

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
OCTOBER 3, 2021

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

✠ ✠ ✠

PRELUDE

O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth
Wayne L. Wold

WELCOME

ENTRANCE HYMN (Stand) #834

O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth

- 1 O God, O Lord of heav'n and earth,
Thy living finger never wrote
That life should be an aimless mote,
A deathward drift from futile birth.
Thy Word meant life triumphant hurled
In splendor through Thy broken world.
Since light awoke and life began,
Thou hast desired Thy life for man.
- 2 Our fatal will to equal Thee,
Our rebel will wrought death and night.
We seized and used in prideful spite
Thy wondrous gift of liberty.
We housed us in this house of doom,
Where death had royal scope and room,
Until Thy servant, Prince of Peace,
Breached all its walls for our release.
- 3 Thou camest to our hall of death,
O Christ, to breathe our poisoned air,
To drink for us the dark despair
That strangled our reluctant breath.
How beautiful the feet that trod
The road that leads us back to God!
How beautiful the feet that ran
To bring the great good news to man!
- 4 O Spirit, who didst once restore
Thy Church that it might be again
The bringer of good news to men,
Breathe on Thy cloven Church once more,
That in these gray and latter days
There may be those whose life is praise,
Each life a high doxology
To Father, Son, and unto Thee.

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. Merciful Father,

Your patience and loving-kindness toward us have no end. Grant that by Your Holy Spirit we may always think and do those things that are pleasing in Your sight; 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 (Be seated)

Genesis 2:18-25

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

"This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman,
because she was taken out of Man."

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 128 (Read responsively)

Blessèd is everyone who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!

**You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you.**

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.

**Behold, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.**

The LORD bless you from Zion!

May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem
all the days of your life!

May you see your children's children!

Peace be upon 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.**

SECOND LESSON

Hebrews 2:1-13

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere,

“What is man, that you are mindful of him,
or the son of man, that you care for him?
You made him for a little while lower than the angels;
you have crowned him with glory and honor,
putting everything in subjection under his feet.”

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying,

“I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

And again,

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again,

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

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.**

GOSPEL

Mark 10:2-16

The Holy Gospel according to St. Mark the 10th chapter
Glory to You, O Lord.

Pharisees came up and in order to test [Jesus] asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this

commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

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:

As we just heard, the first part of today's Gospel reading speaks to the subject of divorce. The Pharisees asked Jesus a question about it, and Jesus, as always, gave a response.

I don't intend to address this subject in detail today. I've done so in the past, and today I'd prefer us to focus on the second part of the reading. But let me just say a few things about Jesus' response here.

First, this response is certainly not meant to be a full discourse on the subject. Jesus knows he is being tested – not only in his Biblical knowledge but also in his very survival. Not long ago in that very region where Jesus and his disciples have just arrived, John the Baptist was arrested and put to death for his teachings on the matter. John had challenged the actions of King Herod and his wife Herodias, who had each divorced their spouses so that they could marry. Jesus shares the same view as John. But he knows that if he says so directly his fate would be death too. And since his time has not yet come, Jesus is careful with what he says and only shares his support of John's view later, with his disciples alone.

But Jesus does give the Pharisees and the crowds two important things to consider. First, he tells them that the Mosaic Law about divorce was given because of the people's "hardness of heart." Saying this communicates clearly that divorce is outside of God's intention, while also acknowledging the broken nature of the human condition which plagues people's efforts, including their efforts toward marriage.

Second, he then points them back to God's plan for marriage as given at the very beginning. There, as people hear about God's action of joining a man and a woman together as one flesh, they will find further reason and further strength not to separate.

Jesus wants to encourage marriage; and to encourage healing rather than brokenness. Our Psalm today also encourages marriage, by lifting up its beauty— listing it, along with family, as among the great blessings that come to those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways. According to the Psalm, spouses and children will flourish when they live in the promises and teachings of God. For where God's ways are followed, there will be peace and prosperity.

In similar texts on the subject of marriage and divorce, found in the writings of Matthew, Luke and St. Paul, we see that there are other considerations in the matter too. For instance, we see that Jesus is sensitive to people's

needs in the case of unfaithfulness and abandonment, and that he knows how difficult marriage can become when only one is interested in following God.

But as I said earlier, I've addressed this difficult and complex subject in a number of sermons over the years, including the last time this text came up three years ago. So, let's focus now on the remaining verses of our reading – those having to do with children.

First, however, we should consider that there may be a connection between these two episodes in the scriptures. The section about children begins by saying that "they" were bringing their children to Jesus. Who were these people? Perhaps husbands and wives, now concerned about their children. Certainly, Jesus' strong affirmation about the sanctity of marriage would appeal to many parents. Most parents I know want their children to be around those who highly value marriage. Marriage is all about commitment, partnership and cooperation – values which are essential for the raising up of healthy children.

And here the church should take a cue for its own life. As much as we in the church need to be sensitive to the reality of divorce and gracious toward those who are saddened to find themselves a part of it, we also need to highly affirm the blessings of marriage as God has designed it and do all we can to support those who are married. Children will thrive in such an environment. And parents will bring them to be a part of it.

In addition to being drawn to Jesus because of his views on marriage, those first parents who brought their children to Jesus may also have been moved by the episode we heard about two Sundays ago. There we heard how Jesus received a child into his midst and told his followers that they, too, should receive such little ones in his name – for this was one way of living out the path of servanthood he taught. Perhaps word had gotten out after this – about the great teacher who valued children. Parents, as we know, are always looking for ways in which their children can be blessed.

Whatever their motivation, the text tells us that people brought their children to him. But then something happened. Jesus' disciples tried to put a stop to it. Perhaps they thought the master's time was too important to be spent with children. Or maybe they worried about Jesus' reputation being diminished in the eyes of other teachers.

Upon seeing this, Jesus scolds the disciples. He is angry with them – "indignant" we usually translate. And here we note that this is one of the few times we see this emotion from Jesus. He didn't get angry very often. The issue of including children must have been particularly important to him.

Jesus then goes on to tell his disciples: "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them." The word for "hinder" – sometimes translated also "forbid or stop," is the same one he used in the last chapter, when the disciples had tried to forbid the one who was casting out demons in Jesus' name from doing so just because that man was not one of them. The disciples, it seems, wanted things to be tightly controlled. Jesus, on the other hand, was all about openness and access.

This statement of Jesus – "let the children come to me" – states plainly one of the two great lessons from this part of the text. That lesson is: the Christian faith is not just for adults but for children too.

This may seem like an obvious teaching to us, since we know that churches usually offer children's ministries and most of us can remember spending time in church when we were children. But it is a teaching that is sometimes forgotten. It's forgotten when our gatherings at church only use vocabulary and discuss concepts that are far beyond a child's comprehension. It's forgotten when children are always shuttled off to spaces and groups that are separate from the rest of the people.

Hearing today's lesson from Jesus should remind us to remember the needs and importance of children. We should welcome children in our worship, provide plenty of opportunities for children's education and service, and convey Christ's teachings in ways that children can understand. We won't dumb everything down. Rather, we will challenge children to grow. And the children will continually surprise us!

At the entrance of our Education Building, by the indoor stairwell, there is a large banner that shows Jesus welcoming children. The banner, given, I believe, at the dedication of our Preschool in 1994, boldly proclaims: "Let the children come." In the years since that time, well over a thousand children have gotten to know Jesus as they passed by that banner and headed into our classrooms. And hundreds more have done so as they've attended Sunday School and Confirmation Classes. The children's ministries of our church are a very important part of our work, and our text today from the scriptures reminds us that this is the way it should be.

Earlier I said that there were two great lessons from this part of the text. In addition to the lesson about welcoming children, this text also teaches that people should receive the kingdom of God like a child.

And what does Jesus mean by this? Certainly, one thing he means is that we should receive him and his teachings with childlike faith. We should trust him, just like children trust their parents. We should believe what he tells us and take these things at face value, just like children do.

Too often we overthink what Jesus tells us. Or we rationalize a message opposing what Jesus says – leading us into disobedience and sin. Receiving Jesus as a child means we should humble ourselves in the face of his wisdom, be content with what he deigns to give us, and acknowledge that we are dependent on his goodness and grace.

Receiving the kingdom as a child will not always be easy. We have questions about the kingdom. And there is a large part of us that resents being asked to humble ourselves and to see ourselves as needy and dependent on another. We like to think of ourselves as adults who can stand on our own two feet and figure things out ourselves. We don't like to be thought of as children.

Let's not misunderstand. Jesus doesn't want us to be childish. Nor does he want us to end our development at a child's level. He wants to bring us to maturity. He wants us to grow, improve, handle responsibility, lead others... things that adults do. But he wants us to do these things with faith. And he desires that we be blessed by his guidance.

When it comes to the health and well-being of growing children, one thing people will often say is that children need to find their place. They need to find activities that they enjoy, friends who will be caring and supporting, jobs they can do to contribute, faith to follow. I talked recently with a parent who told me that his son's second year in college was going much, much better than his first. "He found his people and his place," the parent said. The child was happy. The parent was relieved. Prayers from both were answered.

When we come to Jesus and receive his welcome, we have found the greatest of all places. Here we are welcomed even when our faith is little. Here we are welcomed despite our sin. Here we are welcomed by his loving embrace – one that is most clearly and profoundly understood when we remember that his arms were once spread out upon the cross.

Jesus welcomes children. Of all ages! Let us welcome them also. In his holy name. Amen.

- 1 **Our Father, by whose name**
All fatherhood is known,
Who dost in love proclaim
Each family Thine own,
Bless Thou all parents, guarding well,
With constant love as sentinel,
The homes in which Thy people dwell.
- 2 **O Christ, Thyself a child**
Within an earthly home,
With heart still undefiled,
Thou didst to manhood come;
Our children bless in ev'ry place
That they may all behold Thy face,
And knowing Thee may grow in grace.
- 3 **O Spirit, who dost bind**
Our hearts in unity,
Who teachest us to find
The love from self set free,
In all our hearts such love increase
That ev'ry home by this release
May be the dwelling place of peace.

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

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

Lord God, help us by Your Spirit to receive Your kingdom like little children – humbly repenting of our sins and turning to you in faith, that we may live in the kingdom with the joy of Your forgiveness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, pour out Your Holy Spirit upon us, that we may pay closer attention to Your Word and not drift away from it nor neglect the great salvation it reveals to us in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, in holy marriage You join a man and a woman together so that they are no longer two but one flesh. Bless those who are married with the gifts of your Holy Spirit, that they may know the joy and peace you desire for them and reflect your love in their life together. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, because your Son Jesus welcomes children and seeks to bless them, move all parents to bring their children to Christ in the waters of Holy Baptism, and to bring them as well to your house for worship and fellowship in your name, that Christ may continue to take them in His arms and extend his love. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, help us when we do not see everything in this world in subjection to Jesus. Give us eyes of faith to see Him crowned with glory and honor at Your right hand, and so believe that nothing is outside of His control. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, heal and comfort those on our prayer list and all others who suffer in body or mind, including those we name before you at this time... Remind them that You made the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering, so that in all their trials they might put their trust in You. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, strengthen the faith of all who commune at Christ's table today, that they would be assured of their forgiveness and renewed in their calling to hunger and thirst for righteousness in the world. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **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

Prelude on Welsh Hymn

Tune: Rhosymedre - Ralph Vaughan Williams

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

- 1 Let us ever walk with Jesus,
Follow His example pure,
Through a world that would deceive us
And to sin our spirits lure.
Onward in His footsteps treading,
Pilgrims here, our home above,
Full of faith and hope and love,
Let us do the Father's bidding.
Faithful Lord, with me abide;
I shall follow where You guide.
- 2 Let us suffer here with Jesus
And with patience bear our cross.
Joy will follow all our sadness;
Where He is, there is no loss.
Though today we sow no laughter,
We shall reap celestial joy;
All discomforts that annoy
Shall give way to mirth hereafter.
Jesus, here I share Your woe;
Help me there Your joy to know.
- 3 Let us gladly die with Jesus.
Since by death He conquered death,
He will free us from destruction,
Give to us immortal breath.
Let us mortify all passion
That would lead us into sin;
And the grave that shuts us in
Shall but prove the gate to heaven.
Jesus, here with You I die,
There to live with You on high.
- 4 Let us also live with Jesus.
He has risen from the dead
That to life we may awaken.
Jesus, You are now our head.
We are Your own living members;
Where You live, there we shall be
In Your presence constantly,
Living there with You forever.
Jesus, let me faithful be,
Life eternal grant to me.

ANNOUNCEMENTS *(Be seated)*

DISMISSAL

POSTLUDE

Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus

Tim Shewmaker

Those serving:

Sunday, October 3, 8:30 a.m.:

Greeter: Steve Berg

Comm. assist: Dede Dixon

Reader: Norm Williams

10:30 a.m.:

Greeter: Steve Janssen

Comm. assist: Jill Hecht

Reader: Bill Muller

Acknowledgments

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