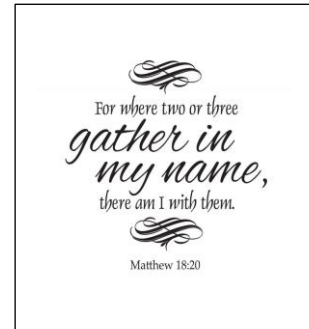


Faith Lutheran Church, First Presbyterian Church, Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Sunday, September 6, 2020
14th Sunday after Pentecost



Gathering

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

Amen.

Call to Confession

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation.

Amen.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Prayer of Confession *(please join in confessing our sins)*

Faithful God, have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from Your loving embrace and go our own ways. We pass judgment on one another before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before those of our neighbors. We keep Your gift of salvation to ourselves. Make us humble, cast away our transgressions, and turn us again to life in You through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Declaration of Forgiveness

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through His death and resurrection, Christ has made us His own. Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Opening Prayer

Please join me in 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.

Readings and Psalm

- **Ezekiel 33:7-11** *The prophet's responsibility to warn the people*
- **Psalm 119:33-40** *I desire the path of Your commandments. (Ps. 119:35)*
- **Romans 13:8-14** *Live honorably as in the day*

The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 18:15-20

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.

Sermon

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Former President Ronald Reagan once said, “Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.”

It’s hard to avoid conflict in our lives. Probably the *only* way to totally avoid conflict is to avoid people. Some may think that would be an ideal situation but it isn’t very practical, is it? Can a person avoid contact with *any* other human being 100% of the time? I suppose it can happen – if one is living off the grid in a remote area of the world. But would they ever *miss* civilization?

Over these past five-plus months, I’d venture to say most of us have had enough of social distancing and the limitations we have had to put in place on who we are around. I know I have. Most humans crave some sort of interaction with another human. Sometimes it may be worth taking a risk even if there is the slightest chance of conflict arising from the interaction.

Our gospel reading for today talks about conflict. Sin. And it uses the example of someone who wrongs you in the church but it’s a good teaching to use in our everyday life.

Jesus explains that, if someone sins against you, go and talk with them in private. If you can resolve the issue, great. If not, take one or two others with you as witnesses to the conversation. If that doesn’t work, then tell the church about the sin. And if *that* doesn’t work, well, it’s time to cut ties with that person. “‘Let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector,’ says Jesus.” Honestly, it is a bit odd that Jesus would say that, don’t you think? I mean, Jesus healed Gentiles, and Matthew was a tax collector before Jesus called him to be one of His disciples.

Conflict happens in our homes, our workplaces, our communities, and, yes, our churches. Church members disagree over what color the carpet should be or whether the chairs should be in rows or a circle. Should we go modern and put up a television or screen or use other media resources? Should we purchase a new organ or piano? Should we resume services yet or not? The service is too long. The service is too short. And the list goes on. (2)

Please know that I'm not making light of these topics. Members are very passionate people with differing opinions - just like everyone else.

It is difficult when church members disagree. It is difficult because we are more than just individuals that show up in a building. We become a community. We *are* a community of believers.

We come together to worship and praise the Triune God. We come together to pray with one another and to nurture one another's spirit. We come together to discuss, listen for, and discern God's will for our lives. We come together to find common ways to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ out into the world. We come together to celebrate our diversities and promote peace and justice in the world. We come together to fellowship with Sisters and Brothers in Christ – *our* community, Christ's community. And we do all this in the name of Jesus.

So, when church members disagree, the community of believers suffers.

Jesus knew this would happen. He knew that disagreements would occur and gave practical advice: talk to one another. And if that doesn't work, take reinforcements. And then if that doesn't work, well, we know what Jesus said.

Jesus realizes how important the community is. Christ knows how difficult life can be and the struggles we face. He knows that it is necessary to have a community of believers that one can turn to, lean on, and pray with. That's why he encourages us to *continue* having a conversation. To talk it out. To not just give up.

Many congregations around the country, including my two in Newberry, have not resumed in-person worship services yet. Other churches in our community have, including my congregation in the Soo. While every congregation and its leadership must determine what is best for their flock, I think it is safe to say we all wonder what our churches will be like when we resume in-person services.

We *know* that there will be some changes. We know that masks are required, social distancing is required, there will be no singing or celebrating Holy Communion yet, and the list goes on.

But what will our church be like? What will our community of believers be like?

I pray that there will be much joy when we gather together again.

I pray that, even though we won't be able to see each other's entire face, we will recognize the smile in one another's eyes, the passion in our expressions.

I pray that, even though we won't be able to physically hug or share the Peace, the gestures are there in our hearts.

I pray that, even though we struggle sometimes and we disagree, we unite as one body together in Christ, who formed a community around His message and cross, who is always in the midst of us.

Gathering together as one community, as Sisters and Brothers in Christ, brings such joy to our Creator. God delights in knowing we gather together to give God thanks and praise. So, we must continue to talk. We must continue to have conversations that unite us as one. For in doing so, *we* strengthen the community of Christ. **Amen.**

Blessing

And now, may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (*Philippians 4:7*)

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

Unite Your church, O God. Grant us the gifts of repentance and reconciliation. Bless the cooperative work of churches in our communities. Strengthen ecumenical partnerships; guide the work of the Lutheran World Federation, the Presbyterian Mission, and the World Council of Churches.

Protect Your creation, O God. Teach us ways that do not harm what You have entrusted to our care. Renew and enliven places suffering from drought, flood, storms, or pollution

Turn nations and leaders from ways that lead to death. Shape new paths toward peace and cooperation, teaching us to recognize one another as neighbors. Guide legislators, civil servants, judges, and police toward laws that protect the well-being of all.

Tend to all in need of Your compassion. Hear the cries of those awaiting justice and those yearning for forgiveness. Give community to the lonely and neighbors to the outcast. Shelter all who are vulnerable in body, mind, or spirit. We pray for those we ask special blessings upon, naming them in our hearts, our minds and with our voices....(please name your prayer concerns).

Sustain us in our work, O God, and give work 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.

We give You thanks for the gift of reason and the opportunity for education. Bless our schools, that they may be places of learning and safety where teachers challenge the minds and nurture the hearts of students. Grant that teachers and students may work together in mutual respect and find joy in the challenges of academic life.

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.

All these things and whatever else You see that we need, we entrust to Your mercy; through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Our Lord's Prayer

I invite you to join in praying the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us...

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

Offering

It is generally at this time during the service that worshipers are invited to share their gifts for the Mission and Ministry of the church. Whether you choose to pause at this time or make your contribution following this service, we encourage you to continue your support of the ministry.

Offertory Prayer *(please join in 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

Benediction

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you. May the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace; in the name of God the Father, God the Son+, and God the Spirit that makes us one. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Remember the poor.

Thanks be to God.

Sources:

www.presbyterianmission.org

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