

THE SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
SEPTEMBER 12, 2021
ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA



PRELUDE

Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing
1.J. William Green; 2. Jan Bender

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN (Stand) #528 Sts. 1, 3, 5, 7 *Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*

- 1 **Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace!**

- 3 **Jesus! The name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life and health and peace.**

- 5 **Look unto Him, ye nations; own
Your God, ye fallen race.
Look and be saved through faith alone,
Be justified by grace.**

- 7 **To God all glory, praise, and love
Be now and ever giv'n
By saints below and saints above,
The Church in earth and heav'n.**

INVOCATION

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

CALL TO WORSHIP

In the morning, O Lord, You hear my voice;
In the morning I prepare a sacrifice for You and watch.

My mouth is filled with your praise,
And with Your glory all the day.

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And renew a right spirit within me.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, Therefore, let us be reconciled to God and to one another.

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

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 you, forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life.

Amen.

KYRIE

see p. 168 for music

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 their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

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

Amen.

HYMN OF PRAISE

p. 171

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is the feast of victory for our God, for the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign.

Alleluia, alleluia.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, our support and defense in every need,

continue to preserve Your Church in safety, govern her by Your goodness, and bless her with Your peace; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON (Be seated)

Isaiah 50:4–10

The Lord GOD has given me
the tongue of those who are taught,
that I may know how to sustain with a word
him who is weary.
Morning by morning he awakens;
he awakens my ear
to hear as those who are taught.
The Lord GOD has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious;
I turned not backward.
I gave my back to those who strike,
and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;
I hid not my face
from disgrace and spitting.
But the Lord GOD helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like a flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame.
He who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who is my adversary?
Let him come near to me.
Behold, the Lord GOD helps me;
who will declare me guilty?
Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.
Who among you fears the LORD
and obeys the voice of his servant?
Let him who walks in darkness
and has no light
trust in the name of the LORD
and rely on his God.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 116:1-9 (Read responsively)

I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my pleas for mercy.
**Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.**

The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;

I suffered distress and anguish.

Then I called on the name of the LORD:

“O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!”

Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful.

**The LORD preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.**

Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

**For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling;**

I will walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.

**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

James 3:1-12

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

ALLELUIA VERSE (Stand)

p. 173

**Alleluia. Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia.**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark the 9th chapter
Glory to You, O Lord.

When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to [Jesus] and greeted him. And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

This is the Gospel 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:

Mark's Gospel records thirteen specific healing miracles of Jesus. The account we just read is the twelfth. Jesus, we see, has the power to heal and he loves to do it.

And yet, each of these healing accounts gives us other messages as well. And to catch these, we need to understand a little about their context.

For this text, theologian N.T. Wright suggests we begin by picturing ourselves hiking up a mountain. On this particular hike, the first few miles are fairly easy. The trail is well-marked. The path is wide. We're going uphill, but the incline is slight and we barely break a sweat. We're enjoying the beautiful view, the clean mountain air and the camaraderie of our fellow hikers.

Then suddenly we turn a corner, and there before us is a terrifying 100-foot wall of rock. We think maybe it's the end of the trail. But no, there with a sign and an arrow pointing up is an old wooden ladder and a rope. The trail hasn't ended; it's just gotten a lot tougher. If we want to go further on this hike, new energy and new courage are needed. Can we do it?

Wright says that this is the mood our Gospel writer wants us to catch in this text. Jesus and three of his disciples have just gotten back from the glorious sight of the Transfiguration. There they experienced a powerful vision of Jesus' true nature and heard the voice of God confirm his calling.

But the Transfiguration also signaled that things were changing for Jesus and his disciples. Jesus' vocation was growing into sharper focus. And the disciples would be a part of this.

Just prior to the Transfiguration, Jesus, for the first time, told the disciples of his upcoming rejection, death and resurrection. The trail for Jesus will now lead to Jerusalem. In the words of Isaiah, Jesus had "set his face like flint."

Furthermore, Jesus had told the disciples that it was time for them to take up their crosses. Up until that time it had been fairly easy for them to follow Jesus. Now it would be harder and harder.

The realities of this change are seen right away in today's reading. The rest of the disciples are experiencing a problem. Previously they have been able to cast out demons in Jesus' name, but now they encounter one who has them beat. They are as puzzled as we, the readers, are likely to be. What's going on here? Are there different degrees of demons, some being harder to deal with than others? Or is there another explanation?

All Jesus will say is that this kind takes prayer. One would think that prayer was always part of the operation, but perhaps the disciples had forgotten. Or perhaps their prayer was not a patient, persistent, faith-filled prayer. Jesus felt the need to give instruction on these aspects of prayer during his ministry. Perhaps today's account shows the need for such instruction.

What the text does make clear is that the disciples are unable to deal with the problem. And this then leads to further stress, for as the crowd presses in and their rivals, the scribes, begin to argue with them, the problem becomes magnified. Things are getting harder for the disciples by the minute.

Here we should stop and reflect on what this suggests for us. People often suppose that the early years of a person's faith walk are the difficult ones, and that as you go on it gets easier. The opposite is frequently the case. As soon as you learn to walk beside Jesus you are given harder tasks, which will demand more courage and more spiritual energy. Did we suppose that following Jesus was a walk in the park?

As the text goes forward, we see that the disciples' problem seems to have made Jesus reflect on just how bad things had become. His response to what he sees, echoing words he had expressed a chapter earlier, is to comment sorrowfully on "this faithless generation" and to wonder aloud how much longer he will be with them. Something in the father's sad telling of his boy's problem, or the crowd's voyeuristic interest, or the scribe's opportunism, or the disciples' inability to cast out the unclean spirit says to Jesus that faith is in very short supply here. The sad reflection of Jesus confirms for him, and us, the need for his journey to the cross.

Our eye is next led to the man at the center of the fuss—the father of the poor boy. As in several other Jesus stories, this is a parent desperate with anxiety over his child. And here we should pause to reflect on the sheer number of these accounts. Certainly, parental anxiety for children is common and abundant in this world. All of us who are parents can vouch for that. But beyond this, these stories are surely meant to reflect the grieving love of the heavenly Father for his child Israel, and for his image-bearing sons and daughters throughout the world, and for his unique Son, Jesus himself, as he goes obediently to his death.

As the father in the story approaches Jesus, here, too, the mood is tense. Failure is in the air. A corner has been turned and everything seems more demanding. In the first half of the Gospel, many people come to Jesus with what appears to be comparatively easy faith. They touch him and are healed; it seems as simple as that. But for this man, in this situation, faith is hard. His request for Jesus' healing sounds anything but confident. "Help us... if you can." He clearly lives somewhere in the murky and shadowy middle between faith and doubt.

Jesus bounces the question right back to him. "If you can?" he replies, with what is probably best understood as a teasing rebuke. "All things are possible for one who believes." This puts the man on the spot. It's his turn to stare at the wall of rock ahead of him. What will he do? Will he go forward, or will he turn away? Out of a combination of desperation and faith he puts his foot on the first rung of the ladder and cries out that great prayer which has given voice to the feelings of so many over the centuries: "I believe; help my unbelief." It is a beautiful prayer. Because it is an honest prayer. And a sincere prayer – said with all the faith the man could muster.

These words – "I believe; help my unbelief" – often characterize our own prayers when things are tough. We, too, wonder how God can expect us to climb the ladders of illness, or scramble up the cliffs of our demanding vocations, or endure the seemingly endless trail of loneliness. Jesus points us to faith and prayer. This is the combination which will overcome the unclean spirits of fear and despair. We are to pray, even though our faith may be weak. And we are to believe, even in those times when our prayers may seem unheard.

Back to the text. The prayer of the father, seemingly shouted out, brings yet more people running to see what's going on. Will the man's faith be rewarded? Once they have arrived, Jesus, the beloved Son on the way to his own death and resurrection, rebukes the unclean spirit. His rebuke leaves the boy apparently dead. But Jesus, in Mark's words, "lifts him up and he arose." The words Mark uses here are resurrection words in the New Testament. Their use is a clue that resurrection is not just for Jesus, but for all who believe. Jesus is, as Paul said to the Corinthians, "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20).

In his telling of this episode in the life and ministry of Jesus, Mark has made it clear that things are now going to be much harder for Jesus and the disciples. But he has also made it clear that Jesus, and with him God's whole saving project, is going to prevail. It will take all his resources of spiritual and physical endurance, but he will indeed climb the rock wall and finish the trail, right to the summit of the mountain. He will take up his own cross, be faithful to the end, and bring in the Kingdom.

The question for us, however, is whether we will go with him. Is the journey with Jesus too difficult for us? Do we fear that we may not have enough energy, or that we lack the reserves of spiritual strength required for the journey? Are we intimidated by the changes in the landscape? Are we willing to spend more time and intensity in prayer as needed?

Twenty years ago yesterday, our country was attacked by terrorists. Thousands of our citizens died. Many more were wounded and scarred. A mood of sadness, fear and anger arose among us.

In those days we needed new courage. And many found it by turning to the church – either for the first time or with renewed sincerity.

As well, many *showed* their courage by committing themselves to work for our nation's security. On this day we honor not only those who made a sacrifice on the day of 9/11, but also those who made a sacrifice in the days and years following, serving to defend us, especially all those who served in the military.

And let's not forget, also, that courage was greatly needed in the wake of the de-stabilization the attacks brought. Many hard decisions needed to be made in our country – such as whether to attack in response, and if so, then who, when, how, and for how long. Decisions needed to be made, too, regarding liberties which might need to be curtailed for the sake of safety, and what kind of resources should be allotted for further protection. These decisions, as we know, led to disagreements and hard feelings – feelings that are still with us today.

Twenty years after the attacks, our days still call for new courage – courage to keep faith amidst bickering, courage to work together amidst disagreement, courage to face new challenges – like the pandemic or changed global realities.

And these are just the challenges of our life together. Each of us has our own challenges which call for courage as well.

When we are faced with a challenge, do we know how to pray with whatever faith we may have? Can we summon the prayer of the desperate but courageous father: "I believe; help me in my unbelief?"

When we are faced with a crisis, do we know to put our faith in the one who casts out unclean spirits and journeyed to the cross for our salvation?

When we find ourselves in these difficult times, the only thing to do is to put our foot on the ladder, ask for help, and start to climb. God will lead and guide us from there.

May God then bless our faith. And our life together. For the sake of Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY (Stand) #867 Sts. 1, 3, 4, 5 Let Children Hear the Mighty Deeds

- 1 Let children hear the mighty deeds
Which God performed of old,
Which in our younger days we saw,
And which our parents told.**

- 3 Our sons and daughters we shall tell
And they again to theirs
That generations yet unborn
May teach them to their heirs.**

- 4 O teach them with all diligence
The truths of God's own Word,
To place in Him their confidence,
To fear and trust their Lord,**

- 5 To learn that in our God alone
Their hope securely stands,
That they may never doubt His love
But walk in His commands.**

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

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

In peace, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For faith and its increase, that unbelief would be overcome and trust in God's care would abound; let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For protection and relief from unclean spirits, that God would sustain his people and help them through the many troubles and trials of this world, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For teachers and students, that God would bless them in their efforts, preserve them in a right spirit, and lead them into all that is true and good, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For our tongues, that the Lord and Father would tame what no human being can tame; that He would turn them from cursing the people made in His likeness to blessing God instead; and that He would keep us from stumbling in what we say, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For our governing authorities, especially Joseph our president and Ralph our governor, that God would guard their tongues so that they do not stumble in what they say but speak wisely, leading in accord with His will, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For those on our prayer list, for those with difficult challenges - especially those we name in our heart... and for all others in need, that our God, with whom all things are possible, would not deny their prayers on account of unbelief, but grant them health, healing and blessing, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

For all who commune today, that they may be strengthened by the body and blood of Christ – who suffered unjustly for our sins and was vindicated in His resurrection; and that they may be certain that no one can contend against or declare guilty those who have been reconciled to God in Christ, let us pray to the Lord: **Lord, have mercy.**

All these things and whatever else You know that we need, grant us, Father, for the sake of Him who died and rose again and now lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. **Amen.**



THE LITURGY OF HOLY COMMUNION

PREFACE TO HOLY COMMUNION (Stand)

p. 178

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

It is truly good right and salutary...evermore praising You and saying:

SANCTUS

Holy, holy, holy Lord, Lord God of pow'r and might:

Heav'n and earth are full of Your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Blessed are You, Lord of heaven and earth, for You have had mercy on those whom You created and sent Your only-begotten Son into our flesh to bear our sin and be our Savior. With repentant joy we receive the salvation accomplished for us by the all-availing sacrifice of His body and His blood on the cross.

Gathered in the name and the remembrance of Jesus, we beg You, O Lord, to forgive, renew, and strengthen us with Your Word and Spirit. Grant us faithfully to eat His body and drink His blood as He bids us do in His own testament. Gather us together, we pray, from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. Graciously receive our prayers; deliver and preserve us. To You alone, O Father, be all glory, honor, and worship, with the Son 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.

THE WORDS OF OUR LORD

PAX DOMINI

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

Amen.

AGNUS DEI

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

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

Lamb of God, You take away the sin of the world; grant us peace, grant us peace.

DISTRIBUTION (Be seated)

The Communion Assistant will come forward to receive first, then those from the pulpit side – by order of pew, front to back. Communicants will come up the center aisle and return via the side aisle. When all from the pulpit side have communed, the baptismal font side will commune in the same manner. Distancing must be maintained between all

communicants. Masks should be kept on except for the moment of consuming the elements. We ask that the wine be consumed away from the tray table. Empty cups should be dropped into the baskets.

COMMUNION MUSIC

Let the Children Hear the Mighty Deeds

Mark Knickelbein

NUNC DIMITTIS (Stand)

p. 182

**Lord, now You let Your servant go in peace;
Your word has been fulfilled.
My own eyes have seen the salvation
which You have prepared in the sight of ev'ry people:
A light to reveal You to the nations
and the glory of Your people Israel.
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.**

POST-COMMUNION COLLECT

BENEDICTION

SENDING HYMN #724 Sts. 1, 3, 4, 10

If God Himself Be for Me

- 1 If God Himself be for me,
I may a host defy;
For when I pray, before me
My foes, confounded, fly.
If Christ, my head and master,
Befriend me from above,
What foe or what disaster
Can drive me from His love?**

- 3 Christ Jesus is my splendor,
My sun, my light, alone;
Were He not my defender
Before God's judgment throne,
I never should find favor
And mercy in His sight,
But be destroyed forever
As darkness by the light.**

- 4 He canceled my offenses,
Delivered me from death;
He is the Lord who cleanses
My soul from sin through faith.
In Him I can be cheerful,
Courageous on my way;
In Him I am not fearful
Of God's great Judgment Day.**

**10 My heart with joy is springing;
I am no longer sad.
My soul is filled with singing;
Your sunshine makes me glad.
The sun that cheers my spirit
Is Jesus Christ, my King;
The heav'n I shall inherit
Makes me rejoice and sing.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS (Be seated)

DISMISSAL

POSTLUDE

*If God Himself be for Me
Paul Grime*

ALTAR FLOWERS: "In memory of Stan and Dorothy Stringer"

By Linda, Larry, and Patty Stringer

Those serving:

Sunday September 12, 8:30 a.m.:

Greeter: Steve Berg

Comm. assist: Jim Easterly

Reader: Norm Williams

10:30 a.m.:

Greeter: Marian Robinson

Comm. assist: Dan Buuck

Reader: Dan Buuck

Acknowledgments

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