

**EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST**

A Service of the Word

July 26, 2020



God's Special Love

ZION LUTHERAN CHURCH

85 East Brandt Boulevard

Landisville, PA 17538

*United in Christ,
we are called to love and serve.*

**EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST**
Service of the Word



P: Pastor A: Assisting Minister C: Congregation & Pastor

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRELUDE

Prelude on 'O Waly Waly'

R. Haan

† **THE GATHERING** †

*The Holy Spirit gathers us in unity on the first day of the week,
the day of Christ's resurrection.*

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P: O God, we pause this morning with heavy hearts. We live in the midst of great and abiding love, but also in the midst of deceit and lies. May we be found faithful in all we do. May we speak the truth in love and live lives of love each day. Too often we seek you in the spectacular and otherworldly. May we see the many in breakings of your kingdom in the mustard seeds, yeast, treasures in fields, and fish gathered in nets. May we be able to answer with a full-throated yes when asked if we have understood your teachings and your call. Amen.

Silence for brief reflection.

P: When we are not sure how to pray, or if we are even able to address God in prayer, the Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. Know that no matter what, nothing, absolutely nothing can ever separate us from God's presence, love, and forgiveness. Amen.

(Verse 1)

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art:
thou my best thought both by day and by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.

(Verse 2)

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord.
Thou my soul's shelter, and thou my high tow'r,
raise thou me heav'nward, O Pow'r of my pow'r.

(Verse 3)

Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always:
thou and thou only, the first in my heart,
great God of heaven, my treasure thou art.

(Verse 4)

Light of my soul, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

THE GREETING

P: 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

P: God of all people, your arms reach out to embrace all those who call upon you. Teach us as disciples of your Son to love the world with compassion and constancy, that your name may be known throughout the earth, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

† **THE WORD** †

God speaks to us in Scriptures read and preached.

FIRST READING

1 Kings 3:5-12

A: A reading from 1 Kings.

At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.” And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?” It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.

A: The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING

Romans 8:26-39

A: A reading from Romans.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A: The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the 13th chapter.

C: **Glory to you, O Lord.**

[Jesus] put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

P: The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

P:

In the name of Christ. Amen.

This morning I'd like to do something a little different. I'd like to "paint" some pictures for you triggered by just a few verses from today's reading from Romans ... verses that express God's special love. And I want to do this because I genuinely believe that God's love is a very special love and needs to be approached in a very special and unique way.

This special love from God is sometimes difficult for us to understand and difficult for us to accept and imagine. It's a love that never leaves us and surrounds us in a very unique and special way. So, for us to get an understanding about what Paul is talking about in the famous words he wrote about God's love, we need to listen to those words again and then apply them in a special way. Hear again Paul's words from Romans 8 ... this time from the New Living Translation.

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below – indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now, I'd like you to picture yourself standing before the throne of God, in his court of law. God is the judge, Satan is the prosecutor, and you are the defendant waiting to be tried for the things you did or didn't do in this life. Satan then calls witness after witness against you and your head sinks low in shame as you remember some of the things you've done and some you should have done but didn't. Satan calls before you all those people you gossiped about, those people you thought were different than you so you couldn't accept them. He calls before you the hungry boy who needed food, but you were too busy with your own needs and your own little world. Then in comes a lonely widow that you were too busy to take the time to visit.

The parade of witnesses goes on and on until finally all your sins of omission and commission have been vividly exposed before the court and you're wishing you could crawl into a hole and hide.

Then God asks you if you have anything to say on your own behalf. For a brief moment you think of all the excuses you might be able to give, but then you realize how futile that would be before God. So, you swallow hard and begin shaking your head while say, "No, God, I don't have anything to say." At that moment, your defense attorney, Jesus Christ, stands up and approaches the bench. He makes this one simple statement: "This one trusted in me. I have paid the penalty for his sins."

Without further comment, the judge announces your acquittal, and you walk out of the court into God's everlasting kingdom.

This picture shows us the special love Jesus has for each of us, and how he paid the price for our sins by going to the cross for the sins we committed and those things we should have done but didn't.

Now let's picture God's love another way.

A wife had a husband who had an alcohol problem. He finally realized his problem, went for treatment, then came back to his wife asking for forgiveness and a second chance to make a better life for them and their children.

She didn't know what to do, so she went to her pastor. She told him the story and said, "My family and friends all tell me I would be a fool to let him come back. What should I do?" The pastor answered, "Do you love your husband?"

"O yes!" she said without hesitation. Then the pastor said, "Then remember this: You're not his judge, jury, or executioner. You're the wife who loves him. And also remember this: Even though you don't wish it or want it to be so, your husband will suffer more from your open love and your complete forgiveness than he would suffer from any punishment you might think of."

This picture of God's love shows us that God, through Jesus, accepts us as we are and gives us the ability to change, to turn away from our sins, and make a new life. God through Jesus allows us to repent, to change and then accepts that changed person with no questions asked. And as we're accepted in an unconditional way

by God through Christ, he asks us to do the same with the people around us. Love them first; then allow them to change.

Now let's look at a picture of God's love written by a woman named Bette Van Dyke. She tells of a blind girl meeting a clown for the first time. Since she had been blind from birth and never had seen a clown, she got to know him in the only way possible. She tentatively traced his facial hair, big ears, funny clothing, and large nose with her very sensitive and well-trained fingers. As she investigated, she asked him questions and he answered her. In his own way, he explained to her that because of his funny face and crazy clothes he often made children laugh and that made him happy.

After completing her finger-walking investigation of the clown, she suddenly threw her arms around the clown, hugged him tightly, and said, "I love you." Even though she couldn't see the clown, she could sense that he was a person who was lovable and loved her in his own unique way.

In this picture parable of the blind girl and the clown, we see another side of God's love for us through Jesus Christ. In a sense, we're the blind girl and the clown is God's love shown to us through Jesus Christ. We explore that love, but we don't quite fully understand it, but we do understand enough to want to throw our arms around Jesus, hug him, and say as loudly as we can, "I love you, Jesus." We do understand that we love Jesus simple because he loves us.

And now, one last picture of God's love. It's based on a story of a soldier named Louis Valbrandt who returned home from Afghanistan after being stationed there for more than two years. He had left for Afghanistan when his daughter was only a few months old. On his return to the United States he was met by his nearly-three-year-old daughter. She knew nothing about him except through a picture her mother had on the dresser and the things her mother told her about him.

But Daddy wasn't a person. Daddy was just a picture and some stories. How was his daughter to know how much he loved her since he was away for a long time? As far as men went, the only one she really knew was her grandfather, and he had died while Louis was gone. Louis had to find a way to develop a relationship with his daughter.

What he started to do was to stoop down and reach out his arms to her if she was on the other side of the room and say, "Where is the little girl that Daddy loves?"

After a while she learned to come running into his arms, and she knew he would hold her close to his heart. As time passed, she learned to know the love her Daddy had for her.

In the same way, Jesus wants us to run into his arms so he might assure us of his love ... which reminds me of a plaque I used to have in my bedroom that said, "I asked Jesus how much do you love me and Jesus said, this much and he spread his arms and died on a cross." And from that cross, Jesus is asking each of us to run into his arms where he will encircle us with his love ... a love he was willing to give so we might live.

God's special love has been seen in four different pictures this morning: in a court of law; as Jesus accepts us as we are; where we openly cry out, "I love you, Jesus"; and finally, we get to see a picture of God's love as he spreads his arms out for us and asks us to run into those arms of love so we might live for all eternity.

The bottom line is: God's special love is indeed very special ... actually incredibly special! And to that I say, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ. Amen."

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

When Love is Found

C. Callahan

APOSTLES' CREED

P: We now proclaim our faith with the words of the Apostles' Creed

C: **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 into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. 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 THE FAITHFUL

A: Let us pray.

Compassionate Lord, help us to follow and find you alive in the world ... in the places where we work, meet people, spend money, and make plans. Make us, disciples of your kingdom, able to see through your eyes, to hear the questions you are asking, to welcome all others with your trust and truth, and to change the things that contradict your love.

O Lord, in your kingdom the poorest are welcome, the homeless find lodging, and the outcasts belong. Fill us with your love and free us to worship and serve you with hearts filled with compassion.

In truth, O Lord, we have done little to advance your kingdom and glory. Excuse our shortcomings and give us greater zeal for your service. Make us more ready and diligent by our prayers, our giving, and our examples to spread the knowledge of your truth and love.

O Lord, reveal yourself to those who are searching for genuine meaning in their lives. Help each of us to lead others to the gift of your word and that through your love, we will be nourished richly.

O Lord, give the leaders of all nations the wisdom, discernment, a spirit of humility, and a passion for justice so that love, peace, and understanding will dominate all areas of the world.

O Lord, we pray for those who are ill, those who are recuperating, those who are grieving, those who are lonely and depressed, and those who are homebound. We especially remember all those on Zion's Prayer List. Surround the frightened with your tenderness; give strength to those in pain; hold the weak in your arms of love; and give hope and patience to all who are in need.

O Lord, keep alive in us the memories of those you have called to your heavenly kingdom and grant that every remembrance leads us to you.

And now, O Lord, we ask that you accept these prayers we offer to you in the name of Jesus Christ, the one who taught us to pray together saying ...

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 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.

† A PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING †
A prayer of thanks to God by his faithful people.

P: Thank You, God, that you have made yourself known to all of us through your Word. Forgive us because we are a rebellious and prideful race and yet you still love us so much that you sent your only begotten Son to lay down his sinless life for our sin, so that by that death and resurrection, all who believe may have everlasting life.

Thank You, that through your love you chose to communicate with us by the Word, and by your holy apostles, disciples, and prophets. You revealed to us your glorious plan of salvation, so that whoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ would not be condemned, but whosoever does not believe in the only begotten Son of God is condemned already, because he has not believed on Jesus who loved us so much that he willingly went to the cross to redeem us from the penalty of sin, and reconcile us back to you forever.

Thank You, Lord, that your Word to us is like a perfumed love-letter that has been forwarded from heaven to all your children. Thank you, for the truth it contains and thank you, for all your unconditional love and grace. May we glorify your name for the unconditional love that you have seen fit to pour out us, by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



† THE SENDING †

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

HYMN

My Faith Looks Up to Thee

ELW 75

(Verse 1)

My faith looks up to thee,
thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine!
Now hear me while I pray,
take all my guilt away,
oh, let me from this day
be wholly thine!

(Verse 2)

May thy rich grace impart
strength to my fainting heart,
my zeal inspire;
as thou hast died for me,
oh, may my love to thee
pure, warm, and changeless be,
a living fire!

(Verse 3)

While life's dark maze I tread
and griefs around me spread,
be thou my guide;
bid darkness turn to day,
wipe sorrow's tears away,
nor let me ever stray
from thee aside.

(Verse 4)

When ends life's transient dream,
when death's cold, sullen stream
shall o'er me roll;
blest Savior, then, in love
fear and distrust remove;
oh, bear me safe above,
a ransomed soul!

BLESSING

P: As you meet the week ahead, with whatever joys and challenges it holds, do not be discouraged or disheartened. Remember the glory that awaits you as a child of God. Hold on to that truth; live and love in that hope; and may the peace of God, the blessing of Jesus Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit be with you and among you. Amen.

DISMISSAL

P: United in Christ, go forth to love and serve.

POSTLUDE

Deck Yourself, My Soul, With Gladness

G. Krapf

PRAYER LIST

FOR HEALING

Adele King
Kate Donnan
Barbara Williams
Dave Wise
Kevin Reinhart
Fred Hamor
Joe Adams
Judie Ingersoll
Lucy Davis
Bill Grove
Kay Crawford
Holly Hoover
Betty Stoner
Don Heartter
Janet & Harry Musselman
Bob Steinmetz (Brother of Diane Gerlach)
Homer Dietz (Brother-in-law of Harry Musselman)
Ron Sahn (Friend of Dave Wise)
Wilson Pipkin (Father of Wilson Pipkin)
Loma Slike (Mother of Sue Wise)
Mike LaFatta (Son-in-law of Bill & Julia Grove)

FOR COMFORT, PEACE, STRENGTH, & SAFETY

For the family and friends grieving the loss of Betty Benner (Sister of Sam King)
For the family and friends grieving the loss of Ginny Eisenhower (Sister of Dolly Overly)
Richard and Marilyn Heim
Arlene Miller
Deb McCartney
Marlin Zimmerman
Charlotte & George Potts
Bette Geibel
Jennifer Thompson
Ted Symonds & Family
Residents and Staff of the Phoenixville Care & Rehabilitation Center
Arlene Wise (Sister-in-law of Dave Wise)

Vaun Hile (Father of Lynda Sherwood)

Jennifer Kready (Daughter of Dave & Donna Dumeyer)

FOR PROTECTION FOR MILITARY & FIRST RESPONDERS

Christopher Wright

Chris Andrew

Thom Whitesel

Ryan Stitzel

Doug Kautter

Justin Gorlaski

Corey Landis (Nephew of Jesse & Pat Landis)

David Adams (Son-in-law of John & Kathleen Hay, and husband of Liz)



Never Underestimate the power of prayer.