



Introduction

In Jesus' parable about a great banquet, those invited do not come, so the invitation is extended to others. In our texts God spreads a table before us. Even amid anxiety and hardship we rejoice in the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. With great joy we go forth to share the wonderful invitation with others hungering and thirsting for the abundant life of God.

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 ELW # 788 / LBW # 451

The Lord's My Shepherd

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

Lord of the feast, you have prepared a table before all peoples and poured out your life with abundance. Call us again to your banquet. Strengthen us by what is honorable, just, and pure, and transform us into a people of righteousness and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Psalmody: Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd;

I shall not be in want.

²**The LORD makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.**

³You restore my soul, O LORD,
and guide me along right pathways for your name's sake.

⁴**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil;
for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil, and my cup is running over.

⁶**Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

Second Reading: Philippians 4:1-9

Though writing from prison and facing an uncertain future, Paul calls on the Philippians to rejoice and give thanks to God no matter what the circumstance. God's peace is with us and binds together our hearts and minds in Jesus Christ, especially when things around us do not seem peaceful.

Read the text [here](#).

Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus tells a parable indicating that the blessings of God's kingdom are available to all, but the invitation is not to be taken lightly.

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

I recently looked at the calendar and counted the weeks since March 13. If I counted correctly, we are beginning the 32nd week of Covidtime, a phrase I recently heard from our synod bishop, Tim Smith. During much of that time, at least during this time after Pentecost, we have been preaching – intentionally – from our second lessons. Paul’s letters to the early Christians.

These letters speak to us in a new way during times of trouble and uncertainty. Paul was writing to people he knew and loved, even while he was imprisoned. His future was really uncertain. But he was still praying for, caring about, and writing to people that he could not be with in person. People that he wanted to reassure of God’s loving care in spite of the circumstances that they all found themselves in. Sound familiar?

Yes, some of us may be able to gather in person for worship this week. But many others, including those who will read this service on paper or watch this service on video from their computer screens, are not yet able to gather together – for a wide variety of reasons.

Some are in quarantine because they have been exposed to the Covid-19 virus; others are isolating because they are ill, either with this virus or some other illness; still others are remaining secluded in order to protect themselves and someone they care for from exposure. ALL of those are completely valid reasons for not gathering with others at this time.

Not everyone is of one mind about Covid, or the upcoming elections, or a wide variety of other issues that face our community and our world today.

While Paul urged the members of the church at Philippi to ‘be of one mind,’ I don’t think that he meant they had to all agree about every single thing. I am certain we will never all agree on our favorite color, or sports team, or even our favorite food at a covered dish dinner.

What they did need to do was to agree on what was central and agree to honor each other’s opinions on the other issues. So, what is central that we are to be of one mind about? What must we be in agreement about to remain peacefully in one community of faith?

To stand firm in faith in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To trust that the Lord is always with us, in spite of the difficulties we face.

To KNOW that God loves us and walks with us even in the valley of the shadow of death.

To keep from falling into despair or anger because of our struggles, by trusting in God to care for us in all situations.

And even to rejoice in the midst of our circumstances, no matter how crazy that may sound.

We can rejoice because we know that God is with us in all things - through the mail delays, the computer problems, and other daily frustrations we face.

God is with us through the annoying campaign ads and heated arguments leading up to the election.

God is with us in the isolation and loneliness, and in the fear of these days, as the darkness lengthens and the uncertain future looms before us.

God is with us in the sickness, the pain and suffering, and even the death of our loved ones.

God is with us in our own sickness, pain and suffering, in the hour of our death – and beyond.

Those are all times we can cling to God's presence with us; and trust in God's love for us. That is something we can – and should – be of one mind about. God's love has been shown to us, once for all, in the life, death, and resurrection of God's own Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

And because of that certainty we can rejoice even in the midst of uncertain times. We can pray for all the situations we experience, let go of our worry, focus on this truth, continue to do what is right, and praise God with thanksgiving. Amen.

**Hymn of the Day ELW # 873 vs. 1, 2, 4, 6 *Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart!*
/ LBW # 553 vs. 1, 2, 5, 7 (*Rejoice, O Pilgrim Throng!*)**

Listen and sing along [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

With confidence in God's grace and mercy, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

Gracious God, fill your church with a spirit of joyous hospitality. We pray for bishops, teachers, church leaders, and all children of God as they invite others to your table of boundless grace. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, as creation waits with eager longing for redemption, protect your creatures that are mistreated. Restore valleys, mountains and pastures, and still and running waters. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, as you set a table in the presence of enemies, so bless the efforts of diplomats, international peace workers, and world leaders who navigate conflict. May they proceed with dialogue and understanding, so that justice and peace prevails. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, let your gentleness be known among those who are weary or ill especially those we name now. Strengthen doctors, medical care workers, and caretakers who see to their needs. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, when we are quick to judge outward appearance, remind us how you clothe all in your mercy. We pray for ministries that provide needed clothing and other assistance in this community. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Gracious God, as we remember those who have died and are gathered at the heavenly banquet, comfort us with your presence. Assure us of your peace at all times. 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.**

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 #856 / LBW # 532

How Great Thou Art

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Worship adapted from sundaysandseasons.com. Copyright © 2020 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #SAS027356.

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