

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost July 12, 2020



Introduction

God's word is like the rain that waters the earth and brings forth vegetation. It is also like the sower who scatters seed indiscriminately. Our lives are like seeds sown in the earth. Even from what appears to be little, dormant, or dead, God promises a harvest. We are filled with the Spirit, that we may bear fruit in the world.

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.**

Gathering Hymn

Oh, for a Thousand Tongues to Sing

Listen and sing along [here](#)

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Psalmody: Psalm 65:9-13

- ⁹You visit the earth and water it abundantly;
you make it very plenteous; the river of God is full of water.
You prepare the grain, for so you provide for the earth.
- ¹⁰**You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges;
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.**
- ¹¹You crown the year with your goodness,
and your paths overflow with plenty.
- ¹²**May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing,
and the hills be clothed with joy.**
- ¹³May the meadows cover themselves with flocks,
and the valleys cloak themselves with grain;
let them shout for joy and sing.

Second Reading: Romans 8:1-11

There is no condemnation for those who live in Christ. God sent Christ to accomplish what the law was unable to do: condemn sin and free us from its death-dealing ways. The Spirit now empowers proper actions and values in our lives and gives us the promise of resurrected life.

Read the text [here](#).

Gospel: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

In Matthew's gospel, both Jesus and his disciples "sow the seed" of God's word by proclaiming the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near." Now, in a memorable parable, Jesus explains why this good news produces different results in those who hear.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

We live in a time of great uncertainty. I cannot remember a time in my life when the news changed so rapidly on a local, national, and global scale – all at the same time! We are not experiencing just one or two breaking news stories or busy news cycles at a time, but overwhelming new statistics and reports day after day after day.

It seems like every single day there is new information about how to slow the rapid spread of the pandemic, to say nothing about news about ongoing unrest, protests, violence, and political division.

Just when we think we understand how to protect ourselves from the pandemic or advocate for justice, it seems like everything around us shifts overnight, causing us to change what we have been doing and question what we should do next. That constant state of uncertainty and turmoil is mentally and physically exhausting.

It is hard for me to imagine the times that Paul and the early Christians lived in, but I know it was a time of uncertainty, too. Paul had already turned from his certainty about his Jewish faith and how to worship God and even who God was, to worship and preach about Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Today we have read from the eighth chapter in Romans, just in time to hear Paul tell the early Christians in Rome - who he had not even yet met - “now”! His message to them is still true in our time – in the “now” that we are experiencing. In spite of uncertainty; in spite of sin, sickness, and death - the Good News still resounds.

Paul’s words were not for a specific situation or a particular moment in time, but for every life situation that humans can experience and for every moment in time after Jesus Christ walked the earth, suffered and died on the cross, and was raised from the dead. Every “now” that we have experienced or can imagine.

And in spite of Paul’s often complicated rhetoric, his message is simple and reassuring – even for us as we live through a time of great uncertainty. Paul writes that for those who are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation. Paul makes that claim with confidence that God has already acted powerfully through Jesus to change everything for everyone who lives in faith.

Like many passages from Paul’s writings, there are contrasts in this passage that seem to balance unsteadily in front of us, especially in these divided times. We hear these phrases: The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus and the law of sin and of death; flesh and Spirit; sin and righteousness; death and life & peace.

And Paul takes time to explain them all to us - or at least drop us some hints about things that we should pay more attention to! The difference between sin and righteousness may seem obvious. And the difference between death on one hand and life and peace on the other certainly is. But what about flesh and Spirit?

Paul is not referring to just our bodies as flesh, but about everything that is part of our existence as imperfect human creatures. Even our emotions and thoughts, as well as our flesh and blood and even our breath.

In contrast the Spirit is God's Holy Spirit, which fills us with faith, hope, and love; which bestows on us all the fruits that we may have celebrated on Pentecost Sunday: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23); and all the gifts that we pray for each time someone is baptized: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD (Isaiah 11:2); and the spirit of joy in God's presence.

In these days and weeks after Pentecost, we are reminded that through the work of the Spirit, we are not left to our own devices or controlled by the flesh. Instead we are always growing in faith, like those seeds planted in good soil. That Spirit of God is the Spirit of life and it has already won the battle over sin and death.

Living according to the Spirit is to have our minds set on the Spirit. It brings – it IS life and peace – which transforms our lives! It will move us from fear and uncertainty to faith and certainty.

In these difficult days, when growth in the Spirit may seem impossible, it is helpful for us to remember that as Paul told the early Christians in Rome, the ultimate decision has already been made for us – in our favor – by God!

While we will still sin and die, we are not condemned by our sins, but saved through our faith in Jesus. We have been redeemed from sin and death and are promised life and peace with God. That is a promise of Good News which we can cling to with assurance. Amen.

Hymn of the Day ELW # 638

Blessed Assurance

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.

Gracious God, your word has been sown in many ways and places. We pray for missionaries and newly planted congregations around the world. Inspire us by their witness to the faith we share. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees and fields clap their hands in praise. We pray for the birds and animals who make their home in the trees, and for lands stripped bare by deforestation. Empower us to sustainably use what you have given. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Reigning God, we pray for our nation's leaders. Increase their desire for justice and equality. We pray for our enemies. Bridge the chasms that divide us and guide authorities to a deep and lasting peace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Abiding God, care for all who are in need (especially those we name now or silently in our hearts). Everyone's exhausted right now: parents, activists, cashiers, people who are just now learning about systemic racism, delivery drivers, the unemployed, the chronically sick, ER nurses, those who fear the police, the elderly, performers with no hope of an audience any time soon, clergy, social workers, those who can't make their rent, and everyone who has to spray something down with disinfectant for the 1,000th time.

Teach us to rest, Lord. Help us dial back our obsession with productivity. Raise up more helpers for those who are over-extended Lord - stir up the desire to serve in those who only take. Remove barriers to napping. Quiet babies for an hour so new mamas and daddies can sleep. Make us aware of any new binge-able shows that might help. Give employers the will to grant extra paid mental-health days. Quiet those voices that tell us we should be doing more right now, especially the ones that come from inside of us. Teach us not to confuse respite with laziness. Increase our compassion for one another. And while you're at it, increase our compassion for ourselves. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Renewing God, revive your church in this place. Nourish and nurture the seeds you have planted, that we might grow as disciples. Replace what has been depleted. Sustain our ministries and deepen relationships with the wider community. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Eternal God, we give thanks for all who have died. Comfort us in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. 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.

Closing Hymn ELW # 545

Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ruth Ann Sipe.

Special music by Robert & Emily Misenheimer.

Prayers adapted from Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Sunday Prayers: July 5, 2020*