

THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
OCTOBER 4, 2020

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

SERVICE OF WORD AND PRAYER



PRELUDE *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come* Setting: Robert Lind

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN #892 *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come*

- 1** **Come, ye thankful people, come;
Raise the song of harvest home.
All be safely gathered in
Ere the winter storms begin;
God, our maker, doth provide
For our wants to be supplied.
Come to God's own temple, come;
Raise the song of harvest home.**

- 2** **All the world is God's own field,
Fruit unto His praise to yield;
Wheat and tares together sown,
Unto joy or sorrow grown.
First the blade and then the ear,
Then the full corn shall appear.
Lord of harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.**

- 3** **For the Lord, our God, shall come
And shall take His harvest home,
From His field shall in that day
All offenses purge away,
Give His angels charge at last
In the fire the tares to cast,
But the fruitful ears to store
In His garner evermore.**

- 4** **Even so, Lord, quickly come
To Thy final harvest home;
Gather Thou Thy people in,
Free from sorrow, free from sin,
There, forever purified,
In Thy garner to abide:
Come with all Thine angels, come,
Raise the glorious harvest home.**

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. Gracious God,

You gave Your Son into the hands of sinful men who killed Him. Forgive us when we reject Your unfailing love, and grant us the fullness of Your salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



FIRST LESSON Isaiah 5:1–7

Let me sing for my beloved
my love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
and he looked for it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.
And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem
and men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.
What more was there to do for my vineyard,
that I have not done in it?
When I looked for it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?
And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and briars and thorns shall grow up;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.
For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
and he looked for justice,
but behold, bloodshed;
for righteousness,
but behold, an outcry!

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 80:7-19

Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved!

You brought a vine out of Egypt;
you drove out the nations and planted it.
You cleared the ground for it;
it took deep root and filled the land.
The mountains were covered with its shade,
the mighty cedars with its branches.
It sent out its branches to the sea
and its shoots to the River.
Why then have you broken down its walls,
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?
The boar from the forest ravages it,
and all that move in the field feed on it.
Turn again, O God of hosts!
Look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine,
the stock that your right hand planted,
and for the son whom you made strong for yourself.
They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your face!
But let your hand be on the man of your right hand,
the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!
Then we shall not turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call upon your name!
Restore us, O LORD God of hosts!
Let your face shine, that we may be saved!

**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 3:4b–14*

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But

one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

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 21:33–46

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

Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] “Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.’ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord’s doing,
and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

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:

In the text just read, Jesus continues his dialogue with the religious leaders of his day. We recall that these leaders had approached Jesus and questioned his authority to do the things he was doing –

namely, his teaching, his drawing of great crowds and his symbolic “cleansing” of the temple. In response, Jesus had told them a parable – about two sons – which indirectly hinted at his authority, showing that it was seen in his ability to turn around the lives of tax collectors and prostitutes.

Now, in today’s text, he is ready to tell them more. The parable which Jesus tells here draws once again on the image of God’s people as a vineyard. His hearers would have been very familiar with this image, since the Old Testament prophets also used it. The hearers would know, from passages such as Isaiah 5 – which we read as our first reading today – that God is the owner of the vineyard and God loves his vineyard very much. They would also know that God will do what he needs to do to bring forth good fruit in his vineyard. Isaiah 5 describes God as digging it and clearing it of stones and planting it with choice vines, building a watchtower and hewing out a wine vat in it. God’s love is shown in his great efforts. God’s love is also shown in his willingness to tear it down and start over if he needs to. In Isaiah’s day, when the vineyard yielded wild grapes instead of good grapes, God told how he would remove his hedge of protection around the vineyard and let it be trampled by enemies. Jesus’ hearers knew very well that this did indeed happen – when the Assyrians conquered the northern portion of the kingdom and when the Babylonians conquered the south.

When Jesus tells his parable, then, the hearers have a very good idea of what is going on.

And yet, in at least one way, the parable would also be quite perplexing to them. In the parable, the owner leased his vineyard to tenants who were to work the vineyard and turn over the grapes. The tenants in this parable clearly correspond to the religious leaders among the people of Jesus’ day – those to whom Jesus is speaking at that moment – for they are the ones whom God has charged to care for his beloved people.

As the parable goes forward, we see that the tenants don’t share the fruit of the harvest with the owner. They want it for themselves. With this detail Jesus is calling out the religious leaders for their refusal to give God his due by conforming to what he wants. God has brought forth a harvest of good – seen in the repentance of sinners and new voices of prophecy among them. The vineyard is producing good grapes! But the religious leaders have refused to give up their control. They are refusing to acknowledge the new realities of the vineyard. They are just like disobedient Israel in the days of Isaiah.

In the parable, the owner of the vineyard sends servants to get his fruit. The people easily see that these correspond to the prophets God sends. They know God has sent important prophets in the past to serve as his representatives and call the people to do what is right. When these servants get beaten and killed in the parable, the people recognize the abuse God’s prophets often receive.

So far, the parable has been a very clear and direct critique of the religious leadership – bold words by Jesus, and yet not out of the ordinary for a prophet. But then Jesus adds one more detail. The owner of the vineyard decides to send his son to the disobedient tenants. The tenants should certainly respect the son. But they don’t. They throw him out of the vineyard and kill him.

At this point Jesus ends the parable and asks the hearers what the owner should do. The hearers give an answer based on the injustice of the story, telling Jesus that the owner should “put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

And yet, even as they were giving this answer, the hearers would also have been wondering about that last detail – the sending and killing of the son. Who was the Son?

Jesus often called himself the Son of Man. But this was a designation of a prophet. The son in the parable is the son of God, not man.

In the Old Testament, Israel's kings were sometimes called God's Son. Could this son indicate a new king? A new anointed one – perhaps the Messiah?

And yet, why would the Messiah die? Wasn't he supposed to be a king – one to lead his people to victory?

Here Jesus addresses their question by saying: "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'"

The quote is from Psalm 118 – the same Psalm the people were chanting as Jesus entered Jerusalem a day earlier. The verse tells of one who was rejected by the leaders but ultimately chosen by God for the highest of purposes. The connection to Jesus' parable is clear: the son in the parable may have been rejected, but he would ultimately be vindicated by God and used by him.

As the hearers are processing all of this, Jesus then turns the conversation back to the religious leaders, saying: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits." The leaders know he is talking about them, but they can't yet do anything about it.

With this indictment of the leaders and prediction of their demise, the conversation now ends. But all who heard the encounter that day would be left wondering. They would wonder about two things: would Jesus' prediction about the leaders come true? And who was the son in the parable?

Answers to these questions would start coming in just a few days. On Friday of that week Jesus would be rejected by the leaders of his people and die upon a cross. Just like the son in the parable, Jesus was killed.

And then, three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. At this point, the identity of the son in the parable becomes clear. Yes, it is Jesus. Jesus may have been killed, but he was also vindicated by God and raised to the place of highest importance in the kingdom.

Reflecting on this vindication and elevation, it soon became clear that his leadership was one of teaching, and his victory was a victory over sin and death.

What's more, Jesus' vindication also served to confirm his authority. The authority to which he pointed in his parables was now made clear. Jesus, as the Son of God, has the authority of God himself.

Because of this authority, Jesus – to use the language of the parable – has inherited the vineyard. With the Father he is the rightful owner of that which God had planted and cared for all those years. And with the Father he will continue to tend the vineyard – doing so with love, in the ways he knows to be best.

The most significant act of his tending is the sacrifice he made by going to the cross. Out of his great love for the vineyard, Jesus gave to it the greatest of all gifts... he cleansed it through his blood. God had told the prophet Isaiah that "he looked for justice, but beheld, bloodshed; for righteousness, but beheld, an outcry!" When Jesus went to the cross, his blood paid the price of justice and covered our sins with his righteousness.

The tenants in the parable killed the son because they greedily desired his inheritance. How sad. The Son of God freely shares his inheritance with all who put their trust in him.

To further show his love, and in fulfillment of the prediction in the parable, the Son also brought new leadership to the vineyard. He did so by sending and commissioning the apostles and by creating and establishing the church. The church and its leaders are now to tend the vineyard with the Spirit and teachings of Jesus.

Looking back at this parable, we can see how accurately it describes the mission and message of Jesus, as well as the arc of history. The vineyard of God's planting has certainly grown and thrived since the sending of the Son. We're grateful to have this parable of Jesus as a means of understanding God's care of his people.

But like all parables of Jesus, we are also to discern in it messages of warning as well. The main warning in this parable is obvious: God once took away the tending of his vineyard from sinful tenants... will he need to take it away from us? From you?

God wants us to produce fruits in keeping with justice and righteousness. He wants us to show love to our neighbors and live according to his commands.

And God expects us to acknowledge his ownership of the vineyard. He wants us to base our lives as individuals and our life together as the church on his teachings and his will, not ours. He wants us to return our thanks to him, that we might be led by a spirit of gratitude, and therefore be equipped to be a blessing to others.

God's promise of faithfulness to his people remains. And, according to his promise, God will provide a leadership that reflects his faithfulness. It is therefore especially leaders – both individual people and individual congregations of the church – that should hear the word of warning in this parable and make sure we are producing good fruit.

God will help us produce the right fruits as we stay close and connected to him in faith. May we therefore re-commit ourselves, again this day, to living under his authority and perfect leadership. And may we commit ourselves always to a just and righteous life lived together in his vineyard.

In the holy name of Jesus, God's Son. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #544 O Love, How Deep

- 1 O love, how deep, how broad, how high,
Beyond all thought and fantasy,
That God, the Son of God, should take
Our mortal form for mortals' sake!**
- 2 He sent no angel to our race,
Of higher or of lower place,
But wore the robe of human frame,
And to this world Himself He came.**
- 3 For us baptized, for us He bore
His holy fast and hungered sore;
For us temptation sharp He knew;
For us the tempter overthrew.**

- 4 For us He prayed; for us He taught;
For us His daily works He wrought,
By words and signs and actions thus
Still seeking not Himself but us.
- 5 For us by wickedness betrayed,
For us, in crown of thorns arrayed,
He bore the shameful cross and death;
For us He gave His dying breath.
- 6 For us He rose from death again;
For us He went on high to reign;
For us He sent His Spirit here
To guide, to strengthen, and to cheer.
- 7 All glory to our Lord and God
For love so deep, so high, so broad;
The Trinity whom we adore
Forever and forevermore.

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 *O Love, How Deep* Setting: Michael Costello

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

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

Brief silence

Merciful Lord, You have planted us as Your own vineyard that we might bear good fruit for Your glory. Grant to us grace, that we may be faithful and show forth in our lives the good works that glorify You and serve Your purposes. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Father, give us ears willing to hear, minds willing to be instructed and hearts willing to trust You in all things. And having heard your Word, embolden us by Your Spirit, that we may give witness to Your mighty acts in all that we say and do. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, rescue us from the enemies of the Church and bless us with leaders whose voices will not waver in the face of threat. Bless Matthew, our synodical president; John, our district president; Andrew, our circuit visitor; and all pastors and church workers, including ours in this congregation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Mighty Lord, give to the nations the desire for peace. Thwart the actions of those who would oppress others. Bless the leaders of our country and spare us in this land from both division and disease. Deliver the poor from want, the anxious from fear, and lead us in enabling worthy employment for all. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Everlasting Father, bless the homes in which Your people dwell. Guide husbands and wives to love and forgive each other and strengthen them in their life together. Help parents to be faithful examples for their children. And bless all children as they learn and grow – especially remembering today our five Confirmands – that they would be filled with your goodness and grace and led by Your Spirit. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of love, deliver the sick from their illnesses, give relief to the suffering, help the troubled to know peace of mind, and be with the grieving and those in their final days. Give patience to those who must bear their infirmities. And guide and protect all health care professionals as they serve those in need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, prepare our hearts to receive the Lord's body and blood in his Holy Supper that we may be strengthened in faith and renewed in love by our communion. Give to us unity of faith and harmony in our life together, and bring us at the last, with the saints who have gone before, to the heavenly kingdom that awaits, that we may attain everlasting life and dwell in Your presence forever. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Hear us, O Lord, and give answer to the prayers of Your people prayed in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, whom with the Father and 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 #540 Sts. 1-3, 6 Christ the Word of God Incarnate

- 1 Christ, the Word of God incarnate,
Lord and Son of Abraham;
Christ, the radiance of the Father,
Perfect God, the great I AM;
Christ, the light, You shine unvanquished,
Light and life You bring to all;
Light our path with Your own presence,
Grant us grace to heed Your call.**

- 2 Christ, the living bread from heaven,
Food for body, food for soul;
Christ, the manna daily given,
Nourish, strengthen, make us whole.
Feed us with the food of heaven,
Foretaste of the feast to be;
Quench our thirst with living water
Springing up eternally.**

- 3 Christ, the shoot that springs triumphant
From the stump of Jesse's tree;
Christ, true vine, You nurture branches
To bear fruit abundantly.
Graft us into You, O Savior;
Prune our hearts so we remain
Fruitful branches in Your vineyard
Till eternal life we gain.**

- 6 Christ, the Alpha and Omega,
Christ, the firstborn from the dead,
Christ, the life and resurrection,
Christ, the Church's glorious head:
Praise and thanks and adoration
And unending worship be
To the Father and the Spirit
And to You eternally.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Altar Flowers: "Glory to my risen Savior and to the many blessings He bestowed upon me. Amen!"
By Val N.

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