



Queen Anne

LUTHERAN CHURCH

Called to Proclaim God's Love in Christ for Every Person

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✘ *In Worship Today* ✘

Pastor	The Rev. Dr. Daniel Peterson
Cantor	Kyle Haugen
Lector	Carol Ann Davis

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SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 19, 2020

"Word Out #20 audio transcript



Prelude

Voluntary on the trumpet stop
Henry Heron (1738-1795)

Welcome

- ☐: Welcome, this seventh Sunday after Pentecost. Wherever you are listening, whatever is happening in your life, however you may be struggling, we invite you into this space: one where you can hear the good news in proclamation, spoken and sung, a time when you can be still and know God is God.
- ☐: Last Sunday, we addressed the question of *how* God responds to the evils of this world, including suffering and pain. Today in our Gospel reading, Jesus touches on a similar question: *why* is there evil in the world? In the parable of the wheat and the weeds, Jesus suggests that both grow together until the harvest. With Paul, we long for the day that all creation will be set free from bondage and suffering. Having both weeds and wheat within us, we place our hope in the promises of God, and the words of reassurance that come with the proclamation of the Gospel.

Greeting


P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C: And also with you.


Gospel Acclamation

Isaiah 55:11

C:




Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.




Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Repeat alleluia




P: My word shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

C:



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

- A:** The Holy Gospel according to Matthew, the thirteenth chapter.
G: **Glory to you, O Lord.**

²⁴[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field;²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ ²⁸He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’ ”

³⁶Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” ³⁷He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

- A:** The Gospel of our Lord.
G: **Praise to you, O Christ.**

It's an impossible task.

As a called and ordained minister of the Lutheran Church, I am responsible for preaching the Word of God and presiding over Holy Communion. In the Lutheran tradition, we understand the Word of God primarily to be the good news of God's unfailing, unconditional love for us in Jesus Christ. We find this message in the Bible, and we bring it to life when we proclaim it.

This is the Word of God in its spoken form.

The Word of God also has a visible form. When we receive the bread and the wine of Holy Communion, we encounter in a visible, tangible way the assurance and consolation that God promises us in and through Jesus Christ. When I distribute the bread of Holy Communion as a pastor, I repeat the words of Jesus at his Last Supper when he said to the disciples, referring in part to the bread, "This is my body, given for you." It was an act, in short, where Jesus gave himself and his presence to his followers.

I find communion to be so powerful. It offers the experience of feeling – in that moment when you receive the bread and the wine – that nothing, as Paul says in Romans 8:39, can separate you "from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Unfortunately, the pandemic has taken away the opportunity for you and me to receive Holy Communion. My function as a pastor, therefore, has been narrowed. Everything hinges now, at least in worship, on the verbal proclamation of the gospel, on declaring the good news of being totally and completely accepted by God in and through Jesus Christ exclusively through words.

The trouble is, it's an impossible task, at least with regard to this week's text. How can I proclaim the good news of God's love for us in Jesus when our Gospel reading, Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, has Jesus speaking about the

torment and suffering of evildoers who will ultimately be thrown “into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”?

As you can see, it’s an impossible task.

Furnaces, Darkness, and Hellfire – Oh My!

Most scholars agree that Matthew’s Gospel was written late in the first century, probably between 80 and 90 CE. Its author was clearly the most Jewish of the four evangelists. One of my mentors used to say that he wrote his account of Jesus looking through the window at a synagogue.

Unique as well to Matthew is the repetition of threat and condemnation. Jesus speaks of hell, torment, and fire as punishment for wrongdoing more here than he does in Mark, Luke, or John. Indeed, Matthew contains more references to hell than *any other book* in the New Testament. Consider, for example, the writings of Paul. Nowhere in them does he talk about hell. Instead of needing to be saved from the fires of the netherworld, he insists we need to be saved from death itself, from the inevitability of annihilation and oblivion under the power of sin. Sure, he occasionally speaks of God’s coming wrath, but even this reference appears in just two of the letters scholars unanimously believe he wrote: 1 Thessalonians and Romans.

The New Testament, in short, contains an astonishingly small number of references to hell or “what nightmares may come,” to invert the words of Shakespeare’s Hamlet. Of all its roughly 8,000 verses, in fact, only 15 speak of hell directly, seven of which occur in Matthew! This should really give us pause. Why has hell figured so prominently in Christian art, literature, theology, and preaching, particularly since the dawn of the Middle Ages, when references to it in the Bible are *so minimal*? And if Matthew’s Jesus makes only seven references to it, coupled with a few more to the realm of “outer darkness,” maybe Matthew is not so devoid of the gospel as we might think.

Maybe finding good news in Matthew is not such an impossible task after all.

An Experiment

What if, instead of focusing on the surprisingly few instances where Jesus speaks of hell and damnation in Matthew, we read it with new eyes, looking for moments of consolation, reassurance, and good news instead? What would turn up?

I decided to find out.

I took it upon myself to reread Matthew cover to cover, hoping to unearth along the way the message of the gospel, a verse of inspiration, a word of hope and promise, especially for us as we continue to tangle with the coronavirus, the lives it has cost, and the havoc it continues to wreak on the economy. Could Matthew's Jesus speak to us?

My first steps were encouraging. The promise of God being with us in Christ according to Matthew 1:23, and the announcement from John the Baptist that the kingdom from heaven had come near (3:2) seemed comforting. But the feeling quickly passed. By the end of chapter three, John had already introduced the *fear-factor*. The one who will appear after him, he says, will use his winnowing fork to burn evildoers ("the chaff") with "unquenchable fire."

I continued, hoping to hear something different. By the end of chapter four I did. The pendulum had swung from the threat of punishment to something good from God. Jesus wasn't simply going around telling people they were going to hell. He was teaching, Matthew says, "proclaiming the good news," and "curing people of every disease and every sickness" (4:23).

Jesus was manifesting the kingdom, making it real! Afterward, the Beatitudes appear where he offers consolation to those who mourn, justice to those who "hunger for righteousness," and mercy to those who forgive. Unfortunately, the comfort — once again — did not last long. By the end of chapter five, Jesus had set up standards most human beings cannot fulfill, forbidden divorce in virtually all circumstances (including, presumably, abuse), and invoked the threat of hell simply if you call someone a fool

(Matthew 5:22). Maybe he was exaggerating to make a point; either way, I felt discouraged.

Chapter six, thankfully, brought the first wave of hope. “Do not worry,” Jesus tells his disciples who fear the lack of having enough to eat and clothing to wear, a fear many in our world possess now. “Consider the lilies of the field,” Jesus says in response, “how they grow; how they neither toil nor spin But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith?” (Matthew 6:28-29)

What a message, I think to myself.

Then the tide that flows ebbs once more: Jesus speaks about the ease with which we slide into disaster, how few of us (it would seem) will pass through the narrow gate to life (Matthew 7:14). It is a teaching he will later repeat, only with respect to the rich and how their wealth will prevent them from being saved.

I decided, finally, to stop. Maybe Matthew’s Gospel was just too full of threats and impossible standards of behavior to be helpful when it comes to preaching the good news. Sure, the narrator tells us that Jesus “proclaimed the good news,” but I was having trouble determining exactly where and what that was. This “Gospel,” it seemed, had nothing but “Law” (i.e., a list of things we must do to make ourselves right with God). Maybe the only purpose it could serve, then, was to show, as Lutherans had interpreted it before, how we cannot measure up to God’s standards and must, therefore, rely completely on God’s grace for salvation.

There wasn’t much to it beyond that.

The Junk Heap

I was about to dismiss Matthew as a source of good news and consign it, at least metaphorically, to the junk heap – the same heap to which Luther consigned the Book of Esther for not mentioning God, the Book of James for not mentioning the gospel, and the Book of Revelation for not mentioning

anything that made sense! I was weary of what felt like, apart from a few examples I mentioned previously, the one-sided Jesus of Judgment, the Christ who did nothing but condemn.

But then a single word caught my attention in the final verses of chapter nine. There I read how, as we saw in chapter four, Jesus “was teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness.” Only this time I noticed an addition, one that could potentially change everything. “When [Jesus] saw the crowds,” Matthew tells us, “he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest’ (9:36-37).

I want you to notice here two things: first, instead of voicing threats, Jesus exhibits compassion for the people around him, providing us with a glimpse into his character which, in turn, discloses to us something of God’s character. God has compassion for us; indeed, as Psalm 145:9 says, God has compassion over all God has made. Second, instead of saying “the gate is narrow,” Jesus offers hope by saying “the harvest is plentiful.”

What follows is incredible: Jesus starts talking about the “little ones” his disciples should help and “the least of these”; he praises children who come to him for a blessing and rebukes the disciples for chastizing them; he speaks some of the most beautiful words of consolation in all of Scripture – “come to me,” he says, “all of you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest;” several times more he exhibits compassion for the crowds as he heals the lame, the blind, the mute, making “the maimed whole;” he feeds the hungry and talks about the need for debt to be forgiven; he affirms that God answers prayer, knowing them even before we ask; for those, lastly, who doubt their salvation, he affirms that “with God all things are possible.”

All of this, we discover, is good news!

An Impossible Task?

Matthew's Jesus, it turns out, has more good news for us than we might have anticipated. True, some of the harsher words of judgment in the New Testament linger here. A closer reading, however, shows a different side to Jesus that emerges over the course of the story: a healer whose heart was moved by the people he encountered; a consoler who sought to ease the suffering and burdens people were carrying; and a caregiver who gave special attention to those experiencing the most need.

Pick a verse you heard from Matthew's Gospel in today's message. Let it be your word of consolation throughout the coming week, no matter what burden you carry or hardship you face. Together, then, we will have found Matthew's Gospel – or rather, the gospel *in* Matthew.

Amen.



Hymn of the Day

(Stanzas 1, 2 & 4)

Jesus, Still Lead On

ELW 624

1 Je - sus, still lead on, till our rest be won; and, al-though the
2 If the way be drear, if the foe be near, let no faith - less
3 When we seek re - lief from a long - felt grief, when temp - ta - tions
4 Je - sus, still lead on, till our rest be won; heav'n - ly lead - er,

way be cheer - less, we will fol - low, calm and fear - less;
fears o'er - take us, let not faith and hope for - sake us;
come al - lur - ing make us pa - tient and en - dur - ing;
still di - rect us, still sup - port, con - sole, pro - tect us,

guide us by your hand to the prom - ised land.
safe - ly past the foe to our home we go.
show us that bright shore where we weep no more.
till we safe - ly stand in the prom - ised land.

Text: Nicolaus L. von Zinzendorf, 1700–1760; tr. Jane L. Borthwick, 1813–1897, alt.
Music: SEELENBRAUTIGAM, Adam Drese, 1620–1701

Prayers of the Church

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

A brief silence.

P: Gracious God, your word has been sown in many ways and places. We pray for grace-centered missionaries, that they may be humbled and inspired by the presence of God already among those they attempt to reach. We pray also for newly planted congregations around the world, that they may be a beacon of hope and light to all who come to them. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

P: 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, especially the rainforest of Brazil. Empower us to sustainably use what you have given. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

P: Reigning God, we pray for our nation's leaders. Increase their desire for justice and equality. We pray also for our enemies. Bridge the chasms that divide us and guide authorities to a deep and lasting peace, especially during these times of bitter partisan disagreement. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

P: Abiding God, care for all who are in need or vulnerable, especially those listening who cannot leave their homes due to the pandemic. For those who doubt, renew faith. For those who are worrying, provide release. For those who are struggling, ease burdens. For those in fear, give hope. Lord, in your mercy,

C: **hear our prayer.**

P: Renewing God, revive your church in this place. Nourish and nurture the seeds you have planted, that we might grow as disciples and live for one another as Jesus taught us. Sustain our ministries and help us find ways to

maintain our fellowship and deepen relationships with the wider community. Lord, in your mercy,

☩: hear our prayer.

P: For who or what else do the people of God pray?

A silence is given so that your prayers may be offered.

P: Lord, in your mercy,

☩: hear our prayer.

P: Eternal God, we give thanks for all who have died, and we pray for all those who find themselves nearing death. Be with them, their families, and friends. Comfort us in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Lord, in your mercy,

☩: hear our prayer.

P: Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

☩: Amen.

Lord's Prayer

P: Lord remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

**☩: Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever.**

Amen.

Announcements

P: We thank you for joining us for this service. If you would like to hear other services or access the newest edition of *the Quill*, our newsletter, we invite you to go to our website at queenannelutheran.org.

P: Receive now the blessing:

Benediction

A: Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

P: Almighty God, the Father, † the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
bless and preserve you.

C: Amen.

Dismissal

P: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Prelude in C Major
Gustav Wilhelm Teschner (1800–1883)

