

THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

MAY 9, 2021

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



PRELUDE *O Blessed Spring* Setting: Kevin Hildebrand

WELCOME

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
**He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

ENTRANCE HYMN #595 *O Blessed Spring*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>1 <b>O blessèd spring, where Word and sign<br/>Embrace us into Christ the Vine:<br/>Here Christ enjoins each one to be<br/>A branch of this life-giving Tree.</b></p>        | <p>3 <b>When autumn cools and youth is cold,<br/>When limbs their heavy harvest hold,<br/>Then through us, warm, the Christ will move<br/>With gifts of beauty, wisdom, love.</b></p> |
| <p>2 <b>Through summer heat of youthful years,<br/>Uncertain faith, rebellious tears,<br/>Sustained by Christ's infusing rain,<br/>The boughs will shout for joy again.</b></p> | <p>4 <b>As winter comes, as winters must,<br/>We breathe our last, return to dust;<br/>Still held in Christ, our souls take wing<br/>And trust the promise of the spring.</b></p>     |
- 5 Christ, holy Vine, Christ, living Tree,  
Be praised for this blest mystery:  
That Word and water thus revive  
And join us to Your Tree of Life.**

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we come into the Lord's presence on this day, it is right for us to examine our lives in light of the will of God, to confess our sins, and to ask for God's forgiveness. We do this in the sure and certain hope that God will keep His promise and give us the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation for the sake of Jesus Christ. Let us then take time to recall the ways we have failed to uphold God's Law this week and confess these sins to Him.

*(We observe a moment of silence for self-reflection.)*

Most merciful God,

**We confess our inability to be faithful in our promises to you and to walk in the way of Christ. We have neglected to serve others and have sought our own well-being rather than good for all. Acknowledging our sin, we look to you for mercy and healing. Strengthen our faith, increase our hope, and guide us in the path of humble service. 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.**

#### *THIS IS THE FEAST*

**This is the feast of victory for our God.**

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

**Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.**

**This is the feast of victory for our God.**

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

**Power, riches, wisdom and strength, and honor, blessing, and glory are His.**

**This is the feast of victory for our God.**

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

**Sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation.**

**Blessing, honor, glory, and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen.**

**This is the feast of victory for our God.**

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

**For the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign. Alleluia.**

**This is the feast of victory for our God.**

**Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.**

#### *THE PRAYER OF THE DAY*

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us pray. O God,

**the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those 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.**



*THE LITURGY OF THE WORD*

*FIRST LESSON* Acts 10:34-48

Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), you yourselves know what happened throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism that John proclaimed: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him on the third day and made him to appear, not to all the people but to us who had been chosen by God as witnesses, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.

This is the Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*PSALM 98*

Oh sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things!  
His right hand and his holy arm  
have worked salvation for him.  
The LORD has made known his salvation;  
he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.  
He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness  
to the house of Israel.  
All the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation of our God.  
Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises!  
Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody!

With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD!

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
the world and those who dwell in it!  
Let the rivers clap their hands;  
let the hills sing for joy together  
before the LORD, for he comes  
to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with equity.

**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* 1 John 5:1-8

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.

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* John 15:9-17

The Holy Gospel according to St. John the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter

**Glory to You, O Lord.**

[Jesus said:] "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit

should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.  
**Praise to You, O Christ.**

### SERMON

Peter didn't come easily to recognizing that God knows no partiality. He grew up in a community that had no place for Gentiles, regarding them as unclean and not saved. In light of all the events that have taken place since the killing of George Floyd, even very orthodox churches like the LCMS, have had to face some of the shame that is part of our history. We championed black churches in the deep south and the work of heroic pastors and teachers. But black and separate and never equal. My late friend and fellow Army Chaplain, Sam Hoard, attended Concordia, Milwaukee, but only because he insisted, only because he refused to be sent to an all black school in AL. On campus he was never allowed to live in the dorms, and had to eat separately. He was initially denied entry to our St. Louis seminary and again pointed toward our black seminary in NC. Sam grew up in St. Louis and always imagined Himself at Concordia Seminary. He learned to preach in German, the only one in his class to do so, just so there would be a call to a congregation who loved their German more than they disliked Sam's blackness. Peter had to be dragged into welcoming Gentiles to the family of Christ. In many places our Synod had to also.

**“Into all the world,” and “Show no partiality,”** are messages of word and deed that come directly from Jesus. **“Love one another as I have loved you,”** sets the bar very high in God's Church, and we do not have a very good record. Many churches required black members to sit apart, if admitted at all, and we did no better with Hispanic and Asian people. When I returned to my home parish after vicaring in an inner city parish in NYC, one old member whom I loved dearly asked how I could stand the stink of *“those people.”* The Anglicans in India segregated so absolutely that the Church lost Mahatma Gandhi and much of brown India, not over the words of the Gospel, but over our Gospel deeds. On this day I pay tribute to my mother who taught me from my earliest days that all are God's children, and my actions needed to reflect that.

Our Gospel from John 15 follows directly from the great **“I AM”** saying we heard last week: **“I AM the true vine and my Father is the Vinedresser.”** It is a wonderful agricultural metaphor, easily grasped. Connected to the vine, His rich juice flows through us and we grow and bear fruit. Even when our Father prunes us, it is to enhance our growth and fruit bearing. By God's grace, in Holy Baptism, each of us was grafted into Jesus, the Holy Vine. His rich life runs through us.

But as I said in a homily to fellow Lutheran Chaplains at a retreat about 40 years ago, I don't want to be just a branch. Sin in me is self centered. I want to be like the vine. Like our first parents we stubbornly choose to go our own way, even though we risk the blessing of being connected to the vine. So pernicious is this sin in me that I can imagine there is life for me as an independent branch, hiding my eyes to the way my leaves are drying up and my fruit is shriveling. Whether *“my way”* is like the harsh soil Sam found at the seminary, or whether it is chasing the shining lights of the world, the end is the same: dried up leaves, brittle stems, and ultimately a burn pile.

Jesus calls us into this Vine and Branch relationship, what Pr Mark called a connected community of faith last week. He promises that by living according to God's commands, we remain in relationship with God and keep growing. Before we cop out and say we can't do God's will because it is so perfect, before we excuse even beginning because we are so sinful, Jesus says, **“You are my friends if you do what I command. I don't even call you servants anymore, but friends.”** He does not invite us to set low goals or no goals because we are poor, miserable sinners. He calls us to the same intimate

relationship He has with the Father which is rooted in obedience and trust. In the words of John in our 2<sup>nd</sup> lesson: **“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments.”** Part of the juice of life that flows to us from the Vine is the kind of trust that dares to also serve God with our deeds. John would not understand a religious practice that works so very hard to get exactly precise “words of faith,” our confession, and then excuses similar hard work to do the deeds of God. At the end of each day we will have to confess that our best words and deeds fell short. But never does God send us away from His absolution with permission to now set a lower bar.

Somehow our mothers have always known that. Whether it was how poorly our first room cleaning turned out, or how badly we mowed the lawn, or how we mistreated our siblings, Mom didn’t send us back into the fray with lesser standards. Mom taught me to do my best and then do better. She sent me out into that world where I was no longer within her measuring sight with a kind of insight: “Remember what it means to be a Lehrer. Always act like it.” Can you remember the enlivening feel of her blessing? “I’m so proud of you!” Today Jesus says, **“I no longer call you servants, because a servant doesn’t know the mind of the Master. I call you friends because I have shown you God’s heart and send you to bear fruit that honors and pleases Him.”**

Jesus created a branches-connected-to-the-vine people for just such tough tasks as our world faces now. It wasn’t different when Peter attempted to draw others to His earthshaking new thing, **“I perceive that God shows no partiality.”** We are the ones who must witness in this real moment with the best ways to value all lives, and wrestle to empathize with brothers and sisters of color who have truly been treated differently for so long. We have Jesus’ rich life in us to be branches that invite and heal, that find the right salves and connect more people to the Vine.

I remember a Pentagon day when I opened a manilla envelope addressed very correctly to me as a Director in the Chief of Chaplain's Office. It was from a Master Sergeant I did not know. Out came an 8 x 10 glossy of a handsome black woman who introduced herself to me as a Baptist Minister, a medic in the Oregon National Guard, a trauma nurse in a Portland Hospital and someone, she said, I needed in my Army Hospital wards. I needed her because no one can soothe a soldier’s hurt like a Mom or a Grandma, she said. She wanted to be commissioned as a Chaplain by her upcoming 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. She reached out to me and taught me to imagine a new thing. Putting a Mom and a Grandma in Army Hospital wards, that preached to me. Because Mom's heal wounds and God's women have rich gifts of healing.

How you heal a wound in our frayed world will take many forms. That you, a branch, are called to do so, of that I have no doubt. The juice of His life is flowing in you and enables you to do all that is needed for healing. **“I AM the Vine. You are the branches.”** It is a simple, rich, wonderful metaphor. You will sing about it in a moment, **“Vine Keep what I was meant to be.”** Go fulfill your calling.

*HYMN OF THE DAY #378LBW Amid the World’s Bleak Wilderness*

**1 Amid the world's bleak wilderness  
A vineyard grows with promise green,  
The planting of the Lord himself.**

**2 His love selected this terrain;  
His vine with love he planted here  
To bear the choicest fruit for him.**

**3 We are his branches, chosen, dear,  
And though we feel the dresser's knife,  
We are the objects of his care.**

**4 From him we draw the juice of life,  
For him supply his winery  
With fruit from which true joys derive.**

**5 Vine, keep what I was meant to be:  
Your branch, with your rich life in me.**

## 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 Water, Blood, and Spirit Crying* Setting: Jeffery Blersch

## PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

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

Heavenly Father, You speak to us in love through your Holy Word and invite us to listen to the help that is found there. Bless our hearing and understanding that we may rightly fear You and learn what You have done for our souls. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord of all, You make known the good news of peace through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Bless and direct the work of those who share this good news, especially our missionaries, that in every nation there would be people who fear God, do what is right and receive the forgiveness of sins through His name. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, Your Son took on human flesh and was born of the Virgin Mary. He thereafter submitted to His mother, honoring and obeying her, and so fulfilled the commandment which we have not. On this Mother's Day, graciously accept our thanksgiving for our mothers and teach us to honor them aright — that we might love, obey and give thanks for them as is fitting in Your sight. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty Father, You rule this world by Your established authorities, in ways that we do not always understand. Bless our nation's leaders and cause them to serve wisely for our good. Give earthly peace and justice to all, in accord with Your commandments and the order You have revealed. And bring an end to violence, hatred and disdain for Your truth, that we all might receive the good you extend with your loving hands. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, the Giver of all that is good, grant Your healing and support to all who are in sorrow or need, sickness or adversity. And especially on this day we lift up to you the family and friends of our brother Paul, whom you called to your heavenly home this week, as well as Gladys who is recovering from surgery... and those we name before you at this time. Extend your care to each of these your children and give them grace to accept and bear their sorrows with faith, that they would be prepared to depart this life and receive the gift of eternal life in Your kingdom. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, Father, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, 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 #477 Alleluia, Alleluia! Hearts to Heaven*

**1 Alleluia, alleluia!**

**Hearts to heav'n and voices raise:  
Sing to God a hymn of gladness,  
Sing to God a hymn of praise;  
He who on the cross a victim  
For the world's salvation bled—  
Jesus Christ, the King of Glory,  
Now is risen from the dead.**

**2 Alleluia, Christ is risen!**

**Death at last has met defeat:  
See the ancient pow'rs of evil  
In confusion and retreat;  
Once He died, and once was buried:  
Now He lives forevermore,  
Jesus Christ, the world's Redeemer,  
Whom we worship and adore.**

**3 Alleluia, alleluia!**

**Glory be to God on high:  
Alleluia to the Savior  
Who has gained the victory;  
Alleluia to the Spirit,  
Fount of love and sanctity!  
Alleluia, alleluia  
To the triune Majesty!**

*ANNOUNCEMENTS*

*DISMISSAL*

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

*POSTLUDE Alleluia, Alleluia! Hearts to Heaven* Setting: Stephen R. Johnson

Acknowledgments

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Created by Lutheran Service Builder © 2021 Concordia Publishing House.

O Blessed Spring Tune: Public domain Text: © 1993 Susan Palo Cherwien, admin. Augsburg Fortress. Used by permission: LSB Hymn License no. 110005326

Amid the World's Bleak Wilderness Contributors: Richard Hillert, Jaroslav J. Vajda

Tune: © 1978 Augsburg Fortress Text: © 1978 Augsburg Fortress All rights reserved. Reprinted under OneLicense.net #A-701491.

Alleluia, Alleluia! Hearts to Heaven Text (sts. 1, 3): Public domain Text (st. 2): © 1982 The Jubilate Group, admin. Hope Publishing Co. Used by permission: LSB Hymn License no. 110005326 Tune: Public domain