**Nith Valley Ministry Area**

**Mediated Joint Worship Service**

**September 20, 2020**

**GATHERING**

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

Welcome to Bethany Woodstock – I’m Pastor Bonnie Schelter Brown and this is our mediated joint worship of the Nith Valley Ministry Area, for Sunday, September 20, 2020 – the 16th Sunday after Pentecost.

On this 16th Sunday after Pentecost, we gather for worship around sacred words, and proclaim God’s faithfulness, power, and love. It is not only a time for worship, but also a time for of community, partnership, and building relationships with one another. Even though we may be physically distanced and isolated from one another, we are united by the power of the Holy Spirit and give thanks that we are able to share our love of God, and our time, talents, and resources together.

Our worship service today includes prayers, scripture, a sermon reflection, and music. We will also celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. If you haven’t done so already, please take a moment now to gather some bread and wine or juice into your worship space at home.

Today’s worship service will be led by our preacher, Pastor Leanne from Zion Philipsburg; our musician and reader are from Bethany Woodstock.

May you find spiritual strength and sustenance here for your week ahead. I invite you now to prepare your hearts and minds for worship.

**Prayer of Confession and Assurance**

Let us confess to our God who forgives and saves.

Gracious and loving God, you lived for us—we have not lived for you. You have forgiven us—we have not forgiven others. You have loved us—we have not loved ourselves nor have we loved one another. Forgive us, God. Help us to forgive. Help us to live for you. Help us to love through Christ our Lord. Amen.

People of God, *you are forgiven.* God is merciful and gracious and is Lord of us all. Reconciled to the God who loves us,let us live and love through Christ our Lord.

**Greeting**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

Almighty and eternal God, you show perpetual lovingkindness to us your servants. Because we cannot rely on our own abilities, grant us your merciful judgment, and

train us to embody the generosity of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

**WORD**

*God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.*

**First Reading: Jonah 3:10--4:11**

A reading from Jonah.

10When God saw what [the people of Ninevah] did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.  
 4:1But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. 2He prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. 3And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” 4And the Lord said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” 5Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.  
  6The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. 7But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. 8When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”  
  9But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” 10Then the Lord said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. 11And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

**Psalm: Psalm 145:1-8**

1I will exalt you, my God and king, and bless your name forever and ever.  
2Every day will I bless you and praise your name forever and ever.  
3Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised! There is no end to your greatness.  
 4One generation shall praise your works to another and shall declare your power.   
 5I will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty and all your marvelous works.  
 6They shall tell of the might of your wondrous acts, and I will recount your greatness.  
 7They shall publish the remembrance of your great goodness; they shall sing

joyfully of your righteousness.  
8The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

**Second Reading: Philippians 1:21-30**

21For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. 23I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; 24but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. 25Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, 26so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.  
  27Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, 28and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God’s doing. 29For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—30since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

**Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] 1“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. 5When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. 6And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ 7They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ 8When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ 9When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ 13But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are

you envious because I am generous?’ 16So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

**The gospel of our Lord.**

**Sermon**

How often have you said or heard this phrase; Hey! That’s not fair! Perhaps it was while you were growing up and your older brother or sister got to stay up late to watch that really cool show on television while you had to go to bed. Perhaps your children have used the phrase on you, to try and get what they want. Or perhaps you have even said it as an adult. Has anyone had this scenario happen…you are standing in line for what seems like forever, waiting patiently for your turn to enter, and suddenly, up walks a person who just cuts in front of you, and they walk right in? You are left muttering under your breath; Hey! That’s not fair!! I have been standing here waiting in line for an hour, they just ignore the line and walk right in!

Our gospel reading from Matthew this morning speaks to a similar scenario of fairness. There was a landowner who owned a vineyard and each morning around sunrise, he would go to the marketplace to hire day labourers. This was a customary practice in antiquity. Day labourers had no full-time work, they would go to the marketplace and wait to be hired hoping to find enough work to feed their family for the day. If they were not hired, the family would surely suffer. The owner completely agreed to pay the workers the usual daily wage of one denarius. Now for some reason the owner went back to the marketplace that day and hired more workers, maybe it was a particularly busy day, maybe all of the grapes were ready to be picked, maybe there was a storm blowing in the next day and he feared losing his crop. The owner went back to the marketplace 4 extra times to hire more workers, with the last time being just an hour before quitting time. Each time the landowner offered to pay a daily wage and whatever was right. All agreed to the wage, not knowing what the exact wage would be.

The end of the day arrived, and the manager began to pay the workers on behalf of the landowner. The landowner had asked that the last be paid first and they were each given one denarius, a full day’s wage. I wonder if they were surprised! I am sure news traveled down the line fast as each worker received a full day’s pay for not a full day of work. Finally, it was the early morning workers time to be paid. They saw that the others had gotten a full day’s wage for less time worked, perhaps they would get a bonus! The manager then handed them a single denarius, and the workers began to grumble….”Hey! That’s not fair!! We worked all day long in the hot sun, we picked your grapes for the last 12 hours and those who only worked for one hour got the same pay we did. We deserve more! That’s not fair!!”

How often do we make assumptions in our lives? After seeing what the other workers were paid, the early morning workers assumed that they would get more

money because of the hours worked. They assumed that they were more deserving than the rest. Greed and envy ended their day, they were not thankful for being paid what they had only asked for in the first place. Can you blame them? On the other hand, can we find fault in the landowner for acting generously? Ah humanity….we are never happy; we are perfectly imperfect humans!

And that is perhaps what our parable is about this morning. We are perfectly imperfect human beings, we sin, we make mistakes, we get angry and we think that life is unfair when something does not go our way. We grumble like Jonah and the early labourers, we make assumptions, we think we are more deserving than others, and we let our emotions get in the way.

But what if we look at this parable from a different angle. What if we look at God’s assumptions for a moment? We are perfectly imperfect, but even so, we are loved, we are loved unconditionally by God, each and every day of our lives. Each of us is made in the image of God, no matter our race, our sex, our gender identity, or our culture. The generosity and grace given to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is beyond our wildest imagination and thought. There is nothing, nothing that we can do to earn or deserve the love and grace of God. It is freely given to us as a gift from God, a wonderfully undeserved gift!

The kingdom of heaven cannot be compared to how we live in the world, whether it is in antiquity or in our modern society. Our parable today is not about running a business as a CEO would, wanting to make a profit at the expense of others. Our parable is about the grace and generosity of a loving God where no one is less deserving than the other, This is the gift from God that each of us is given in our baptism. We have died to the old life, we are born anew, and all are deserving of God’s love. Our psalm reminds us of that gift, “God is gracious and slow to anger, God is abounding in steadfast love and God is good to all, and God’s compassion is over all that God has made” (Psalm 145:8-90).

There has been a renewed interest in the Universal Basic Income since the pandemic began and CERB has been offered. A UBI has always been controversial because it brings to the forefront worthiness and deservedness. If one chooses not to work, should they receive an income? I have to work to put food on the table, they should as well. But if we look at it from God’s assumption, does everyone not deserve to have enough? Can we envision a UBI through the eyes of God? Can we learn to see one another as God sees us? Can we let go of who we believe to be deserving and who we do not? When we say the Lord’s Prayer we say, “give us our daily bread”, it is not “give me my daily bread.” What would our world look like if we all had enough, if everyone were considered worthy despite whether they deserved it or not?

The parable in our gospel reading today reminds us that God is at work in the world, that God is doing just as God does, turning things upside down to help us see and understand the radical grace that only God can provide. And while it is human for us to think that life is unfair at times, when something does not go the way we want it to, let us step back for a moment, and remember the one who gave us life, the one who gives us hope, the one who fills our lives with grace offering compassion, and the one who challenges us to love one another and accept one another as we have been loved and accepted. Let it be so. Amen

*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

**Prayers of Intercession**

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

Generous God, you make the last first, and the first last. Where this gospel challenges the church, equip it for its works of service. Strengthen those who suffer for Christ. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Sun and wind, bushes and worms, cattle and great cities—nothing in creation is outside your concern, mighty God. In your mercy, tend to it all. Give us a spirit of generosity toward all you have made. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Where we find envy and create enemies, you provide enough for all. Bring peace to places of conflict and violence. Inspire leaders with creativity and wisdom. Bless the work of negotiators, peacekeepers, and development workers. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Reveal yourself to all in need as you are gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, ready to relent from punishing. Accompany judges and lawyers, victims of crime and those serving sentences. Give fruitful labor and a livelihood to those seeking work. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Even beyond our expectations, you choose to give generously. Grant life, health, and courage to all who are in need. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We praise you for the generations that have declared your power to us. Give us faithfulness to follow them, living for Christ, until you call us to join them in the joyful song around his throne. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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

**Amen.**

**MEAL**

*God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ*

**Prayer for our Offerings**

Over the past week, we have received offerings by mail, drop off, or online and so we give thanks for the many gifts we have received:

Holy God, gracious and merciful, you bring forth food from the earth and nourish your whole creation. Turn our hearts toward those who hunger in any way, that all may know your care; and prepare us now to feast on the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

**Blessing of Children**

God, we pray your blessing on the children of all ages whom you have entrusted to our care.  Thank you for giving them to us to love and to teach your ways.  Be with them, guard and protect them in these difficult times.  Bless them in all their learning’s, so they may grow closer to you, wherever they are this week: at home, with friends, resting, at play, with toys, screens, books, and crafts.  In Jesus name we pray, **Amen.**

**You can share this meal with your family or friends to remember Jesus’ sacrifice for us.**

**Words of Institution**

On his last night, as he shared a meal with his friends,

our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;

broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,

and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood,

shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

Though we are apart, we are made one in Christ Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, and so we pray as one:

**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.**

**Invitation to Communion**

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

**Communion**

Let us eat together:

(BREAD UP)The body of Christ, bread of heaven;

(WINE UP)The blood of Christ, cup of salvation.

**Prayer after Communion**

Gracious God, in this meal you have gathered your scattered people, drawn us to your heart, and nourished us at your table with food and drink, the body and blood of Christ. Now give us courage to be your people in the world, and voice to proclaim your truth this day and always, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

**SENDING**

*God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.*

**Blessing**

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

**Peace**

The peace of Christ be with you always.