

Worship in the Home: September 6, 2020

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Worship in the Home

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost Lectionary 23 September 6, 2020

In this time of world-wide crisis, congregations throughout this [church](#) are not able to gather for worship as the body of Christ. While you cannot be together in person, we can hear the word of God and hold each other in prayer. We offer this brief resource as an aid for prayer in the home. As with our prayers in the gathered assembly for worship, you are encouraged to prepare or adapt them locally for your context.

Conflict is a part of relationships and life in community. Jesus' words in today's gospel are often used in situations having to do with church discipline. The prophet Ezekiel tells of warning the wicked to turn from their ways, and Paul reminds us that love is the fulfilling of the law. We gather in the name of Christ, assured that he is present among us with gifts of peace and reconciliation.

Find a peaceful place to pray, perhaps a table. You may wish to light a candle near where you pray. One person may lead in this acclamation and then pray the Prayer of the Day.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Amen.

Let us pray.

A brief silence is kept before the prayer.

O Lord God, enliven and preserve your church with your perpetual mercy. Without your [help](#), we mortals will fail; remove far from us everything that is harmful, and lead us toward all that gives life and salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Ezekiel 33:7-11

God appointed Ezekiel as a sentinel for the house of Israel. Ezekiel must faithfully convey God's warnings to the people. Remarkably, God—who is about to attack Jerusalem—gives a warning with the hope that repentance will make the attack unnecessary.

⁷So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ⁸If I say to the wicked, "O wicked ones, you shall surely die," and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in the iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. ⁹But if you warn the wicked to

turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life.

¹⁰Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: "Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" ¹¹Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 119:33-40

³³Teach me, O LORD, the way^l of your statutes, and I shall keep it^l to the end.

³⁴Give me understanding, and I shall^l keep your teaching; I shall keep it with^l all my [heart](#).

³⁵Lead me in the path of^l your commandments, for that is^l my desire.

³⁶Incline my heart to^l your decrees and not to^l unjust gain.

³⁷Turn my eyes from beholding falsehood; give me life^l in your way.

³⁸Fulfill your promise^l to your servant, which is for^l those who fear you.

³⁹Turn away the reproach^l that I dread, because your judgments are good.

⁴⁰Behold, I long for^l your commandments; by your righteousness enliven me.

Second Reading: Romans 13:8-14

The obligation of Christians is to love one another and so fulfill the heart and goal of the law. Clothes make the person as we "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and live today in light of the future God has in store for us.

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Word of God, word of life.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel: Matthew 18:15-20

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

Jesus offers practical advice to his disciples on how individuals—and the church as a whole—should go about restoring relationships when one member has sinned against another.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained

that one. ¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Reflection

Having read these readings, think of this:

Let Ezekiel the prophet speak to us today, in the name of God. If we do not turn from our own sins toward the mercy of God, we will waste away and die. And we are such sinners. But in Matthew, Jesus gives us a way of mutual forgiveness. The "keys" that he gave to Peter two Sundays ago, he gives now to the whole church. When someone has offended us, we should not respond with gossip nor with announcing a grievance on social media, but with direct contact and mutual reconciliation. And in the midst of our common life, especially as we are gathered in prayer but even when we are isolated from each other, the risen Christ dwells, as he promised. He is the source of all forgiveness, the grounds of reconciliation. He dawns for us like the day. Baptized in his Spirit, we may put on Christ like clothing, which is: we may put on love for our neighbor.

If you have a hymnal, you may now sing or read "Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 470), "Blest Be the Tie That Binds" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 656); "God, When Human Bonds Are Broken" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 603). Links to hymns in the public domain are provided below.

[Blest Be the Tie That Binds](#)

Then pray these intercessions:

Drawn together by the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need, responding to each petition with the words "Hear us and help us."

Unite your church, O God. Give to all the baptized the gifts of repentance and reconciliation. Strengthen ecumenical partnerships and interracial cooperation among the churches. Guide the work of the [Lutheran](#) World Federation and the World Council of Churches.

A brief silence.

O God, Leader of the church, in your mercy,

hear us and help us.

Protect your creation, O God. Teach us ways to live that do not harm what you have entrusted to our care. Give to the animals the habitat they need for life. Renew and enliven places suffering from drought, flood, storms, or pollution.

A brief silence.

O God, Creator of the earth, in your mercy,

hear us and help us.

Bless the nations, O God. Frustrate the designs of dictators. Give to the military a clear and moral purpose. Guide legislators, civil servants, judges, and police toward the well-being of all. Infuse the coming election season with honesty and integrity.

A brief silence.

O God, Governor of the world, in your mercy,

hear us and help us.

Sustain us in our work, O God, and give employment to those who need it. Shape societies to ensure fair treatment for all who labor. Help us to love our neighbors in and through our work.

A brief silence.

O God, Guardian of all peoples, in your mercy,

hear us and help us.

Guide our civil discourse, O God. Alert us to social evils and show our nation how to end the patterns of racial injustice. Accompany all are endeavoring to bring about a renewed society. Curb the violence in our cities.

A brief silence.

O God, Haven of righteousness, in your mercy,

hear us and help us.

Tend to all in need, O God. Assist all friends and family members who are seeking restored relationships. Give community to the lonely and welcome to the outcast. Shelter all who are vulnerable in body, mind, or spirit, especially those we name here before you.

A brief silence.

O God, Physician of the sick, in your mercy,

hear us and help us.

Receive once again, O God, our plea for the end of the coronavirus. Comfort those afflicted with COVID-19 and uphold our medical workers. Give youth a sense of responsibility for others and provide the world a vaccine.

A brief silence.

O God, Healer in times of plague, in your mercy,

hear us and help us.

Hear each one of us, O God, as we pray now for ourselves.

A longer period of silence.

O God, Lover of us all, in your mercy,

hear us and help us.

We remember with thanksgiving those who have died in faith. As you equipped them, equip us with your protection and power, until with them we see your salvation.

A brief silence.

O God, Eternal One, in your mercy,

hear us and help us.

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

If you have a hymnal, you might now sing or read "Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 836); "Where Charity and Love Prevail" (Evangelical Lutheran Worship 359). Links to hymns in the public domain are provided below.

[Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee](#)

Then conclude with these prayers:

Let us pray.

A brief silence is kept before the prayer.

We thank you, O God, for your life-giving Word,
for calling creation into being,
declaring forgiveness from the cross,
and delivering the spirit of rebirth.

We praise you, O God, for your Word:

we praise you, O God, for your Word.

Your word is a lamp lighting our path,
a mirror reflecting our selves,
a shield providing us refuge,
a fire burning for justice and truth.

Your word is sweeter than honey:

it nourishes our bodies like milk,
it sustains your people like bread.
We receive your promises, more treasured than gold.
We bless you, O God, for your Word:

we bless you, O God, for your Word.

Open our ears to your prophets, apostles, and saints,
and to all the cries of the needy.

Breathe into your church the mighty Spirit of Christ,
that heeding your voice of beauty and power
we are strengthened to serve wherever we are called.

To you, Father, Son, and Spirit – the Source, Word, and Breath —
we offer our thanks for your life-giving Word:

we offer our thanks for your life-giving Word.

Amen.

Amen.

Offering

Please remember to mail in your offerings so that Grace can continue to serve you.

Offering Prayer

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things. You have set before us these gifts of your good creation. Prepare us for your heavenly banquet, nourish us with this rich food and drink, and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world, through the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Then speak the Blessing:

Mothering God,
Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life.

Amen.

Devotional Music Links: For your individual or group devotion, you may choose to listen to the following choral recordings made available through Augsburg Fortress: "[Here is Love,](#)" "[Jesus Calls Us.](#)"

Readings for the Week:

Monday Psalm 116:65-72. **Tuesday** Romans 13:1-7. **Wednesday** (commemoration of Peter Claver, priest, missionary to Colombia, died 1654) Matthew 21:18-22. **Thursday** Psalm 103:[1-7] 8-13. **Friday** Genesis 41:53—42:17. **Saturday** Matthew 6:7-15. **Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost** (commemoration of John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, died 407) Genesis 50:15-21; Psalm 103:[1-7] 8-13; Romans 14:1-12; Matthew 18:21-35.

Daily Prayer Resources are available, including simple forms of Morning, Evening, and Night Prayer; Responsive Prayer; and prayers for mealtimes and other occasions.

Due to copyright restrictions, we are only able to provide downloadable hymns that are in the public domain. Other suggestions provided above may be found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. To purchase a copy of *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* for the home, visit the [Augsburg Fortress website](#) or call 1-800-328-4648.

Reflection text: Gordon Lathrop. Intercessory Prayer: Gail Ramshaw

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Please keep in your prayers this week: Kevin Johnson, Barbara Metzger, Rob Johnson and Steve Lindberg (Streeter Family Friend's & Kin), Noah Klenken (Fred Fixsen's Nephew), Cal Curtis & Patty Thompson (Carole Holten's Son-in-Law & Sister), Bill Warner, David Warner, Emily (Ben & Casey's Daughter), Terry Newgard, Judy Winges.

- ✓ **New Bishop for the Synod is Amy Odgren, taking office on 1 November.**
- ✓ **Flu Shots will be given here at Grace on October 22, 9:00 – 11:00. They are requesting a sign-up sheet, just to enable us to spread time to enable to keep the 6' distance. Also asking for participants to wear mask.**

Pastor Bill Sass – Sermon for Sunday, August 30, 2020

THE LURE OF THE EASY WAY

Matthew 16: 21-28

I like the story of the young man eager to make it to the top, who went to a well-known millionaire businessman, and asked him the first reason for his success. The businessman answered without hesitation, "Hard work." After a lengthy pause, the young man asked, "What is the SECOND reason?"

We want to deal with the lure of the easy way. Jesus and his disciples were at Caesarea Philippi. Their ministry had been a stunning success. Crowds pressed in on them everywhere they went. People eagerly reached out to touch this young teacher from Nazareth. The disciples themselves were caught up in the excitement of it all. Jesus asked them, "Who do you say I am?" and Simon Peter answered enthusiastically, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" It was one of the most dramatic moments in the disciples' pilgrimage with Jesus.

Then Jesus changed the subject. He began to tell them the crowds would soon turn against Him. He would be crucified, on the third day He would be raised. The disciples didn't know what to make of all this. Simon Peter took Jesus aside: "Forbid it, Lord, that these things should happen to you." Jesus' response to Simon Peter is as harsh as any words in the New Testament: "Get behind me, Satan! You are not on the side of God, but of man."

Perhaps Jesus called Simon Peter 'Satan' because of Jesus' experience in the wilderness immediately after his baptism by John. In today's parlance, it was there that Satan revealed to Jesus the way to make a million dollars in three easy steps—turn stones to bread, leap off of the pinnacle of the temple, "bow down and worship me!" I see Satan not as a red-caped figure with a pitch fork but dressed in a \$400 suit and offering instant success, instant glamor, instant gratification. We can see Satan almost anywhere today. Jesus encountered him this time in Simon Peter: "Forbid it Lord, that you should have to suffer, and die."

If there is any doubt Jesus is resisting the lure of the easy way, listen to the words that follow: "If any man would be my disciple, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me."

Many of us today are making the mistake of following the easy way. We see it in our family life. Homes are disintegrating because a father or a mother decides one day that enough is enough, and simply walks out. To be sure, being a parent is hard work.

We can also see the desire to follow the easy way in the church. One fellow said to another, "Say, I heard you bought a new car. How did you ever afford it?" The other fellow replied, "I just cancelled my church pledge." The first one said, "Gee, I wish I could buy a new car for so little." We are devotees of the easy way even though everyone knows TWO IMPORTANT TRUTHS.

THE FIRST IS THE PATH TO PERSONAL SUCCESS IS SELF DENIAL. Zig Ziglar tells of visiting the Washington monument. As he and his party approached the monument, he heard a guide announcing loudly there would be a two-hour wait to ride the elevator to the top of the monument. However, with a smile on his face, the guide then said, "There is no waiting if you are willing to take the stairs." Successful people know there is no limit to what a healthy, reasonably intelligent person can accomplish if willing to "climb the stairs." The opportunity is there for anyone willing to pay the price.

Success in life requires a willingness to resist the lure of the easy way. A sound body requires that we exercise, eat the right foods, conquer bad habits. A sound mind requires that we read, that we observe, that we continually learn. A sound marriage requires that each partner goes into it with the understanding that marriage is not a 50/50 proposition, but a 70/30 one in which both parties give the 70. A sound family means we will take time to be sensitive to the needs of children, that we provide not only for physical needs, but emotional and spiritual needs as well. Such goals require sacrifice, perseverance, and determination. But everyone should know the path to personal success is the path of self-denial.

WE ALSO KNOW SELF DENIAL IS ESSENTIAL TO SALVATION OF THE WORLD. Our world faces some tremendous challenges. Is there no one who cares enough to act? Some cynic has said, "When the going gets tough, everyone leaves." That happened to Jesus. As the way got harder, the numbers who followed Him dwindled—until finally He died alone on Calvary. Yet, if He had been unwilling to lay down His life, the world would never have known the love of the Father.

If those early disciples had not picked up Jesus' cross, and followed after Him, we still would not know about the love. If you and I do not pick up the cross in our time—make those hard choices, and assume those difficult responsibilities—our children's children will still not know the old, old story of Jesus and His love.

You may know the thrilling story of Glen Cunningham, a young man whose legs were so badly burned as a boy that doctors said he would never walk again. However, this determined champion went on to win an Olympic gold medal as a miler. Even more importantly, Glen Cunningham devoted his life to helping troubled young people. Once his wife asked, "Glen, why do we have to give so much more than others? No one else is doing what we are." Glen answered, "That's the reason, Ruth. No one else is doing it."

Richard Leakey, the famous archeologist who worked in northern Kenya, discussed in his book *PEOPLE OF THE LAKE* what separates man from the great apes. It is not man's intelligence, says Leakey, but his generosity. Only human beings love the ability to share. Only human beings are capable of genuine compassion. Only human beings are capable of laying down their lives for a friend. As did Dale Wayrynen, who threw himself on a hand grenade in the Vietnam War. He sacrificed his life for his fellow soldiers. When it comes to taking up the cross of self-denial, however, many of us have not discovered our humanity. If we don't care what happens to this world, who will? If we don't feed the hungry, who will? If we don't shelter the homeless, who will? If we don't tell the world about Christ, who will?

I recall the words of General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, and a friend to the down-and-out. Three months before his death, he wrote: "While women weep as they do now—I'll fight; while little children go hungry as they do now—I'll fight; while men go to prison, in and out,, in and out, as they do now—I'll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets, while there remains one dark soul without the light of God—I'll fight—I'll fight to the very end."

Can you imagine General Booth writing a book entitled *LOOKING OUT FOR NUMBER ONE*? What has happened to us? "If any man or woman would be my disciple," Jesus says to us, "Let him deny himself, and take up the cross and follow me." That is the word we desperately need to hear. It is a call, as M. Scott Peck would phrase it, to "a road less travelled." In Zig Ziglar's analogy, it is the lonely stairs, as opposed to the crowded elevator. Or as Jesus Himself once said, it is the narrow way that only a committed few will pursue.

How about you? The road to personal success is the road of self-denial. Any worth-while self-help book will tell you that. Self-denial is also essential to the salvation of the world.

The story is told of a worker in an inner-city mission who had given many years in a most discouraging ministry. A friend came to him one day and said, "Why don't you leave this job, before you are broken by its inhuman burden? Why don't you run away from it all?" The man replied, "There are times when I would very much like to leave it all. But there is a loving man on a cross that won't let me."

Jesus said, "If anyone would be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." That is His call to your life, and mine, today. Can He count on you? Will you join the company of the committed? Will you take up your cross today?

AMEN!

Pastoral Message for September 2, 2020

Last week I was watching "outnumbered" at noon on Fox News Channel. The host is Harris Faulkner. She was at KSTP-TV, channel 5, in St. Paul until about five years ago. You may have seen her, too. Harris is more than equal to the task.

Her guest last week was U.S. Representative Emmanuel Cleaver of Kansas City, MO. Before going to Congress some years ago, he was mayor of Kansas City.

Now he is also a member of the Black Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives. Ms. Faulkner asked him to comment on race relations in America. Rep. Cleaver was more than equal to the task too.

He said several memorable observations. First, he criticized all the riots and looting instead of peaceful protests. He remarked that the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led protests only in the daytime, not at night. So much destruction occurs under the cover of darkness, as with other crimes.

Second, Rep. Cleaver said calling someone a "racist" stops open and honest communication between people. While he may think someone is racist, he refrains from calling that name because it is counter-productive. He's wise in holding his tongue. Self-control is important in all walks of life.

I feel somewhat of a kinship to Rep. Emmanuel Cleaver. I campaigned for him when he ran for office in Kansas City about 1974, when I was a part-time student at the Methodist St. Paul School of Theology there. I recall a T.V. station mistakenly referred to him as Eldridge Cleaver, who was prominent in the news then. Big difference.

How I wish, hope, and pray all Americans could and would be kind and civil to one another. But sin enters in. Someone in Palisade recently asked me if these are the "end times" spoken of in the Bible. I replied that I'm not sure – only God the Father knows for certain. In the meantime, I will keep on doing what I can for God's Kingdom to come, whenever it does.

Oh yes, it's good to worship together again. It's not exactly the way it was before, but it's a step or two in the right direction. If you need to stay home yet, I understand. Thanks for keeping in touch with these mid-week messages and Sunday sermons.

Peace, Pastor Bill Sass