**MODIFIED SERVICE FOR THE 7TH WEEK OF EASTER, MAY 24, 2020**

**ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH, PHILIPSBURG**

Welcome to everyone on this 7th Sunday of Easter. We give thanks that we can gather today in spirit and faith with one another from the comfort and safety of our homes. It was wonderful to see the sunshine this week, warmer temperatures are on the way! I know lots of you have been busy in your flowerbeds and gardens. Enjoy this time.

Reta is home recuperating from the hospital and feeling better each day, we will remember her in our prayers this morning.

Just a reminder that if there is anyone you would like to include on our prayer list, please call or email me, or send an email through the website.

The worship Committee will be meeting this week online, if there is something you would like to see in our modified worship service or if you have a favourite hymn you would like to hear please just send an email.

Please remember that Zion relies on your continued support each week to meet our monthly expenses. Our PAR application and instructions are now found on Zion’s website for those who may be interested. Thank you to all who support and pray for our congregation.

**GREETING**

Alleluia, Christ is risen!

**Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**OPENING HYMN- “Blest Be The Tie That Binds”- ELW 656**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

O God of glory, your Son Jesus Christ suffered for us and ascended to your right hand. Unite us with Christ and each other in suffering and in joy, that all the world may be drawn into your bountiful presence, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**SECOND READING: 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11**

A reading from 1 Peter.

12Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. 14If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.  
5:6Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. 7Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. 8Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. 9Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. 10And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. 11To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.

The word of the Lord.

**GOSPEL: John 17:1-11**

The holy gospel according to John.

1After Jesus had spoken these words [to his disciples], he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. 4I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.  
  6“I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**SERMON**

Every year there is an event in the United States called the Festival of Homiletics. This event invites pastors, seminary students, and theologians from all over the world to join for a week of learning, fellowship, and listening to some of the best preachers, storytellers, and activists that the world has to offer. It is like Woodstock or Boots and Hearts for pastors! The festival was to be held in Atlanta, Georgia this year until the pandemic hit. Rather then cancel the event the organizers decided to offer it online and they made it free so that all could attend. Talk about making lemons into lemonade! So last week I along with thousands of other folks sat at our laptops, tablets and computers and listened and learned together from the safety of our homes and offices. The original theme of the week was climate change, but the effects of the pandemic were also prevalent.

The preachers and storytellers were from many denominations throughout North America, there were Baptists, Methodists, United Church of Christ, Anglicans, Lutherans, and more. Their styles all varied but each were passionate and dedicated to preaching the word of God in these strange and uncertain times. It came as no surprise to me that many of the sermons contained moments of questioning and even misery, there were many moments of deeply personal laments to God asking why there is so much suffering going on in the world.

Our Epistle reading from 1st Peter this morning is a letter composed for multiple congregations of Gentile Christians in antiquity, (Gentile meaning non-Jewish). Scholars believe that the letter was probably written by Jesus’ faithful disciple Peter or one of his followers in the later years of the first century. The letter was written to encourage and motivate the congregations during the challenging times they were facing. These Gentile Christians faced persecution and harassment in living out their newfound Christian faith, they were considered aliens and exiles and their familial ties were cut.

Throughout history humans have suffered. There have been wars and genocides, famines and holocausts, hatred and racism, terrorism and injustice, illness and disease; sadly, the list could go on and on. The recent pandemic has thrown us into isolation and physical distancing; we cannot attend worship together, loved ones are getting sick, the world is struggling economically, we hear numbers rise and fall each day; it is overwhelming. Covid-19 has exposed the cracks in our health care system especially in our long-term care homes and in the shortage of available PPE. And while the pandemic carries on there is also much other suffering that place in our vast world. Right now, massive swarms of locusts are devastating crops in Africa and the Middle East. In some cases, 100% of the crops have been destroyed. There were already immense food shortages before the swarms arrived. What will these folks do for food? In India and Bangladesh super cyclone Amphen made landfall earlier this week with winds reaching 190 KM per hour. More than 2.5 million citizens have been evacuated. In Michigan two dams broke due to heavy rainfall. Cities and town are underwater and over 10,000 people were evacuated. All of this is happening during the pandemic. The words of 1st Peter 5:9 certainly seem to ring true today, “for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.” It weighs us down with worry and fear, where is God? Where is the grace and hope of Jesus Christ amidst the suffering that is taking place?

We can read Peter’s letter with fear and trepidation or we can read the letter with an understanding of hope and faith. Assistant Professor Jennifer Kaalund suggests that “suffering has the potential to both harm and transform.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Jesus Christ died on the cross because he was trying to transform corrupt and oppressive systems, he stood for those who could not walk on their own and for those who had no voice, he fought the injustices of the world and showed one how to love their neighbour unconditionally like the love that is received from God. Jesus suffered to help us see that eternal life does not just happen in the future, eternal life is the opportunity to know God right now, right here in the present through our actions of grace, kindness, empathy, and justice to name a few. To know God is to be in community and relationship with God and with one another, it is to glorify one another, right here, right now.

Peter through his faith and relationship with Jesus Christ encourages the congregation and us with three instructions on how to live with suffering in our lives. The first is to act with humility, we can trust that God is with us in these times, that our suffering has a voice and that we do not need to suffer in silence. We do not know all the answers and that is okay. We can cast all our anxieties on God knowing that we are held in God’s loving arms when we pray and ask for God’s help.

The second is to act with discipline, for the lion is roaring nearby. Discipline does not necessarily mean punishment, discipline is getting up in the morning and going for a walk, or improving that golf game by practising your putting skills, discipline is making a point to call one another on the phone to check-in, it is donating to causes where one can make a difference be it large or small. Discipline is praying for each other, it is reading the Bible, it is reflecting and learning more about your faith. Discipline is loving one another is loving one another enough to stay six feet apart or wear a mask in confined areas.

Three is resistance in knowing that being steadfast in our faith and love for God we can know and live out the work of Jesus Christ in the world. These times will not last forever, there will be suffering but there will also be great joy. We have much to look forward to and together, we can grow in the strength and love that is provided for us by a God who is the source of all life, truth, and grace that encourages us always and forever. Amen

**HYMN OF THE DAY- “Son of God, Eternal Saviour”- ELW 655**

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

On this seventh Sunday of Easter, we gather in our homes and yet together as one, praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need. Our response to each petition is, “hear our prayer”

In this time of troubling separation, we pray to you, triune God, for the unity of your churches. Bind us together in the truth of your gospel. Make us witnesses of your mysterious might. As you blessed the early disciples for their unfolding ministry, bless those who lead and serve our local congregation.

Nurture the life of your creation. Bring sun and warm rains to newly planted crops and vegetable gardens. Protect vulnerable species and lands from overuse. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Make your justice known among the nations of the earth. Protect the vulnerable and weak. Give us courage to stand up to the racism, discrimination, and harassment that is taking place in our world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Come to the aid of all who suffer. We pray for those who are laden with illness, injury, grief, or overwhelmed by anxiety. Uphold all health-care workers who attend to Covid-19 patients. Comfort all families and friends who cannot embrace their loved ones at the time of death. We give into your care those we name before you, Eddie, Elaine, Ruth, Mary Ann, Betty, Reta and those we name in the stillness of our hearts. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Grant your oneness to humankind, so marked by isolation and division. Bring harmony to families, rival gangs, distraught citizens, racial groupings, and members of our government. Give to each individual a wholeness that is birthed in you.  Make us one, as you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are one. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Raise all your saints to eternal life. Until that day, we give you thanks for the faithful examples of those who have listened to your voice and now rest in you. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

With bold confidence in your love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God of our past, our present, and our future, we place all for whom we pray into your circle of love, now and forever.  
**Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as 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.**

**BLESSING**

May the one who brought forth Jesus from the dead

raise you to new life, fill you with hope

and turn your mourning into dancing.

Almighty God, Father + Son, and Holy Spirit bless you now and forever.

**Amen**

**DISMISSAL**

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

Go in peace. Share the good news.

**Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

**SENDING HYMN “Crown Him With Many Crowns” ELW 855**

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1. Jennifer T. Kaalund, “Commentary on 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11” in *Working Preacher.org*, accessed May 23, 2020, <https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4471>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)