**MODIFIED SERVICE- 8TH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST- July 26, 2020**

**ZION EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH, PHLIPSBURG**

Welcome to everyone on this 8th Sunday of Pentecost, where we gather safely from the comfort of our homes as a reminder of our love for one another.

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. Our GotoMeeting Coffee hour is today at 11:00, please join us! The Messenger will be sent out late next week. I am on holidays from Aug 1-11 but will still be available for emergency pastoral care. Please call my cell phone and leave a message. The services for the next 2 weeks are a new initiative by the Nith Valley Ministry Area, featuring many of the churches from the NVMA. These pre-recorded services will run from July 19- Sept 6, and will be available in video, audio, and paper form and found on Zion’s website and on the Facebook page. Services will also be sent out to those who have no internet. There will be no coffee hours when I am on holidays.

Please remember that Zion relies on your continued support each week to meet our monthly expenses. Thank you to all who support and pray for our congregation.

**GREETING**

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

**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. By your Spirit, give us your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**OPENING HYMN- Gather Us in- ELW 532**

**PSALM: Psalm 119:129-136**

129Your decrees are wonderful; therefore I obey them with all my heart.  
 130When your word is opened it gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.  
 131I open my mouth and pant because I long for your commandments.  
 132Turn to me and be gracious to me, as you always do to those who love your name.   
 133Order my footsteps in your word; let no iniquity have dominion over me.  
 134Rescue me from those who oppress me, and I will keep your commandments.  
 135Let your face shine upon your servant and teach me your statutes.  
 136My eyes shed streams of tears, because people do not keep your teaching.

**SECOND READING: Romans 8:26-39**

A reading from Romans.

26The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.  
  28We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.  
  31What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. 34Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”  
37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The word of the Lord.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 13:****31-33, 44-52**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

31[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;32it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”  
  33He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”  
  44“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.  
  45“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.  
  47“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; 48when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. 49So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.  
  51“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” 52And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**SERMON**

Our gospel reading today with continues Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom or reign of God, or the kingdom of heaven. When we think of a kingdom we often think of kings, queens, rulers, and power but as we know from the past couple weeks in our lectionary, Jesus uses the ordinary and everyday items found within our lives to explain the true meaning of God’s kingdom. Kings and queens are noticeably absent! Again, this week, there is a gardening or farming theme with seeds; this time it is the tiny mustard seed that grows into a bush big enough to house birds, also included is yeast, a woman who hides the yeast in the dough and prepares the bread, pearls, treasures, and fishnets full of all kinds of fish. These are ordinary and insignificant everyday occurrences and tasks in our lives, but they are important in the eyes of God and they are invaluable in understanding the kingdom of God and God’s unconditional love for humanity.

The parable that stood out to me most this week was the parable of the yeast. Perhaps it is because the baking of bread has seen a huge resurgence in these times of pandemic. Lots of folks are posting their pictures of amazing loaves of sourdough and good old-fashioned white bread fresh from their ovens. I bet some of you have been baking as well! Whereas we bake bread nowadays mostly for fun, baking bread was a staple in the homemaker’s busy day of chores.

Yeast, as we all know is what makes bread rise and leaves it with a light and fluffy texture that we all love so much. However, the yeast used in this parable is not the kind of yeast that we find on the shelf in our grocery stores today. Back then it was a small piece of leftover bread that was put aside and left to go moldy, but you had to use it at just the right time. If it were not moldy enough, the dough would not rise, if it were too moldy, it would ruin the bread and could result in food poisoning leading to a fatality in the family.

Most of the bread eaten by Jewish families was unleavened because yeast was thought to be impure and invasive. Introducing yeast to the dough contaminated the dough because it was alive, and it would spread through the bread. In biblical metaphorical terms, yeast was believed to be a corrupting moral influence. In the book of Exodus 12:15, there was a Passover ritual stating the need to get rid or cast out the old yeast or leaven, because if one ate leavened bread they would be cast out of Israel. Even in Matthew’s gospel, yeast is given a negative connotation as stated in chapter 16:6 where Jesus says to the disciples “watch out and beware of the yeast of Pharisees and Sadducees.” The activity of yeast invading the dough compares to the tendency of sin spreading within a community. So why would Jesus be using yeast as an example of the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God, if it were viewed negatively?

The woman hides the yeast in the dough, it is a small and insignificant amount. But it does not matter the amount because it is invasive, but not as a negative connotation, the yeast acts as a positive, spirited, and active presence that not only invades the flour but transforms the flour into something new. There is also an element of surprise and discovery at the small amount of yeast being added to the three measures of flour, which in today’s terms is between 50 and 80 pounds of flour which would have produced over 100 loaves of bread, enough to feed most all of the community. The woman who lovingly prepared and kneaded the dough with strong hands and muscles then let the dough rest, long enough for the yeast to do its job, long enough for it to permeate and transform the dough allowing it to rise into the shape of a loaf. The woman represents Jesus who lovingly mixed and kneaded the world and fed all through his humble acts of service and love. This is the kingdom of heaven and the reign of God; this is God at work in our lives, through the ordinary and insignificant.

The yeast that was so small and insignificant transformed the dough into something new, much like Jesus’ mission in the world. He was born a tiny babe in human flesh, born to Mary and Joseph in a lowly stable, he grew and transformed the world with the word of God offering justice, peace, and love to all he met, knowing that there was mounting opposition to the radical grace he offered. He was arrested, found guilty, and died on a cross, with his mother nearby. He was laid in a tomb but was resurrected 3 days later. He returned to send the disciples out into the world to share the good news, to share the radical love of God, to share the kingdom of heaven with everyone regardless of worth, status, or power. The presence of Jesus Christ in the world like the yeast transformed everything into something new and lifegiving. This is the kingdom of heaven; this is the reign of God!

The church in these times has also been given an opportunity to transform itself. The pandemic has opened our eyes to a new world using technology where we can continue to reach out to and worship with one another even though we are physically separated. And even though we the folks of Zion are scattered in our homes like mustard seeds on the ground, we can see the kingdom and reign of God in action when we participate in the ordinary events of our lives; in calling one another to check in and see how they are doing, in going through our cupboards and donating empty yogurt containers to hold meals for those who are homeless, or living on little income, to collecting mugs for St John’s Kitchen, to constructing a lift in the church so the building can be accessible for all. These acts of love and service may not be out of the ordinary, but we are participating in the transforming power and love of the kingdom of heaven and reign of God.

So, may we continue on in love for one another, in the vision of the radical and invasive love given to us by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. May our lives continue to be transformed by the power and hope of that love, like the love of the woman hiding the yeast that transformed the dough into bread. May we continue to be nourished and fed through the power and glory of God and may the kingdom of heaven continue to reign in our lives. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY- Be Thou My Vision- ELW 793**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C2DkJKyKYN4>

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

From our many locations, yet held in one body by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need. *A brief silence.*

Merciful God, your reign is revealed to us in common things: a mustard shrub, a woman baking bread, a fishing net. Help your church witness to the surprising yet common ways you encounter us in daily life. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

When your word is opened, it gives light and understanding. Increase our understanding and awe of your creation; guide the work of scientists and researchers. Treasuring the earth, may we live as grateful and healing caretakers of our home. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

As the birds of the air nest in branches of trees, gather the nations of the world into the welcoming shade of your merciful reign. Direct leaders of nations to build trust with each other and to resist the ways of violence. Stifle the lust for conquest. Bring peace to the Middle East. Visit the people of Hong Kong. Move us away from racist attitudes and policies. Form politicians and leaders to speak with honesty, to strive for justice, and to work to alleviate our country’s needs. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Your Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for the saints according to your will. Help us when we do not know how to pray. Give comfort to the dying, refuge to the weary, justice to those who are oppressed, and healing to the sick and injured especially Eddie, Elaine, Susie, Ruth, Mary Ann, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Beatrice, and those we name in the stillness of our hearts. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You show steadfast love and direct us to ask of you what we need. Help this congregation ask boldly for what is most needed. Refresh us with new dreams of being your people in this place and time. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In you our lives are never lost. Strengthen us by the inspiring witness of your people in all times and places. Embolden our witness now and one day gather us with all your saints in light. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

Let us pray.

Praise and thanks to you, holy God, for by your Word you made all things: you spoke light into darkness, called forth beauty from chaos, and brought life into being. For your Word of life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

By your Word you called your people Israel to tell of your wonderful gifts: freedom from captivity, water on the desert journey, a pathway home from exile, wisdom for life with you. For your Word of life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

Through Jesus, your Word made flesh, you speak to us and call us to witness: forgiveness through the cross, life to those entombed by death, the way of your self-giving love. For your Word of life, O God, **we give you thanks and praise.**

Send your Spirit of truth, O God; rekindle your gifts within us: renew our faith, increase our hope, and deepen our love, for the sake of a world in need. Faithful to your Word, O God, draw near to all who call on you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory 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**

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God the creator, + Jesus, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the comforter, bless you and keep you in eternal love. Amen.

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

**Thanks be to God.**

**SENDING HYMN- God of Grace, God of Glory- ELW 705**

From sundaysandseasons.com.

Copyright © 2020 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.