**Our Redeemer Lutheran Church Prospect Heights, IL**

**3rd Sunday after Pentecost Sunday, June 21, 2020**

HYMN: “Today Your Mercy Calls Us”  *LSB 915*

1 Today Your mercy calls us
 To wash away our sin.
However great our trespass,
 Whatever we have been,
However long from mercy
 Our hearts have turned away,
Your precious blood can wash us
 And make us clean today.

2 Today Your gate is open,
 And all who enter in
Shall find a Father’s welcome
 And pardon for their sin.
The past shall be forgotten,
 A present joy be giv’n,
A future grace be promised,
 A glorious crown in heav’n.

3 Today our Father calls us;
 His Holy Spirit waits;
His blessèd angels gather
 Around the heav’nly gates.
No question will be asked us
 How often we have come;
Although we oft have wandered,
 It is our Father’s home.

4 O all-embracing Mercy,
 O ever-open Door,
What should we do without You
 When heart and eye run o’er?
When all things seem against us,
 To drive us to despair,
We know one gate is open,
 One ear will hear our prayer.

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**INVOCATION**

Pastor: In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**People: Amen.**

**CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION**

Pastor: We come before the Lord this day to be strengthened in faith and to be witnesses of righteousness and truth before a hostile world. Let us first confess our own sinfulness, that we receive mercy, grace, and forgiveness from God.

**People: Most merciful God, we confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean. We have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We justly deserve Your present and eternal punishment. For the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in Your will and walk in Your ways to the glory of Your holy name. Amen.**

Pastor: Upon this, your confession, I, by virtue of my office as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God to all of you. And in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**People: Amen.**

**KYRIE** *(spoken responsively)*

Pastor: In peace let us pray to the Lord.

**People:** **Lord, have mercy.**

Pastor: For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

**People:** **Lord, have mercy.**

Pastor: 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.

**People:** **Lord, have mercy.**

Pastor: For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

**People: Lord, have mercy.**

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

**People:** **Amen.**

**SALUTATION AND PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

Pastor: Let us pray, Loving God, since You have called us by the light of Your truth to let that light shine through us to the world, give us the boldness, love, and strength to be Your faithful witnesses, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**People: Amen.**

**OLD TESTAMENT READING** *Jeremiah 20:7–13* (Jeremiah’s complaint)

7O LORD, you have deceived me,

and I was deceived;

you are stronger than I,

and you have prevailed.

I have become a laughingstock all the day;

everyone mocks me.

8For whenever I speak, I cry out,

I shout, “Violence and destruction!”

For the word of the LORD has become for me

a reproach and derision all day long.

9If I say, “I will not mention him,

or speak any more in his name,”

there is in my heart as it were a burning fire

shut up in my bones,

and I am weary with holding it in,

and I cannot.

10For I hear many whispering.

Terror is on every side!

“Denounce him! Let us denounce him!”

say all my close friends,

watching for my fall.

“Perhaps he will be deceived;

then we can overcome him

and take our revenge on him.”

11But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior;

therefore my persecutors will stumble;

they will not overcome me.

They will be greatly shamed,

for they will not succeed.

Their eternal dishonor

will never be forgotten.

12O LORD of hosts, who tests the righteous,

who sees the heart and the mind,

let me see your vengeance upon them,

for to you have I committed my cause.

13Sing to the LORD;

praise the LORD!

For he has delivered the life of the needy

from the hand of evildoers.

Lector: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**EPISTLE** *Romans 6:12–23* (Slaves to righteousness)

12Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. 14For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

15What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, 18and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. 19I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

20When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. 21But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. 22But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. 23For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Lector: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**VERSE** *Matthew 10:32*

Pastor: Alleluia. Everyone who acknowledges Me before men,

**People: I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven. Alleluia.**

**HOLY GOSPEL** *Matthew 10:5a, 21–33* (Do not be afraid.)

Pastor: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the tenth chapter.

**People: Glory to You, O Lord.**

5These twelve Jesus sent out, instructing them, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans,

21“Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death,

22and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. 23When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next, for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes.

24“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

26“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. 28And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 31Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. 32So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, 33but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

Pastor: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**People: Praise to You, O Christ.**

**HYMN OF THE DAY** **“Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus”** *LSB 685*

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.

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**SERMON**

            **Despite the silly joke I’m about to tell you about church growth, Jesus was a wise and competent leader, as the passage of scripture we read today from the Gospel of Matthew shows. But here’s the joke: Church growth must not matter much. After all, Jesus started out with 12 and ended with 11. I told you it was silly.**

**The first part of the 10th chapter of Matthew, which we didn’t read, shows Jesus gathering his original 12 disciples together and preparing them to go out and preach the Good News to the people he calls “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” At least for the moment, he asks the Twelve to ignore preaching to the Gentiles and Samaritans. Presumably, he’ll get to them. As, of course, he and his followers do.**

**But what is the Good News he asks the Twelve to proclaim? Is it that Jesus has come to die for their sins? Or that if they declare that Jesus is their personal Lord and Savior they’ll go directly to heaven, not needing to pass “Go” or collect $200 on the way? Certainly, Christ’s life, death, and resurrection are the good news of the Gospel.**

**But in Matthew chapter 10, Jesus tells His disciples to go and proclaim: “The kingdom of heaven has come near.” The kingdom has come near in the compassionate, loving, caring, just and merciful, work of Christ and His followers. On the day when God’s kingdom fully comes such values will reign supreme.**

            Jesus warns the disciples that he’s sending them out **“like sheep in the midst of wolves,”** which itself doesn’t sound much like good news. But then, starting with the passage we’re focusing on, he tells them to have no fear. Their job, he tells them, is to shout this good news from rooftops. Doesn’t that seem like a strange thing to tell them? Have you ever gone up to the top of your house to alert your neighbors to a great new restaurant, say, or to a special program at church or to the news that you have a new child or grandchild? I doubt it. If you have, I’d like to see the video.

            But let’s remember the times of Jesus. Most homes then in the land of Israel had flat rooftops. And even if it was hard to outshout the noise when you were on the narrow, often-crowded streets below, sometimes neighbors could communicate to each other from those rooftops and even be heard from quite a distance.

            So Jesus is doing what we often hear from the angels — telling people not to fear. Fear not, fear not, they repeat over and over. Jesus knows his disciples are inexperienced in what he’s asking them to do, so he’s giving them a good talk before he sends them out. He says, in effect, that they’ve taken good notes when he’s lectured to them and they should refer to them as they preach so they can tell people in public what they’ve heard from Jesus in private.

            But he tells them something much more important, something for us to focus on today, something each of us needs to remember. Jesus tells them they are of infinite value, of inestimable worth, as are all human beings.

            **“Even the hairs on your head are counted,”** he asserts. God’s eye is on the sparrow, he says, so you know he watches you. (Someone should write a song about that sometime.)

            This idea of the value of each individual is woven throughout the Bible and has become what Glenn Tinder, author of *The Political Meaning of Christianity*, calls “the spiritual center of Western politics.”2 The idea of the exalted individual is why we have a welfare system in the United States, however frail, inadequate and even sometimes incompetent that system may be. It’s why we send out the Coast Guard to rescue even one lone, unlucky or unskillful sailor. It’s one reason the cultural fight over abortion has been so harshly fought. And it’s why we as Christians are obligated not to be indifferent to the fate or condition of any other person on Earth. That person is one of God’s children, is made in God’s image, is our sister or brother and is precious in God’s sight.

            That’s part of what makes Christianity so difficult to live out. We are obligated to see the other person as a person created by God, who is valued by God and by us— even annoying people we may run into this summer on vacation. And yet we know that we simply don’t like some people, nor do some of them like us. But God doesn’t call us to like them. God calls us to love them and to remember that God counts every hair on their heads and that although God values sparrows, as Jesus tells his followers, **“you are of more value than many sparrows.”**

            What would it look like if we took Jesus seriously about loving people because God believes they’re of infinite value? Wouldn’t we listen to people better than some of us do now? And isn’t listening to people a sign of respect? And isn’t respecting someone a way of loving them?

            Wouldn’t we pay more attention to how people are wounded, where they’re hurting, what needs they have that we might supply? This doesn’t mean making people dependent on us for what they can provide for themselves, so it doesn’t mean giving what’s been called toxic charity.3 Rather, it means being sensitive to what’s keeping people from living flourishing lives, and it means looking for ways to respond to them with empathy, grace, and mercy. Sometimes it’s whole systems that block people from flourishing, and unless we fix those systems, we cannot expect individuals to overcome obstacles by themselves. That’s why we must be aware of how our systems of, say, education, employment and criminal justice are functioning, so those systems don’t crush individuals who are God’s children, who are of unimaginable worth in God’s eyes, who are our siblings. To love individuals sometimes requires a holistic picture of systems that often needlessly limit the boundaries of their lives.

            **In our passage from Matthew today, Jesus also advises his disciples to pay attention to what can kill the soul and to fear those who can destroy both body and soul. In Jewish thought, which we Christians have inherited, body and soul ultimately are not separated. It’s why we Christians have the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. It’s a bit of a mysterious doctrine in that we really don’t know what that will look like in eternity. But it suggests that the whole person is important and will be redeemed. And while we live on Earth, that means honoring people, treating people well — and doing nothing that would devalue another person.**

**That, of course, includes the body of Christ, of which each Christian is a part. We devalue that sacred body when we engage in mean-spirited disputes over belief and practice. We dishonor the body of Christ when we exclude people from it in prejudicial ways. We make a mockery of the idea of the body of Christ when we are so appallingly divided.**

**In his high priestly prayer in the 17th chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus prayed that his followers “may all be one.”**

**To people outside the church universal, do we look like *one*? When we’re divided, among other ways, into Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant branches — and when there are, within Protestantism, multiple further divisions — are we helping to answer Jesus’ prayer that we may all be one? Or, instead, are we adding to the prejudice that we’re not exactly equal in God’s sight but that some of us, depending on where we worship, are more equal than others?**

**What kind of witness is that? If Jesus prepared his disciples by teaching them that God prizes every individual, shouldn’t Christians around the world take that idea seriously? Jesus took it seriously. He didn’t worry about church growth. He worried about people whom God valued more than many sparrows.  May we do the same, in Jesus name, Amen.**

**CONFESSION OF FAITH:** *Nicene Creed*

**People: I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible.**

 **And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures and ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father. And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead, whose kingdom will have no end.**

 **And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life ✠ of the world to come. Amen.**

**PRAYER OF THE CHURCH**

O merciful Father, hear Your people as they pray in the name of Jesus on behalf of all manner and conditions of people.

Faithful God, with Your favor upon us, we pray You to help us in our fight against temptation and sin. Help us to live holy and righteous lives by the power of Your Spirit, and keep us from surrendering ourselves to the slavery from which Christ has set us free. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, with the witness of the saints before us and the courage of Your Holy Spirit within us, we pray You to help us to maintain the faithful confession and to contend for the faith in our own age as did those who confessed Christ at Augsburg. Give to all the churches of the Augsburg Confession unity of doctrine and harmony of life together under the cross of Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, give grace to those being baptized, to the catechumens in their instruction, and to all the places where Your people gather to learn Your Word. Equip us to live out the promise of our baptismal life under Your grace, and guide us to love our neighbors as You have loved us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, give healing and strength to the sick and all afflicted in body or mind, and grant to those who struggle the gift of peace of mind and heart. Hear us especially for those who have requested our prayers *[including* *\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_]* and those whom we name in our hearts now. Restore our nation and the world in health and livelihood, and preserve us from pestilence and fear. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, by Your Word and table You continue to feed and nourish Your people with all that will sustain our lives and faith. Help us to receive these gifts with faith and with repentance. Bring us to that day when all earthly divisions will cease and, united in faith, we shall be one people before Your altar. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Faithful God, sanctify us as Your people and make us bold to confess You on earth. When this earthly life is ended and we stand before You on high, grant us to hear the Savior’s acknowledgment that we are His and He is ours forever. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things, Father, and everything else for which we need, we pray You to grant us for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who died and rose and lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER** *Matthew 6:9–13*

**People:** **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.**

**CONCLUDING COLLECT**

Pastor: Lord Jesus Christ, giver and perfecter of our faith, we thank and praise You for continuing among us the preaching of Your Gospel for our instruction and edification. Send Your blessing upon the Word, which has been spoken to us, and by Your Holy Spirit increase our saving knowledge of You, that day by day we may be strengthened in the divine truth and remain steadfast in Your grace. Give us strength to fight the good fight and by faith to overcome all the temptations of Satan, the flesh, and the world so that we may finally receive the salvation of our souls; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**People: Amen.**

**BENEDICTION**

Pastor: The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look upon you with favor and ✠ give you peace. *Numbers 6:24–26*

**People: Amen.**

**HYMN** **“God of Grace and God of Glory”** *LSB* 850

1 God of grace and God of glory,
 On Your people pour Your pow’r;
Crown Your ancient Church’s story;
 Bring its bud to glorious flow’r.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
 For the facing of this hour,
 For the facing of this hour.

2 Lo, the hosts of evil round us
 Scorn the Christ, assail His ways!
From the fears that long have bound us
 Free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
 For the living of these days,
 For the living of these days.

3 Cure Your children’s warring madness;
 Bend our pride to Your control;
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
 Rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
 Lest we miss Your kingdom’s goal,
 Lest we miss Your kingdom’s goal.

4 Save us from weak resignation
 To the evils we deplore;
Let the gift of Your salvation
 Be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
 Serving You whom we adore,
 Serving You whom we adore.

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