

THE SEVENTEETH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
SEPTEMBER 27, 2020

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

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *All Praise to Thee, for Thou, O King Divine* Setting: Robert B. Farlee

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #815 *All Praise to Thee, for Thou, O King Divine*

- 1 All praise to Thee, for Thou, O King divine,
Didst yield the glory that of right was Thine,
That in our darkened hearts Thy grace might shine.
Alleluia!
- 2 Thou cam'st to us in lowliness of thought;
By Thee the outcast and the poor were sought;
And by Thy death was God's salvation wrought.
Alleluia!
- 3 Let this mind be in us which was in Thee,
Who wast a servant that we might be free,
Humbling Thyself to death on Calvary.
Alleluia!
- 4 Wherefore, by God's eternal purpose, Thou
Art high exalted o'er all creatures now,
And giv'n the name to which all knees shall bow.
Alleluia!
- 5 Let ev'ry tongue confess with one accord,
In heav'n and earth, that Jesus Christ is Lord,
And God the Father be by all adored.
Alleluia!

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

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

Amen.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

(Silence for reflection and self-examination)

Let us then confess our sins to God our Father.

Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy

on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

KYRIE

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

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

Amen.

GLORIA IN EXCELSIS

Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father:

We worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God:

You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

You are seated at the right hand of the Father; receive our prayer.

For You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord,

You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,

in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Almighty God,

You exalted Your Son to the place of all honor and authority. Enlighten our minds by Your Holy Spirit that, confessing Jesus as Lord, we may be led into all truth; 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 Ezekiel 18:1–4, 25–32

The word of the LORD came to me: “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live,

declares the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die. . . .

“Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just? When a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice, he shall die for it; for the injustice that he has done he shall die. Again, when a wicked person turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he shall save his life. Because he considered and turned away from all the transgressions that he had committed, he shall surely live; he shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?

“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.”

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 25:1–10

To you, O LORD,

I lift up my soul.

O my God, in you I trust;

let me not be put to shame;

let not my enemies exult over me.

Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;

they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Make me to know your ways, O LORD;

teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth and teach me,

for you are the God of my salvation;

for you I wait all the day long.

Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,

for they have been from of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;

according to your steadfast love remember me,

for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!

Good and upright is the LORD;

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

He leads the humble in what is right,

and teaches the humble his way.

All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,

for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.

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 Philippians 2:1–4, 14–18

If there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL Matthew 21:23–32

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 21st chapter.

Glory to You, O Lord.

When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus answered them, "I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?" And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

SERMON

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

As we continue our reading of Matthew's Gospel account of the life of Jesus, we should note that today's text finds Jesus in a new setting. Up until this point Jesus has been teaching and ministering in Galilee and the surrounding regions. But now Jesus has gone to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration.

And we recall that when Jesus entered Jerusalem, he did so to much fanfare. The people cheered his arrival by waving palm branches and throwing their cloaks on the road and shouting acclamations of joy. The people knew that he had done great things among them and they believed that he might possibly be the promised Messiah.

Upon entering the city Jesus went immediately to the Temple, and there he cleansed it – driving out the salespeople and turning over the tables of the moneychangers. He reminded the people that God had said in the Scripture: "my house shall be a house of prayer."

Our text today picks up the story as Jesus returns to the Temple the next morning. Not surprisingly, the religious leaders are there waiting for him with a question. They want to know from where he claims to get his authority. And for emphasis, they ask him twice.

The question of Jesus' authority was not new. When Jesus had given his so-called Sermon on the Mount, the people had marveled at his teaching for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes (Mt. 7:29).

And then, a little after this, Jesus healed a man who was paralyzed by saying: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—rise, pick up your bed and go home." When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, "who had given such authority to men" (Mt. 9:6,8).

Jesus' authority came directly from God. It did not derive from having studied under a certain Rabbi or belonging to a particular association of men. Jesus had authority because not only was he from God, but he was God – God made flesh to dwell among his people. Jesus had supreme authority, and that authority was seen in his miracles and expressed in his goodness.

But Jesus was not yet ready to publicly claim the source of his authority. His time had not yet fully come. He therefore throws the question about authority back on the religious leaders, asking them a question about John the Baptist. His question is similar to the one they have asked him. Did John's baptism come from God or from men?

Jesus knows the leaders are afraid to answer the question. And by posing it he successfully puts them off for the time being so that he can continue to teach.

But the question of his authority was still there. And that question remains even today.

This account in the life of Jesus was not included in the scriptures to simply show that Jesus was clever and knew how to side-step an issue if he needed to. Rather, it was included so that people would be confronted by the question of his authority.

We have already noted that there is an answer to the question the religious leaders asked that day. Jesus' authority comes from God – because Jesus is sent by God and, ultimately, is God. That is the Christian confession. That is what we believe.

But this belief is not accepted by all. Some think it quite untrue. What about you?

There is a part of us that doesn't want to give an answer to the question. We'd rather side-step it or delay it, as Jesus did in the text. We might think we need more information, or we might not like closing ourselves off to other possibilities, or we might be leery of assigning such authority to one voice.

But the question demands an answer. We recall that back in chapter 16, Jesus asked the question of his disciples, saying: "Who do you say that the Son of Man is?" When Peter spoke up and said: "you are the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus commended him for his confession.

The question about Jesus demands an answer because there are important issues at stake.

There is the issue of whether one believes that God chooses to reveal himself – and whether he does so in detail. Jesus came to make God known in a clear and thorough way. Through the many teachings and actions of Jesus we learn critical things about God – including his justice, his goodness and his power.

And there is the issue of whether one believes that God forgives sins. In the teachings of Jesus, and, even more, in his death, we have a certain word that God does indeed forgive us. He forgives us because of the perfect sacrifice for sins which Jesus offered when he went to the cross. This sacrifice guarantees that all who come to him in repentance and faith will receive God's forgiveness.

And there is the issue of whether one believes that God is the authority we need for life. We like to believe that we don't need an authority – that we are completely free and a servant of no one. But Jesus shows us the blessings which come when we submit to the will of the Father. His obedience, even unto death, resulted in life for all.

We need God as our authority. Think about this. If we submit to no authority but our own, we have no common authority with others and our lives will consist of constant struggle with them.

We might think that submitting to certain human authorities – such as our government or the company we work for – would be sufficient for us. But these authorities are imperfect and vulnerable to greed and corruption. Moreover, these authorities end up just grouping together allies for more struggle. They don't give the universal outlook that God does. They don't tell us that all human life is sacred.

When we don't place ourselves under the authority of God – fearing him, to use the Biblical language – then we end up placing ourselves under other authorities – ones that cannot deliver as God does.

Last Sunday I began teaching our new confirmation class. As we got into the First Commandment, I noticed that the new edition of our catechism has an interesting list of alternatives to God's authority – ones that people often choose instead. The First Commandment, we recall, says we shall have no other gods. And Luther says this means we should fear, love and trust in God above all things. To expand on this teaching, the new notes explain that we are to look to God first and foremost for our well-being,

rather than to a) human achievements, such as intellect, technology or medical advances, b) human goodness or religious devotion, c) money and possessions, d) pleasures such as food, drink, sex, sports or entertainment, and e) family and friends.

The items in this list are all good gifts of God, but they are not to be God's replacement. We are to make God the ultimate authority in our life – trusting in his word, following his will, and offering him our praise.

When we first got into our examination of today's text, I implied that Jesus kind of side-stepped the question of the religious leaders. However, it would be more accurate to say that Jesus addressed the question in one of his usual beguiling ways – by telling a parable. Actually, by telling three parables.

We read the first parable as part of our text today. The parable tells of a man who had two sons – both of whom he orders to go and work in the vineyard. The first son replies by saying “no,” but later changes his mind and starts working. The second son replies by saying “yes,” but doesn't go. And that's where the parable ends. It's very short.

With the parable concluded, Jesus then asks those who questioned him: “Which son did the will of his father?” The answer is clear: the second one – the one who ultimately obeyed.

Jesus then interprets the parable, and his interpretation is very critical of his questioners. He tells them that the tax collectors and the prostitutes would go into the kingdom of God before them. And the reason for this is that John the Baptist came to them in the way of righteousness, but they did not believe him. They may have been saying “yes” to God with their prayers and religious manner, but when called to believe God's prophet they did not obey.

The tax collectors and the prostitutes, however, did believe him. They whose lives had been a “no” up to this point, because of their sinful actions, now heard the call of the prophet and obeyed.

The parable points to what was happening in Jesus' day. And it has a point for us as well. The parable is about hearing the word of God and obeying it. It is about embracing the change of mind that is needed to receive God's grace through the belief that his promised Messiah has come.

The parable ultimately points to Jesus' authority by recalling the message of John, who proclaimed Jesus as the one who was coming after him. John had said this “one to come” would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire – doing things which only one with the authority of God could do.

The parable is also further commentary on the lesson from Jesus that we explored last week. There we heard Jesus say, “the last shall be first and the first last.” The tax collectors and prostitutes, who were last because of their sin, were now entering the kingdom of heaven first, because they heard the call of Jesus and repented. The religious ones, on the other hand, who up until this point were first in the eyes of the people, were now last because of their rejection of the new thing God was doing.

What about you?

Today's text is a call to acknowledge and heed the authority of God as given in Jesus Christ. It is a call to repent of the sin which may be holding you back. It is a call to change your mind if you do not believe that Jesus is God's chosen Christ. And it is a call to go to work in God's vineyard by sharing the good news of salvation given through Jesus Christ.

Today's text points us ahead to Jesus' last words to his disciples. There Jesus commissioned his disciples for their work to come. Since his words that day mention his authority, they fit perfectly as a conclusion for our meditation today. There Jesus said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18–20).

All authority has been given to Jesus. May we therefore acknowledge this authority, and work with him in the tasks of his kingdom. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #655 Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word

- 1 Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word;
Curb those who by deceit or sword
Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son
And bring to naught all He has done.**
- 2 Lord Jesus Christ, Your pow'r make known,
For You are Lord of lords alone;
Defend Your holy Church that we
May sing Your praise eternally.**
- 3 O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth;
Support us in our final strife
And lead us out of death to life.**

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 Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word Setting: Scott M. Hyslop

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

Make us to know Your ways, O Lord, that we may walk in the path of salvation made known in Your Word. Hear our complaints and quiet them by Your merciful deliverance, that we may respond with trust and thanksgiving. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Encourage us, O Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, that we may not lose heart but, being of one mind and one will, may serve You with gladness, doing the works of Your Kingdom and speaking Your Word of witness throughout the world. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Help us, O Lord, to hold fast to Your Word; and bless our congregation with faithfulness, good leadership and a loving spirit, so that together we may rejoice in doing your will. Guide and direct your church throughout the world, that your Word may go forward among all peoples and bring healing to the nations. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Shine Your light upon us, O Lord, that we may do what is good and right and live as faithful citizens in our nation. Bless Donald, our president; *Ralph*, our governor; and all those elected and appointed to make, administer and judge our laws. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Enlighten us with godly knowledge and wisdom, O Lord, and bless those who pursue science to improve our lives and the lives of those in greatest need. Bless all honorable vocations and all honest labor, and lead the unemployed to good jobs and noble work not only for their own interests but for the good of us all. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Show us Your compassion, O Lord, and in Your mercy grant healing, comfort and peace to all those who suffer. Deliver them from all their afflictions, pain, sorrow and fear. We especially pray for _____ and all those we name in our hearts before You. [*Brief silence*] Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Guide us, O Lord, that with all our hearts, minds, bodies and resources we may serve You. Give special blessing to the Lutheran Women's Missionary League and to the many ways they bring the good news of Your salvation and the works of Your love across our nation and world. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Help us, O Lord, to remember the faithful who loved and served You and who now rest from their labors. Bring us with them to that most blessed day when together we shall dwell in Your presence on high forevermore. Lord, in Your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Grant to us all good things needful for this body and life and profitable for our salvation, and keep from us all things harmful, that sustained in time of want and guarded in time of prosperity, we may endure to the day of our Lord's coming and be judged worthy of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, 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 #854 Forth in Thy Name, O Lord, I Go
(Alternate tune: Winchester New)

- 1 Forth in Thy name, O Lord, I go,
My daily labor to pursue,
Thee, only Thee, resolved to know
In all I think or speak or do.**
- 2 The task Thy wisdom has assigned,
O let me cheerfully fulfill;
In all my works Thy presence find,
And prove Thy good and perfect will.**
- 3 Thee may I set at my right hand,
Whose eyes my inmost substance see,
And labor on at Thy command,
And offer all my works to Thee.**
- 4 Give me to bear Thine easy yoke,
And ev'ry moment watch and pray,
And still to things eternal look,
And hasten to Thy glorious day.**
- 5 For Thee delightfully employ
Whate'er Thy bounteous grace has giv'n,
And run my course with even joy,
And closely walk with Thee to heav'n.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE Postlude on the Tune "*Winchester New*" Setting: Robert J. Powell

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