



Introduction

The mystery of God's ways is sometimes hidden from the wise and intelligent. Jesus associates with those often excluded from the religious community. Like Paul, we struggle with our own selfish desires and seek God's mercy and forgiveness. We gather to be refreshed by Christ's invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary." Gathered around word, water, and meal, we find rest for our souls.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity one God, Father, ✚ Son, and Holy Spirit,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. **Amen.**

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,

**we confess that we do not trust your abundance,
and we deny your presence in our lives.**

We place our hope in ourselves and rely on our own efforts.

We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.

We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.

We fear difference and do not welcome others as you have welcomed us.

We sin in thought, word, and deed.

**By your grace, forgive us; through your love, renew us;
and in your Spirit, lead us;**

so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen.

Beloved of God,

by the radical abundance of divine mercy

we have peace with God through ✚ Christ Jesus,

through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.

Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope.

For hope does not disappoint,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Special Music

America

arr. Richard van Auken

Listen [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

You are great, O God, and greatly to be praised. You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Grant that we may believe in you, call upon you, know you, and serve you, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Psalmody: Psalm 145:8-14

⁸The LORD is gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹**LORD, you are good to all,
and your compassion is over all your works.**

¹⁰All your works shall praise you, O LORD,
and your faithful ones shall bless you.

¹¹**They shall tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your power,**

¹²that all people may know of your power
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

¹³**Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom;
your dominion endures throughout all ages.**

**You, LORD, are faithful in all your words,
and loving in all your works.**

¹⁴The Lord upholds all those who fall
and lifts up those who are bowed down.

Second Reading: Romans 7:15-25a

Life captive to sin is a catch-22 existence in which we know good but do not do it and do things we know to be wrong. Through Jesus Christ, God has set us free from such a futile existence.

Read the text [here](#)

Gospel: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Jesus chides people who find fault with both his ministry and that of John the Baptist. He thanks God that wisdom and intelligence are not needed to receive what God has to offer.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

I have a confession to make. When I read Paul's words in our text from Romans, I think Paul is talking about me: "I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." Paul is not just talking about will power, but about the power of sin itself.

It is not just that we don't do what is right, sometimes we think we are doing right, but instead, we are doing what we should not do – and may not even realize it.

Paul knows that we are not saved by our works. He has spent several chapters already explaining how we are saved by grace through faith; how through our baptism, we die to Christ so that we might be raised like He was.

I fully understand what Paul is saying. I know I am saved by grace, not works. I know that God, through Jesus, has redeemed me and forgives me all my sins. I know that through God's grace, my life is and should be transformed; that doing the "right thing" should be natural; that it should be clear to me that my response to God for this gift of grace should be to do God's will – to do the "right thing."

And yet, it seems that as often as not, I realize that I am not doing what I should. For example, I know that I should drive the speed limit, that there are certain foods that I should not eat, there are words that I should not use, that I should wear my mask when out in public, that I should do more about those who are hungry, homeless, or jobless, and yet – I look down and I am driving too fast, or I have a handful of potato chips that I should not eat, that I dropped something on my foot and said something that I should not have, get cut off while driving and I find myself talking to the driver in front of me in a not so kind way, I get inside somewhere and realize I forgot my mask, or I pass by someone with their hand out, using the excuse that I don't have any cash, or that I don't have time, or that I don't trust them to really be in need. So many times that I know what is right, but for whatever reason, I find myself not doing it.

Paul realizes, whether through personal experience or through his observations of others, that we all have this problem. It is not that some of us just are not trying hard enough; it is that the power of sin is so powerful. Sometimes, even when we think we are right, we find that sin has deceived us into thinking that what we are doing is right. As Paul talks about the flesh, which is so prone to do those things which may seem right, but are not. How many times do we think that we are helping someone only to find out that we have made a situation worse?

We might, if we spent enough time thinking about this, be driven to despair. We might be led to believe that, if left to our own devices, we can never do God's will. And we can't. As Martin Luther says in his response to the third article of the Apostle's Creed, "I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him." We cannot, because of the power of sin, do what we should. We cannot do God's will perfectly, or even come close.

Paul, realizing just how wretched he is, and we are, reminds us that it is not what we do that matters, but what God, through Jesus, has done, is doing, and continues to do – for us. “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” is Paul’s exclamation. For Paul knows that this is our only way out; that we cannot overcome the power of sin by ourselves.

So, as we gather on Sunday to worship God, to confess and ask forgiveness, to pray, and to be in fellowship with one another, we also realize how powerless we are. It is only here, in the company of our fellow sinners that we have any hope. Here we can honestly confess our shortcomings and pray for forgiveness. Here we can hear the mighty acts of God on behalf of God’s children. Here in fellowship with sinners just like us, we do not feel so alone and powerless. So, with Paul, we proclaim, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” Amen.

Hymn of the Day ELW # 697

Just a Closer Walk with Thee

Listen [here](#).

Apostles’ Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord.

**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

A brief silence.

We pray for the church. Sustain us as we share your word. Embrace us as we struggle to find our common ground. Lift up leaders with powerful and prophetic voices. Free us from stagnant faith. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for the well-being of creation. Protect the air, water, and land from abuse and pollution. Free us from apathy in our care of creation and direct us toward sustainable living. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for our country as we celebrate Independence Day, and for all nations during this time of international crisis. Guide leaders in developing just policies and guide difficult conversations. Free us from attitudes that hinder relationship-building and lead us to expansive love for our neighbor. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for all in need. For all who are tired, feeling despair, sick, or oppressed (*especially those we name now*). Take their yoke upon you and ease their burdens. Give your consolation and free us from all that keeps us bound. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for these congregations. Bless pastors, interns, and congregational leaders. Uplift us as we continue to worship apart and guide us as we seek safe ways to re-gather. Energize those who plan worship and continue necessary tasks. Shine in this place that we might notice the ways your love transforms our lives. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We give thanks for those who have died in faith. Welcome them into your eternal rest and comfort us in our grief until we are joined with them in new life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**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 of the Masks

Before we return to our holiday weekend and our daily work, we pause to offer a blessing for the masks that we wear as a way of loving others and protecting them from the spread of the COVID-19 virus:

We bless you and we praise you, Lord Christ, for commanding us to love one another. Let these masks we wear be signs of your love, and let our actions be filled with love for our neighbors. Amen.

Closing Hymn ELW # 888

O Beautiful for Spacious Skies

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ray Sipe.
Special music by June Almond.