**MODIFIED SERVICE- 18TH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST- October 4, 2020**

**ZION EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH, PHLIPSBURG**

Welcome to everyone on this 18th Sunday of Pentecost, where we continue to gather safely from the comfort of our homes as a reminder of our love for one another.

Fall is upon us, the turning of the leaves is beautiful this year, I encourage you to take a moment to see the beauty that God gives to us in this season!

Church Council will be meeting this week and will make a final decision on opening next week. Please keep them in your prayers. Look for a phone call either way.

Our GotoMeeting Coffee hour meets at 11:00, please join us!

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.

**GATHERING**

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

**THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God,

the fountain of living water,

the rock who gave us birth,

our light and our salvation.

**Amen.**

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism,

we are clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness.

Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

*Water may be poured into the font as the presiding minister gives thanks.*

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters

and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight.

Through the waters of the flood you delivered Noah and his family.

Through the sea you led your people Israel from slavery into freedom.

At the river your Son was baptized by John and anointed with the Holy Spirit.

By water and your Word you claim us as daughters and sons,

making us heirs of your promise and servants of all.

We praise you for the gift of water that sustains life,

and above all we praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ.

Shower us with your Spirit, and renew our lives with your forgiveness, grace, and love.

To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

**Amen.**

**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 God, from you come all things that are good. Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to know those things that are right, and by your merciful guidance, help us to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**OPENING HYMN- If You But Trust in God To Guide You- ELW 769**

1 If you but trust in God to guide you  
with gentle hand through all your ways,  
you'll find that God is there beside you  
when crosses come, in trying days.  
Trust then in God's unchanging love;  
build on the rock that will not move.  
  
2 What gain is there in anxious weeping,  
in helpless anger and distress?  
If you are in your Savior's keeping,  
in sorrow will he love you less?  
For Christ who took for you a cross  
will bring you safe through ev'ry loss.

3 The Lord our restless hearts is holding,  
in peace and quietness content.  
We rest in God's good will unfolding,  
what wisdom from on high has sent.  
God, who has chosen us by grace,  
knows very well the fears we face.  
  
4 Sing, pray, and keep God's ways unswerving,  
offer your service faithfully.  
Trust heaven's word; though undeserving,  
you'll find this promise true to be.  
This is our confidence indeed:  
God never fails in time of need.

**WORD**

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

**FIRST READING: Isaiah 5:1-7**

A reading from Isaiah.

1Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 2He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. 3And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.  
4What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?  
5And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.

6I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.  
7For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah  
are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness,  
but heard a cry!

**PSALM: Psalm 80:7-15**

7Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved.  
8You have brought a vine out of Egypt; you cast out the nations and planted it.  
9You cleared the ground for it; it took root and filled the land.  
10The mountains were covered by its shadow and the towering cedar trees by its boughs.   
11You stretched out its tendrils to the sea and its branches to the river.  
12Why have you broken down its wall, so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?  
13The wild boar of the forest has ravaged it, and the beasts of the field have grazed upon it.  
14Turn now, O God of hosts, look down from heaven;  
15behold and tend this vine; preserve what your right hand has planted.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 21:33-46**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

[Jesus said to the people:] 33“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. 34When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. 35But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. 36Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. 37Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ 38But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ 39So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” 41They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”  
  42Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:  
 ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’?  
43Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. 44The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”  
  45When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. 46They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

**SERMON**

I am sure many of you have heard the saying “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” I know I have said this before, but I am always amazed when I read the bible, when I read those parables and passages that were written thousands of years ago for a certain time, context, and audience, but the message is still so relevant in our lives today.

Our first reading from the prophet Isaiah speaks of the beloved planting a vineyard. He lovingly prepares the soil, removing the debris and rocks, the earth was fertile, and he planted the best grapevines available. The harvest should have been great and plentiful, but when the time came to gather the grapes, they were wild, they were small, unripe, and bitter to eat. The prophet asks the question; what more could God have done as the conditions were perfect….

Our gospel reading today uses the prophet Isaiah’s teaching and words. Jesus speaks to them knowing that the religious leaders would have been very familiar with the passage. They would have understood that God came to Jerusalem looking for good fruit, looking for people who believed in justice, mercy, and grace for one another and their neighbour. However, the people only thought of themselves and were judgemental, yes there were only wild grapes found in the vineyard.

In our gospel reading, a vineyard is again planted, care is taken in preparing the soil, a fence is built around to keep predators out and a wine press is constructed to reap the rewards of the harvest. The landowner then leaves, and tenants are hired to take care of the land and harvest the grapes. This was not an uncommon occurrence in antiquity. The landowner would get things started, then leave the country and share the grapes with the tenants in exchange for the services provided.

If the tenants did not cooperate they would be replaced. The significant difference in our readings today is that the grapes in Isaiah were wild, while in the gospel the grapes were plentiful and sweet, but the tenants were wicked and evil.

The parable that we read today is another allegory. An allegory is a story that has a hidden meaning that Jesus used to teach those around him. In the parable, God is the landowner, the vineyard is Israel (as it was in the Isaiah reading as well), the tenants are the chief priests and Pharisees, the religious leaders of the time, and the son is Jesus Christ. Jesus told this parable in the temple, earlier that week he had just entered Jerusalem on a donkey, the crowds cheered and worshiped him, they laid their cloaks on the ground for him to walk on. Along the way, Jesus had been healing people, teaching people, hanging out with tax collectors and prostitutes, the sick, and the lonely, the othered in society. He upturned the tables in the temple cleansing it of the money changers and buyers and sellers of goods because the temple was being misused. The religious leaders were watching all of this, they went to Jesus, demanding to know “by what authority are you doing these things and who gave you this authority?” (Matt 21: 23-25) The leaders were afraid of him, they saw how the crowds were reacting to him, and they feared that they were losing their authority. In their eyes, Jesus was not following the law of Torah, but in reality, it was the religious leaders who were using the law and religion to their advantage. They were not understanding who Jesus was and who God is. They were not living out their call in the world to be gracious and merciful to others.

After Jesus told the parable, he asked the chief priests what the landowner should do with the tenants. They responded that they deserved death and should be replaced with tenants who lived justly. Suddenly the chief priests realized what Jesus was trying to teach them, they realized that they were the tenants, and they were not happy. They wanted to arrest him, but again, they were fearful because of the crowds that had gathered.

The chief priests and elders were abusing their authority. They were using the law to get what they wanted at the expense of others, they were not loving their neighbours. There was no mercy and grace to be found, their responsibility as leaders and followers of God were lacking, to say the least.

What are our responsibilities as leaders? What are our responsibilities as followers of Christ? Do we produce the fruits of the kingdom, or do we leave it for others to harvest and fulfill?

I wonder how many of you heard the news story about a 37-year-old Indigenous mother of seven taken to a hospital in Montreal this past week. Joyce Echaquan (Eshaquan) was suffering from severe stomach pain. She had been in the hospital for 2 days when she recorded a video showing the treatment that she had been receiving from the staff. The video shows the staff berating her, taunting her, and hurling insults at her. She died a short time later, and now her family is left to grieve her death, her husband is left to raise their 7 children on his own. 2 members of the hospital staff have been fired, and members of the Indigenous community are once again expressing outrage at the systemic racism and discrimination that she and many other Indigenous men and women have and continue to receive in this country. How different were the staff from the chief priests? Joyce was not shown any grace or mercy in her time of need. She was belittled, labeled, and othered because of her ancestry and culture, because of ignorance and hate.

The parable this morning is not one that is easy to hear, it is violent and disturbing, and for many years it has been viewed as anti-Semitic. Just where is the good news to be found in a parable like this? Just where is the good news to be found in our world today?

The good news is the cornerstone. The good news is in God’s actions, even though God is rejected time and time again. The good news is that God does not and will never ever give up on us. God is always willing and ready to guide and restore us. God sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die on a cross for our sins, for our shortcomings. God's action of unconditional and redemptive love is a sacrifice of the ultimate love of God through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. God continues to call us God’s own. God continues to instill in us the power of the Holy Spirit to make a difference in the world. Our leadership role as followers of Christ calls us to stand with those who are othered and belittled, it calls us to be the hands of the weak and the lowly. Our leadership role calls us to be the voice of women like Joyce whose voice has now been forever silenced.

My hope for the future is that someday we can say that we have changed, we can say that we have learned from our mistakes. We can say that we truly are leaders and followers of Christ who are willing to make a difference in the world, who are willing to take a risk and love unconditionally and freely knowing that Jesus Christ is the head and cornerstone of our lives. When we do this, we too can produce plentiful fruit for the kingdom knowing that all are loved and accepted. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY- Christ is Made the Sure Foundation- ELW 645**

[**https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bC0tgG\_blE**](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bC0tgG_blE)

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

With confidence in God’s grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need. *A brief silence.*

Holy God, you call us to work for peace and justice in your vineyard. Refresh the church with your life, that we may bear fruit through work and service. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Thank you for the abundant harvest of the earth. Thank you for the beauty of fall. Bless and care for those whose hands bring the fruits of the earth to the tables of all who hunger. May we be inspired by your servants who cared deeply for your creation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Curb the impulses of greed and pride that lead us to take advantage of others. Grant that world leaders seek the fruits of the kingdom for the good and welfare of all people. We remember Joyce Echaquan and the many other Indigenous peoples who continue to face racial discrimination in Canada. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Sustain all who suffer with the promise of new life. Assured of your presence, heal our pain and suffering, and equip us to embrace all bodies aching for wholeness of mind, body, and soul. We call to mind those who are struggling today Eddie, Elaine, Susie, Ruth, Mary Ann, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Carol, Janet, and those we name in the silence of our hearts. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Thank you for the saints who teach us to live faithfully in your vineyard. May our chorus join theirs until our labor is complete. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Listen as we call on you, O God, and enfold in your loving arms all for whom we pray, in the name of 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.

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; 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.**

**SENDING**

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

**BLESSING**

Mothering God, Father, +Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life.

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Remember the poor.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Sending Hymn- The Church of Christ in Every Age- ELW 729**

1 The church of Christ, in ev'ry age  
beset by change, but Spirit-led,  
must claim and test its heritage  
and keep on rising from the dead.  
  
2 Across the world, across the street,  
the victims of injustice cry  
for shelter and for bread to eat,  
and never live before they die.

3 Then let the servant church arise,  
a caring church that longs to be  
a partner in Christ's sacrifice, and clothed in Christ's humanity.  
  
4 For he alone, whose blood was shed,  
can cure the fever in our blood,  
and teach us how to share our bread  
and feed the starving multitude.  
  
5 We have no mission but to serve  
in full obedience to our Lord;  
to care for all, without reserve,  
and spread his liberating word.

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