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

**7th Sunday after Pentecost Sunday, July 19, 2020**

**AS WE GATHER**

Why must we endure the questions, the challenges, and the things that are not as they should be? The disciples long ago wondered about this too. Why are there weeds in God’s field and what can be done about it? The seed was good, but God has enemies, and so do you. It is not given to us to resolve this until the Lord’s time, when He will separate the weeds from the wheat. It is enough for us to know that God knows the hearts of people and that this tension will not endure. When Jesus comes in His glory, the angels will gather out of His kingdom all who do not belong. Then the righteous shall shine like the sun, so take heart, people of God.

**INVOCATION**

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

**People: Amen.**

**CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION**

Pastor: Give ear, O Lord, to the prayers of Your people, and listen to their cry for

mercy.

**People: You, O Lord, are a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.**

*Silence for self-examination*

Pastor: Lord of mercy,

**People: we confess that with us there is an abundance of sin, but in You there is the fullness of righteousness and an abundance of mercy. We are poor sinners whose thoughts, words, and deeds betray our weakness and death. You, O Lord, are gracious and merciful and, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, You have saved us by His blood. Give to us true repentance that we know Your forgiveness and the comfort of a clear conscience. Give us also hearts made new by Your grace, that we love You above all things and our neighbors as ourselves and, by Your Holy Spirit, do what is pleasing in Your sight. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

Pastor: Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. Through the mercy of God in Christ Jesus, our Savior, you have been made the children of God in Baptism and live because of His mercy. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**People: Amen.**

Pastor: May He who began this good work within you bring it to completion on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peace be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

**HYMN OF PRAISE:** “Sing Praise to God the Highest Good” *LSB 819*

1 Sing praise to God, the highest good,
 The author of creation,
The God of love who understood
 Our need for His salvation.
With healing balm our souls He fills
And ev’ry faithless murmur stills:
 To God all praise and glory!

2 What God’s almighty pow’r has made,
 In mercy He is keeping.
By morning glow or evening shade
 His eye is never sleeping.
Within the kingdom of His might
All things are just and good and right:
 To God all praise and glory!

3 We sought the Lord in our distress;
 O God, in mercy hear us.
Our Savior saw our helplessness
 And came with peace to cheer us.
For this we thank and praise the Lord,
Who is by one and all adored:
 To God all praise and glory!

4 He never shall forsake His flock,
 His chosen generation;
He is their refuge and their rock,
 Their peace and their salvation.
As with a mother’s tender hand,
He leads His own, His chosen band:
 To God all praise and glory!

5 All who confess Christ’s holy name,
 Give God the praise and glory.
Let all who know His pow’r proclaim
 Aloud the wondrous story.
Cast ev’ry idol from its throne,
For God is God, and He alone:
 To God all praise and glory!

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**SALUTATION AND PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

Pastor: Let us pray, O steadfast Lord, You are the great I am whose promises never fail us and in whom alone salvation is to be found. Grant to us hearts to trust in Your mercy and courage in the face of doubt and fear that we not surrender hope to darkness and faith to unbelief; 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** *Isaiah 44:6–8*

6Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel

and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:

“I am the first and I am the last;

besides me there is no god.

7Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.

Let him declare and set it before me,

since I appointed an ancient people.

Let them declare what is to come, and what will happen.

8Fear not, nor be afraid;

have I not told you from of old and declared it?

And you are my witnesses!

Is there a God besides me?

There is no Rock; I know not any.”

Lector: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**EPISTLE** *Romans 8:18–27*

18For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

26Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Lector: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**HOLY GOSPEL** *Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43*

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

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

24[Jesus] put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field,

25but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. 26So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. 27And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ 28He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ 29But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. 30Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

36Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” 37He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38The field is the world, and the good seed is the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. 41The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, 42and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Pastor: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

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

**HYMN OF THE DAY** “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less” *LSB 575*

1 My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness;
No merit of my own I claim
But wholly lean on Jesus’ name. Refrain

ref On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

2 When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In ev’ry high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil. Refrain

3 His oath, His covenant and blood
Support me in the raging flood;
When ev’ry earthly prop gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay. Refrain

4 When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found,
Clothed in His righteousness alone,
Redeemed to stand before His throne! Refrain

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**SERMON**

**Perfect Timing**

***The Lake House* is a love story that literally transcends time. The two main characters in the story, Alex and Kate, lived in the same glass-walled house on a lake at different times, two years apart. But in this fable, they are able to communicate with one another *in real time* by exchanging notes via the lake house mailbox. When they discover and believe that they are living two years apart, they develop a romantic relationship of soul-mate proportions through their correspondence. But both are wary of actually meeting because of the perplexing problem of timing that they find themselves in.**

**While Alex has chance encounters with Kate (in his “time zone”), he does not identify who he is because she’ll probably just think he’s crazy. It would just be too early. So they remain stuck in their dilemma, because the timing always seems wrong, either to one or both of them.**

**As you get involved with the story, you might be reminded of the admonition of the bride-to-be in the Song of Solomon “do not stir up or****awaken****love until it is ready!”1 Many people have paid a high price for moving too quickly, especially in matters of love.**

            Timing. How often we wonder about if and when we should take a particular action. And then, there’s God’s timing. We often hear that God’s timing is perfect. But, from a human standpoint, it does not often seem to be so. The needed miracle continues to delay its arrival. We experience losses that God could have prevented. How do we explain God’s perfect timing and sovereignty to the parents of the four vibrant, Christian young people shot to death by a disturbed man shortly before Christmas a few years ago? And the news is full of stories of innocent people, whom surely God loves, who have suffered significantly at the hands of evildoers.

            So why is it that God often seems to delay when his intervention is needed the most? When Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus was sick, he waited two more days to go see him! During that delay, Lazarus died. We know the miraculous ending of the story, but the people who were in the story, Mary and Martha, did not know how the incident was going to end. Certainly they were perplexed, confused, and perhaps even angry with Jesus’ delay.

            Can you relate? Have you ever prayed and prayed for God’s intervention, only to see nothing change?

            Jesus told a parable in today’s Gospel that may help us understand, a little better anyway, why sometimes God delays his response, especially when times are difficult, or difficult people are causing significant trouble for us.

            This story is commonly known as the parable of the weed among the wheat. In it, Jesus tells of a farmer who planted good, healthy seeds in his field, hoping for a bumper crop of nutritious wheat. But while the landowner and his servants slept, a malicious enemy came in and sowed weeds among the wheat. The diabolical act was not discovered for several weeks. It became obvious only when noxious weeds began to sprout intermingled with the good plants.

            Scholars have speculated that Jesus might have had a weed in mind called “the bearded darnel,” a type of rye grass whose seeds are poisonous to consume. The plant looks amazingly like wheat until the ear appears; only then can someone distinguish between the phony wheat and the real thing. The bearded darnel grows copiously in the Middle East, so it’s easy to gather the seeds for this agricultural weapon.

            In any case, when the servants discover the sabotage, they ask the landowner if they should go and pull all the weeds. He, however, tells them to wait until the harvest, because pulling the weeds would likely also uproot the wheat. They should wait until it’s time to actually harvest the grain, when the wheat has completed its growth cycle.

            So, in order to enable his crop to reach maturity, the landowner delays in responding to the act of sabotage against him and his servants.

            Later in this same chapter from Matthew, Jesus interpreted the parable for his disciples. He explained that the field is the world (and the cultures within the world). The good seed are those who have been reconciled with God. The weeds are “the children of the evil one,” that is, people committed (either consciously or unconsciously) to destroying that which God holds precious. The enemy in the story is the devil, and the servants represent the angels of god, who seem to be chomping at the bit to clear the fields of God of all this wickedness, but who wait in obedience to the Lord’s command.

            At the end of the age, when it becomes clear (by the fruit they bear) who belongs to God, and who does not, then, and only then, are the angels of God allowed to intervene. In a drastic and decisive way, they will separate the imposters from the harvest and cast them into the fire, and then gather those who have borne fruit for the kingdom to spend eternity glorifying God.

            Throughout church history, many Christians have seemed to jump the gun on the harvest, trying to pull out the “weeds” with disastrous results. The infamous Spanish Inquisition was created to “weed out” the infidels in the churches of its day. All it did was coerce false confessions of heresy, and cost innocent people their lives. Much the same could be said of the Salem Witch trials. The elimination of these supposed “weeds” only ended up tearing the hearts out of those who were following God and waiting on him. All we’re left with, from these premature and vengeful acts, are very dark periods in the history of the church.

            What we can learn from this parable that is useful to our lives, however, pertains to those times when God appears to delay, when it seems that he could intervene and take care of our problems (and punish those who cause them), but does not.

            The parable suggests that God has chosen, in his sovereignty, to allow evil and good to co-exist until the end of the age.

            Perhaps one reason is that there are certain types of spiritual growth that can only occur in the presence of evil, and only then, in the context of spiritual warfare. It’s often during such times that God brings people into our lives who reflect certain aspects of his character we need to be reminded of (for example, they model God’s compassion, protection, provision, empathy or acceptance). Sometimes it’s only when we see and experience the powers of darkness that we become sufficiently motivated to seek out the help of Spirit-filled people and the power and grace of God reflected through them.

            We don’t want to say this too glibly. It’s altogether too easy for a person who is not suffering to turn to someone who is suffering and say, “Be patient; God is teaching you something.” Right. Easy for you to say. What’s more, many people who live with pain would gladly sacrifice any potential spiritual growth to find relief. And for some sufferers, pain and troubles, rather than fostering growth, bring only bitterness, anger and resentment.

            But part of what makes Jesus the right Savior of the world is the fact that he suffered as we have. We are told in Hebrews that Jesus learned obedience through suffering,2 and we should expect no less for ourselves. This is not to say that God purposely sends troubles and agony to us to teach us lessons. But when it is a choice between our not suffering and our growing more into the image of Christ, perhaps God allows the growth over the elimination of pain because the eternal results are so important. This may also be the reason why God does not always act as quickly as we would wish.

            Know this, however: During our pain, God suffers with us, for he loves us so much that he can never be simply a passive observer of our pain.

            **During times of trial, we can learn something about “waiting on the Lord.” This does not mean rejecting perfectly good relief and expecting God to intervene instead. Rather, waiting on the Lord, especially as it’s described by the psalmists, Isaiah and Jeremiah, means living our lives in the expectation of God’s triumph and trusting his care for us. Waiting on the Lord can be a surprising time of renewal and trust-building, a period of spiritual sweetness we cannot experience under any other circumstances. After we’ve done all we legitimately can, and then finally leave matters in God’s hands, we can find rest and peace in the Lord.**

**Waiting on the Lord of the harvest to act in his own perfect time can be an unexpectedly wonderful time of worship, peace and rest, even in the most difficult and trying of circumstances. May God Bless and keep us as we wait for Him and His timing, today and always, 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**

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

Almighty God, we are too quick to judge Your ways and too bold to presume upon Your wisdom. Grant us grace so that we may trust in Your Word and fulfill our baptismal vocation of worship, witness, prayer and works of mercy, both to our families and to our neighbors in need. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Blessed Lord, we are stewards of Your creation, but we have often squandered its goodness and wasted its resources. Guide us to use wisely and for the benefit of all people the fruits of this good earth, and preserve its goodness for those to come. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Lord, we enjoy great freedom and blessing in our land. Bless Donald, our president; the Congress of these United States; \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, our governor; and all those who make, judge and administer laws in our land. Give them wisdom in their actions for the protection of life and livelihood. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we give You thanks for the gift of health, which we must never take for granted. Hear our prayers on behalf of the sick, the aged, the infirm, those who mourn and those near death. Grant them healing in accord with Your will and grace to sustain them in their need. Hear us especially for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy Lord, we too easily forget those in nursing homes, assisted living and the homebound. Give us grace so that we may bring them Your consolation and peace, and give them the aid and comfort of Your Word and our fellowship in Christ. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, we are wounded by the sufferings of this life, and we need Your grace to sustain us in hope and equip us with patience. Give to us all that we need to pass through the day of trouble and be found faithful when Christ comes in His glory at the Last Day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gentle Lord, we ask You to visit the homes of Your people, that they may be places of blessing and love, where faith is nurtured and we learn to live out our new lives in holiness and righteousness all the days of our lives. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, hear us on behalf of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Grant that what we pray for, we may work toward, under the guidance of Your Holy Spirit, that at the Day of Judgment we may be found worthy to join the saints and enter into Your gift of eternal light and life forevermore; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. **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.**

**BENEDICAMUS AND BENEDICTION**

Pastor: Let us bless the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

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.

**People: Amen.**

**DISMISSAL**

Pastor: Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**HYMN** “Crown Him with Many Crowns” *LSB 525*

1 Crown Him with many crowns,
 The Lamb upon His throne;
Hark how the heav’nly anthem drowns
 All music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
 Of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless king
 Through all eternity.

2 Crown Him the virgin’s Son,
 The God incarnate born,
Whose arm those crimson trophies won
 Which now His brow adorn:
Fruit of the mystic rose,
 Yet of that rose the stem,
The root whence mercy ever flows,
 The babe of Bethlehem.

3 Crown Him the Lord of love.
 Behold His hands and side,
Rich wounds, yet visible above,
 In beauty glorified.
No angels in the sky
 Can fully bear that sight,
But downward bend their wond’ring eyes
 At mysteries so bright.

4 Crown Him the Lord of life,
 Who triumphed o’er the grave
And rose victorious in the strife
 For those He came to save.
His glories now we sing,
 Who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring
 And lives that death may die.

5 Crown Him the Lord of heav’n,
 Enthroned in worlds above,
Crown Him the king to whom is giv’n
 The wondrous name of Love.
Crown Him with many crowns
 As thrones before Him fall;
Crown Him, ye kings, with many crowns,
 For He is king of all.

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**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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