

THE FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
SEPTEMBER 6, 2020

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

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling* Setting: Nancy Raabe

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #700 *Love Divine, All Loves 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,

from whom all good proceeds, grant to us, Your humble servants, Your holy inspiration, that we may set our minds on the things that are right and, by Your merciful guiding, accomplish them; 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 Ezekiel 33:7–9

“So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 32:1-7

Blessèd is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

Blessèd is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

**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 18:15–20

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”

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 13:1–10

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

Romans 13:1-10. Also: Matthew 18:1-20, Ezekiel 33:7-9, Psalm 32:1-7

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

Today, in our sermon series on Romans, we have gotten to chapter 13. The infamous chapter 13!

In the early 1990's, the common lectionary that most Christians use as their schedule of readings was revised. In that revision, the early verses of chapter 13 – the ones on government authority that we just read – were dropped. I guess it was too controversial. But we still read them in our Synod. Two years ago, the acting Attorney General of the United States referred to the verses in his explanation of a policy position. He was roundly rebuffed for doing so – by some who felt his application of the words was off, and by others who felt this scripture had no place in our national dialogue.

It is not difficult to understand the controversy surrounding these words of the scripture. The scripture calls us to obey our government because that government was given its authority by God and instituted by him. The words sound fine and good if the government is acting justly. But what if it isn't? What then?

Some have suggested that this teaching of the scripture, more than any other, is responsible for the fracturing of Biblical authority in our day. Not only do people not like being told they need to obey, but they get very angry at anything that is seen as a tool of oppression. And that's what many people see these verses as being. They think the verses give a government license to do what it pleases, and that it tells those being dominated they must put up with it.

But that's not what these verses say. These verses point to the government's duty to maintain order by punishing wrongdoing. The verses flow very naturally out of Paul's teaching in the last chapter, where he encourages people to live ethically and where he says that we are not to seek our own vengeance when we have been wronged but are to submit to God's justice. God's justice, as stated in chapter 13, is often carried out through governing authorities – those whom God has allowed to achieve that authority.

Yes, throughout history there have been plenty of governments – and people in government – who have abused their power. Power tends to corrupt. But it doesn't always.

And even when a government or a leader is corrupt, God sees it. And will deal with it.

We are called to be subject to the governing authorities. To accept its authority for the sake of peace.

That being said, we can certainly point out corruption, and protest it, and work against it too. But we need to be very careful in speaking out against our leaders. Are we really protesting corruption, or just policies we don't like? Do we really have the full picture of what is needed, or is our scope limited? Are we really promoting things that serve as a help to all, or just for ourselves – or our friends?

"God is not on the side of the oppressor, he's on the side of the oppressed," goes the refrain. That is true. And if God is on someone's side, they will be taken care of. We, on the other hand, need to be very careful in taking sides. Not all claims of oppression are valid. Not all wrongs can be righted by us.

But back to Romans 13. Some people say these words from Paul come out of left field, or that maybe he was just trying to curry favor with the government of his day. Paul did indeed receive some benefit as a Roman citizen. Then again, the authorities were not always on his side. Think of all the time he spent in prison.

But the teachings of Romans 13 are not just Paul's. Jesus, we recall, also taught us to respect governing authorities – by paying our taxes, "rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's." And Peter, in

his first epistle, includes a very substantive paragraph on submitting to our leaders – one that is quite similar to Paul’s.

The Old Testament, too, taught the people to honor and follow their leaders, whether these be the patriarchs, Moses, the judges or the kings. Think of the honor given to the kings in the Psalms. Honor was to be given because the king was God’s anointed. And God had placed not only Israel’s kings but all leaders in their positions. In Daniel 2:21 the prophet blesses God by saying of him: “He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding.” In Isaiah 45 God speaks to Cyrus, the Persian king, explaining that he has given him the authority to do what he is doing.

Our Old Testament reading today, from Ezekiel 33, records God telling Ezekiel to prophesy against the wickedness of his people. He’s to speak up and not keep quiet. As a prophet, that’s his part in maintaining order and good. Our reading from this chapter commenced with verse seven. But if we were to start at the beginning of the chapter, we would hear God speak of the possibility that he might “bring the sword upon a land.” God can use leaders and their armies to accomplish his purposes.

At the same time, God often sent prophets like Ezekiel and others to condemn a king’s actions. In fact, there are probably more verses in scripture which point out the evils of Israel’s kings than speak about those that were good. Prophets were to call out what was wrong.

We recall, too, that there is certain content in Paul’s letters that could be considered critical or even subversive in its messaging about Rome. For example, Paul was clear that Jesus was Lord, not Caesar. What we don’t hear in the scriptures is the urging of the people to rebel. God is the one who breaks the yokes of oppression. He will find the means for accomplishing his purposes.

Remember when King Saul was trying to kill young David? Saul had turned from a good king to a bad one and the prophet had already anointed David as the next king. But David waited for the Lord’s timing. Once, David even had a perfect opportunity to kill Saul discretely and claim the throne. But he didn’t.

“Vengeance is mine,” says the Lord. God first said this in the Old Testament. Last week we heard it repeated by Paul in Romans 12. Paul’s teachings on government authority come out of this thinking.

Paul knows how important it is that there be order and justice in the world. Otherwise there is chaos.

As we know, order and justice will never be achieved perfectly. But they should be actively pursued. God has given his law as a means for achieving these. The Law does this as it promotes personal responsibility and ethics, establishes lines of authority, and gives direction to show mercy too.

The fourth commandment is one of those teachings that speaks to the establishment of authority – commanding us to “honor thy father and mother.” And while the commandment may speak primarily to the dynamics of the home, Paul shows, in his letter to the Ephesians, that the commandment pertains also to other relationships where authority is needed. And Luther clearly reflected this wider understanding of the commandment in his catechism, urging us to “not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honor them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them.”

Lutherans have looked at these teachings of Paul in this chapter, as well as the entirety of scripture, and concluded that they tell of two kingdoms – two ways in which God is at work in the world. Luther called these the kingdom of the right hand and the kingdom of the left hand. The right hand is the

church. This is the means whereby God proclaims salvation, gathering for himself a people who share his message of salvation with the world. The left hand is the state. The state embodies God's gift of civil authority. One looks to this authority not for a proclamation of the gospel but for an enactment of God's good rule in the world.

This teaching on two kingdoms reminds us that Christianity can live under any government. Christians don't have to have it their way when it comes to politics. This teaching also allows us to do work in places where Christianity might seem like a threat – places like China.

And, this teaching has led Lutherans, in general, to have a high regard for the authority of government. Luther himself famously sided with the princes and those in authority in their efforts to put down a rebellion by the peasants in his day. About that, some say that Luther was heavy-handed in his support, and perhaps a case could be made for this. But it's easy for us to look back and criticize. Luther saw it as a very clear distinction between order and chaos.

Making choices about maintaining order and showing mercy is never easy. It's difficult enough to do this when there are two parents and one child. It's infinitely more difficult when there are millions of citizens in a nation.

Paul grew up witnessing his fellow Jews in a great debate about these very things. The Jews generally saw it as a horrible thing that they lived under pagan, Roman rule. But they reacted to it in different ways. The coolly realistic Sadducees made their peace with it; the Pharisees submitted to it in resignation as a judgment of God upon his people; the Zealots rejected it as intolerable and passionately rebelled. We know what happened when the people chose rebellion. The rebellion was crushed.

So also in our day, Christian people debate among themselves how to best respond when government authority is lacking, misguided or unjust. Do we patiently endure? Or assertively protest?

The cynical view says that those who are quiet are the ones benefitting from the government while the ones who protest are those who don't. That's true to a degree. But only part of the story.

There is one additional teaching of Christianity that plays into this. According to our scriptures, Christians are also called to endure persecution and suffering. We don't believe that there will ever be heaven on earth. We know that a certain amount of pain will come to us – not only via natural means but also from our enemies. And in the face of this, we have a calling to live with contentment.

Again, this doesn't mean we can't protest the injustices we see. But our motives must be pure. And our means should be peaceful. And when we do protest, we must assess whether our words actually help or whether they simply promote more unrest.

History has shown that much can be accomplished through non-violent means of protest. Today, it seems many have given up on this means. We see instead daily choices of war and assassination, verbal abuse, property damage, half-truths and outright lying. People seem to believe that the end justifies the means. And in an increasingly godless society, people feel they must take matters into their own hands.

As Christians, we can be active in the political process. But we must do so carefully and with integrity. And we must do this as individuals – leaving the gathered church to be a place of peace and Gospel proclamation.

As I've said many times before, I believe Christians today have an important calling to be peacemakers in a world of increasing anger. A look around our world shows that people are more and more seeking their significance in advocating some form of change, not being content. And in this great communications age, they have more and more opportunity to have their voices heard. The desire to be a soldier in a fight or a leader in a cause is greater than ever. And there are many who are eager to recruit you to their side.

When Paul concludes his short section on government authority, notice that he follows it up with more teaching about love. "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." Even more than order and authority, Paul knows that we need love. And he knows that love will help to bring order and good authority too.

Yes, even in our loving of one another there will be different thoughts on how to best do this. But when we are connected to the love of God, and recall how he showed his great love for us in giving his Son, we will be given a maturity and wisdom to our love that will guide us in our choices and lead us in truly being a blessing to others.

May that love from God, then, be strong within you, according to the will and promise of Christ. And may you be wise in your exercise of love toward others, especially as you consider your submission to the governing authorities. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #558 Not unto Us

- 1 Not unto us, not unto us be glory, Lord;
Not unto us but to Your name be praise;
Not unto us but to Your name all honor be giv'n
For matchless mercy, forgiveness, and grace.**
- 2 Amazing grace—that chose us ere the worlds were made;
Amazing grace—that sent Your Son to save;
Amazing grace—that robed us in Your righteousness
And taught our lips to sing glory and praise.**
- 3 O faithful love—that shepherded through faithless years;
Forgiving love—that led us to Your truth;
Unyielding love—that would not let us turn from You
But sent us forth to speak pardon and peace.**
- 4 Not unto us but to Your name be glory, Lord,
For grace so rich, so wide, so high, so free.
Abide with us till trav'ling days are over and done,
And pilgrim feet lead us home, Lord, to You.**

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 *Not Unto Us* Setting: William Braun

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Blessed Lord, You have promised that where two or three are gathered in Your name, You are in the midst of them. Hear the prayers of Your people, and grant our supplications.

Brief silence

O Lord, grant to Your people courage, that with boldness we may speak Your name in witness and warn sinners so that they may come to faith and repentance and so enjoy the forgiveness of their sins. Give Your Church wisdom and strength by Your Spirit, that she may be steadfast and unmovable in Your Word and truth. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

O Lord, be present among Your people to serve us with the gifts of Your grace, and grant that we may receive them with joy. Give to us faithful pastors and church workers who will minister to us in Your name and strengthen our faith and life together as Your baptized people. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

O Lord, give to us good and honest leaders who will govern according to Your Word and will. Give us grace, that we may not fail to pray for those who lead us and to act as good citizens and good neighbors to one another. Give peace to the nations, and bring an end to violence, prejudice and racism. Guide us to know and respect all life, from the infant in the womb to the youth beginning maturity, and from the mature to the aged. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

O Lord, You send rain upon the earth and turn the seeds into plants rich with fruit for harvest. Accept our thanks and praise for Your continued goodness in providing a good harvest and food for all. Give us wisdom so that we may use Your resources wisely and extend Your care to those in need. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

O Lord, You urge us to give special care and guidance to the young and those new to the faith. Give us grace, that we may not lead them into temptation or sin but guard their faith by making known to them the full counsel of Your Word. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Hear us on behalf of _____, that they may be sustained in their afflictions, comforted in life and death, and delivered to everlasting life. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

O Lord, You have given the day for work and the night for rest. Bless all honest labor and industry, artists and artisans, and those in caring professions. Keep us in humility, and guard us against pride and arrogance. Give to us a spirit of generosity, that we may share with others the blessings that flow from our labors. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

O Lord, deliver us from pandemic and pestilence, from disaster and danger, and from a sudden death, that kept in faith, we may be preserved through this mortal life and in death be received into the arms of Your mercy and into the blessed rest of everlasting life. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Hear us, O Lord, who cry to You in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, whom with the Spirit, You are one God and one Lord, 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 #814 O Bless the Lord, My Soul

- 1 O bless the Lord, my soul!
Let all within me join
And aid my tongue to bless His name
Whose favors are divine.**

- 2 O bless the Lord, my soul,
Nor let His mercies lie
Forgotten in unthankfulness
And without praises die!**

- 3 'Tis He forgives thy sins;
'Tis He relieves thy pain;
'Tis He that heals thy sicknesses
And makes thee young again.
- 4 He crowns thy life with love
When ransomed from the grave;
He that redeemed my soul from hell
Hath sov'reign pow'r to save.
- 5 He fills the poor with good;
He gives the suff'ers rest.
The Lord hath judgments for the proud
And justice for th'oppressed.
- 6 His wondrous works and ways
He made by Moses known,
But sent the world His truth and grace
By His belovèd Son.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE *O Bless the Lord, My Soul* Setting: Bernard Wayne Sanders

Altar Flowers: "With gratefulness and thanksgiving to God for keeping us safe these past months. In memory of Jack." By Marge G.

Acknowledgments

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