crunch numbers on a computer screen to help your company. That is a gift for those who benefit from your company's work. You may help to protect others. You may help to teach others. You may help

to provide statistics or research or better communications or better tools. You may care primarily for your family. There are myriad numbers of ways you can help others through your work. At any age. In any situation.

What's important is that we see our work as a way to be a gift to others and that we use what God has given us to be of service. “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them,” says Paul.

In these days of the pandemic, many of us are having to re-think how we use our gifts for work. Jobs have changed. People's needs have changed. Most significantly, how we operate has changed. We're more reliant than ever before on technology. We're always having to assess if what we're doing carries too much risk or is done in an unsafe manner. We're concerned more than ever about the public shaming and blaming that comes out so forcefully in these days of heightened fears.

As you consider the ways in which you use your gifts to help others, I encourage you to spend extra time in prayer and the hearing of God's Word. These gifts of God will focus you and ground you. They will be the voice of guidance, encouragement and sanity that you need.

God has given us individual talents, yes. And God had given us individual callings, vocations and areas of responsibility, yes. But most importantly, God has given us the gifts of the Spirit. To each of us he has given the gift of faith, and the gift of a renewed mind, and the gift of peace in knowing that our sins are forgiven, and the gift of his indwelling presence.

In Paul's great doxology at the end of chapter 11, he asks in relation to God: “who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?” God had made that same point himself in his great speech to Job at the end of that book. God doesn't need us to do anything for him. He doesn't need our gifts. And none of us has done anything so wonderful that God would owe us.

And yet, our neighbor needs our gifts. And we need the gifts of our neighbor. We need gifts given according to the ways of God. Holy gifts. Holy examples. Holy words. Holy actions.

And when we give these gifts to one another, we are also giving God our worship and praise. God may not need that, but it is pleasing to him. And beneficial to us.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

May this be so among us. In the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen.

*HYMN OF THE DAY #802 Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*

- 1 Immortal, invisible,  
God only wise,  
In light inaccessible  
hid from our eyes,  
Most blessèd, most glorious,  
the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious,  
Thy great name we praise.**
- 2 Unresting, unhasting,  
and silent as light,  
Nor wanting, nor wasting,  
Thou rulest in might;  
Thy justice like mountains  
high soaring above  
Thy clouds which are fountains  
of goodness and love.**
- 3 To all life Thou givest—  
to both great and small—  
In all life Thou livest,  
the true Life of all;  
We blossom and flourish  
as leaves on the tree  
And wither and perish—  
but naught changes Thee.**
- 4 Great Father of glory,  
pure Father of light,  
Thine angels adore Thee,  
all veiling their sight;  
All laud we would render:  
O help us to see  
'Tis only the splendor  
of light that hides 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.**

*OFFERING*    *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*    Setting: Stephen P. Johnson

*PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH*

Having heard the Word proclaimed, let us pray for ourselves, for all the faithful and for all people as they have need.

*Brief silence*

For all people, that they may have faith in Christ and heed the voice of God calling by His Word;

For the Church, that the people of God may pursue righteousness with peace and joy in their hearts;  
and

For all pastors and their ministry of Word and Sacrament and for all vocations to the ministry, that the lives of God's people may redound to His praise and glory, let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

For our president, Congress, governor and all civic leaders in their pursuit of peace and unity;

For all judges and magistrates in their pursuit of justice with mercy; and

For those who protect us from violence and preserve order here and everywhere, let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

For all noble professions, and for the flourishing of the arts and music;

For favorable weather and the fruits of the earth; and

For those unemployed, the poor, the homeless, the hungry and all people in need, let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

For all families and children, single adults and youth;

For those who teach and those who learn, that they may advance in wisdom and grace; and

For the catechumens and those who teach the faith to them, let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

For victims of disaster and for those stricken by illness or infirmity;

For the aged and infirm, as well as those in nursing homes and assisted living facilities;

For those who grieve the loss of those whom they love; and

For those who meet with sudden death, [*and especially for those who have requested our prayers*  
\_\_\_\_\_], let us pray to the Lord:

**Lord, have mercy.**

For the work of God's kingdom in this place;  
For our faithful support of the Church and the renewal of our parish life through the Means of Grace;  
For our communion this day upon the life-giving body and blood of Christ; and  
For our growth in grace, that we may attain to the full stature of Christ, let us pray to the Lord:  
**Lord, have mercy.**

Be merciful to us, O Lord, and hear our prayers. Grant to us the grace of Your Holy Spirit, that we may be led into all truth and be steadfast in the confession of Christ; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever.

**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 #646 Church of God, Elect and Glorious*

**1 Church of God, elect and glorious,  
Holy nation, chosen race;  
Called as God's own special people,  
Royal priests and heirs of grace:  
Know the purpose of your calling,  
Show to all His mighty deeds;  
Tell of love that knows no limits,  
Grace that meets all human needs.**

- 2 God has called you out of darkness  
Into His most marv'lous light;  
Brought His truth to life within you,  
Turned your blindness into sight.  
Let your light so shine around you  
That God's name is glorified  
And all find fresh hope and purpose  
In Christ Jesus crucified.
- 3 Once you were an alien people,  
Strangers to God's heart of love;  
But He brought you home in mercy,  
Citizens of heav'n above.  
Let His love flow out to others,  
Let them feel a Father's care;  
That they too may know His welcome  
And His countless blessings share.
- 4 Church of God, elect and holy,  
Be the people He intends;  
Strong in faith and swift to answer  
Each command your Master sends:  
Royal priests, fulfill your calling  
Through your sacrifice and prayer;  
Give your lives in joyful service—  
Sing His praise, His love declare.

*ANNOUNCEMENTS*

*DISMISSAL*

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*POSTLUDE Trumpet Tune* by Henry Purcell

Altar Flowers: "In loving memory of Albert Stephen Zambone." By Jennifer Z.

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