



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. Dan Peterson
Cantor	Kyle Haugen
Lector and Intercessor	Susan Evans

This service of worship can also be listened to online on our website.

Go to queenannelutheran.org and click on "WORD OUT" to find audio, video, and print resources for worship at home, as well as resources to use with children.

Visit our YouTube channel for other worship services, educational forums, music and messages for children, and other organ music.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 9, 2021

A "Word Out" audio transcript



Prelude

Free improvisation on ANDREW'S SONG

Welcome

P: Welcome, this sixth Sunday of Easter, to Queen Anne Lutheran Church. Wherever you are listening, whatever challenges you might be facing, we invite you into this space: one where you can hear the good news in proclamation, spoken and sung; a time where you can be still, and know God is God.

This Sunday's image of the life the risen Christ shares with us is the image of friendship. We are called to serve others, as Jesus came to serve. This calling might seem hierarchical: God loved Christ; Christ loves us; we love others. Fortunately, Christ himself offers a corrective. "I no longer call you servants," he says, "I call you friends."


Greeting


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

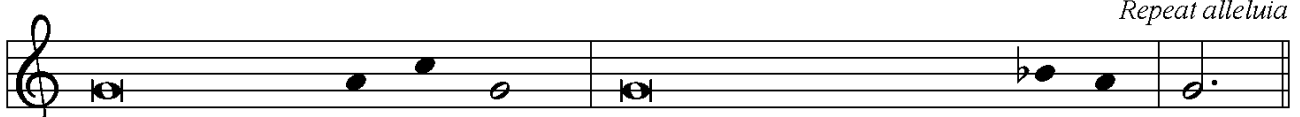
G: And also with you.

Gospel Acclamation


John 14:23


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


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

A: 
Repeat alleluia

Those who love me will keep my word,
and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make
our home with them.

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


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

The Holy Gospel:

John 15:9-23

A: The Holy Gospel according to John, the fifteenth chapter.

G: Glory to you, O Lord.

A: [Jesus said:] ⁹“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved

you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

📖: The Gospel of the Lord.

🎵: Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Are You Sure of Your Salvation?

Pastor Dan Peterson

I heard it on Christian radio. A man, probably in his 40s, was talking about what it was like growing up as a preacher's kid. "Church was a drug to me," he joked. "I was drug to it every Sunday."

That said, he continues, the repetition of weekly attendance had a clear benefit. Repeated exposure to his father's preaching led him to realize he was a sinner in need of saving. This compelled him one Sunday to respond to the altar call, which in evangelical churches refers to the moment in a worship service where the pastor invites people forward to dedicate their lives to Christ and accept him as savior.

And so, before the congregation, before his Father in heaven, and his father in the pulpit, he gave himself to Christ.

He was four.

Now, I don't know about you, but to me that seems a *little* young to be deciding the fate of your soul eternally! It's difficult, in fact, to imagine any of us having that kind of authority. I mean, think about the weight of it: your salvation ultimately lies in your hands. At some point, whether you are a four-year-old or a 40-something, you must, with complete earnestness and conviction, say the right words to open before you the gates of paradise. Otherwise, God will condemn you to hell.

This, at least, is the message of popular evangelical Christianity. Evangelical historian and scholar Mark Noll of Baylor University calls it “conversionism.” At some point in your life, you must have a life-changing experience where you “decide for Christ” as a precondition of your salvation.

You must, in other words, be born again. But at four? That seems a little early! Fortunately, our speaker continued, he had enough scruples as an adolescent to look back and reflect upon what he had done. Maybe, he wondered, he lacked the sincerity and commitment he now possessed as a teenager. After all, the First Commandment stipulates that you are to love the Lord your God with “all your soul,” that is, as one rabbi interprets it, “with all your life . . . until the [very] last drop of life is wrung out of you” (see Reuven Hammer, *Akiva: Life, Legend, Legacy*, p. 100).

Shouldn't that same level of commitment be present also when accepting Christ? Unsure of whether it was the first time around, our speaker decided to double-down and do it again. As a teenager, then, he rededicated his life to Christ, confessing yet again Jesus as lord and savior with the kind of conviction he believed was necessary to be saved. Now he could be sure!

“Are you doubting your salvation?” he asked his listeners. “Do you lack the assurance that you are saved even if you have already accepted Jesus? Then do as I did: accept him again. *Only then* you can be *sure* of your salvation.”¹

This advice may seem odd, even funny. I share it with you, however, not to mock the speaker or his listeners, *particularly* those who were unsure of their salvation. I share it because I recognize the problem. Perhaps some of you do too, and with good reason: this was the struggle of Martin Luther. He, too, had what I call *damnation anxiety*.

Do What is Within You

Luther lived during an era that James Kittelson, author of *Luther the Reformer*, refers to as the age of fire and brimstone. The fear of God's wrath was pervasive. The harsh realities of life, including plagues that would ravage

¹This quotation is a reconstruction I am using from memory for the sake of emphasizing the speaker's point. It is not verbatim.

enormous segments of various populations, compelled many to assume God was judging them for their moral imperfection. God's standards, after all, were high. Those who fell short, it was believed, would be condemned to eternal hell.

Like a number of his contemporaries, Luther lived in terror. What if he wasn't good enough? What if he couldn't meet God's expectations?

Because of the threat, many people sought answers from spiritual advisors and theologians across Europe. What can they do? How might they be saved? The message they received in response was simple: try your best – or more specifically, “do what is within you.”

Unfortunately, when Luther looked within himself, especially after being trained in the methods of introspection as a Catholic monk, he could see nothing but sin. Even his most virtuous acts, he recognized, was tainted by self-interest. He didn't do good deeds out of love for his neighbor or God; he did them to save his own skin from the fires of hell. Surely, God would judge him for that!

Luther felt that there was no way out. God demanded the impossible and then punished human beings for failing to achieve it! No wonder Luther came by his own admission to “hate God.” Who wouldn't?

A Great Reversal

Fortunately, Luther made a discovery that changed everything. After combing through Scripture for a solution, he realized when reading the letters of Paul that salvation rested not on what we do, but on what God does for us in Jesus Christ. Since our all-too-human nature makes it impossible for us to perfectly fulfill the commandments of God, God has come to us and accepted us without condition in and through Jesus Christ, *liberating us to love others as God first loved us.*

Does this line of thinking sound familiar? It should! The language comes directly from our Gospel reading for today, John 15:9-17.

You Did Not Accept Me

It's strange to me how many Christians – including our speaker on the radio – insist that salvation depends on our choice rather than God's to be effective. Not only does taking salvation out of God's hands and placing it in mine make our

acceptance of Christ seem like an impossible burden! It also directly contradicts what Jesus says to his disciples in John 15:16. "You did not choose me," he tells them, "but I chose you."

Let me repeat that. "You did not choose me," Jesus tells his followers, "but I chose you."

Here Jesus makes it abundantly clear that the "credit," if you will, for his disciples' salvation goes to him. He acted first. He claimed them. Yes, the disciples responded by following him, but elsewhere John attributes even our belief in Christ as the work of the Holy Spirit. Consider John 6:28-29. There the disciples ask Jesus, "What must we do to perform the works of God?" Jesus replies, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

Christ chooses those who follow him, and the Holy Spirit enables them to do so. He initiates. He chooses us. We do not choose him.

The same holds true for the love that comes to us through Jesus from God. "As the Father has loved me," Jesus says in v.9, "so I have loved you." Instead of insisting they must accept him to be saved, Jesus makes it clear that they are already loved! The only thing to do now is to share that love, to "love one another as I [Jesus] first loved you" (v. 12).

Jesus, in short, turns everything around. It's not that we must accept him to be saved; the gospel is that through him *God has accepted us!* In response to such amazing grace, we are invited to share the love we have received with others. This is the only real commandment Jesus gives his followers, that they love one another as he loved them (v. 12). This is how his followers will bear fruit (v. 16), and this is how they would distinguish themselves in the early days of the faith: their love for others was unsurpassed.

Grace Has a Place

Now, I don't know about you, but this is the kind of Christianity I *long* to see today. I would love to live in an age where others would know that we are Christians by our love instead of the insistence that people must say the right combination of words with the right degree of intensity to be saved! How is that any different than insisting we must *do something* to make ourselves right with

God, that we are justified by works or in this case justified by the intensity of our *belief* rather than by God's grace?

By insisting we must do something, that we must accept Christ with the appropriate amount of conviction, we turn faith into a work, into something we must do to gain God's favor. Our source of assurance is no longer in the God who has pledged Himself to us in Jesus Christ, but in the pledge we make to God. We find assurance, as the speaker did, by referring back to the commitment *we made* to Christ instead of trusting that God in Christ long ago made a commitment to us! We end up having faith in our own faith, which is idolatry.

Finding assurance in what God has done for us instead of in the commitment we have made to God reflects what Christ teaches his disciples in today's reading. "You did not choose me," he says, "but I chose you." That is the good news. Those are the words we should trust in the face of damnation anxiety, whether in Luther's day or ours. Imagine how such assurance might free Christians today to love others instead of being pressured to have the right kind of conversion experience in order to be saved.

Blessed Assurance

It's not my intent, as I said at the outset, to mock our speaker, nor do I believe he is a bad person. He seemed earnest. I do, however, take issue with his advice. Instead of formally repeating our commitment to Christ just to make sure we are saved, why not let go and "simply accept the fact that we are accepted," to cite the words of the theologian Paul Tillich?

Linger here for just for a moment as the words you are hearing of your total and complete acceptance by God give way to silence. Do not attempt anything. Do not try anything. Do not believe anything. Just accept the fact that you are accepted, accepted by a God who loves you more than you could know, indeed, a God who gave Himself out of His love with everything he had "until the last drop of His life was wrung from him" on the cross.

Then sing the hymn that follows with great joy. Then go. Do a good deed for a friend, a neighbor, or someone in need. Love them as God first loved you.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day

Beloved, God's Chosen

ELW 648



1 Be - lov - ed, God's cho - sen, put on as a gar - ment
2 With - in, call forth Wis - dom, to dwell in you rich - ly;
3 Be - lov - ed, God's cho - sen, put on as a gar - ment



com - pas - sion, for - give - ness, and good - ness of heart.
let peace rule your hearts and that peace be of Christ.
com - pas - sion, for - give - ness, and good - ness of heart.



A - bove all, be - fore all, let love be your rai - ment
And from the heart's cham - ber, be - lov - ed and ho - ly,
A - bove all, be - fore all, let love be your rai - ment



that binds in - to one ev - 'ry dis - so - nant part.
let sing - ing thanks - giv - ing to God ev - er rise.
that binds in - to one ev - 'ry dis - so - nant part.

Text: Susan Palo Cherwien, b. 1953
Music: ANDREW'S SONG, Robert A. Hobby, b. 1962
Text © 1994 Susan Palo Cherwien, admin. Augsburg Fortress.
Music © 1997 Augsburg Fortress.



Prayers of the Church

A: Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

A brief silence.

A: Loving God, you call us to be your fruit-bearing church. Strengthen the bonds among all Christian churches. Today we pray for the Moravian Church, giving thanks for the life and witness of Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, renewer of the church and hymnwriter. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Creating God, the earth praises you. The seas roar and the hills sing for joy. Fill the earth with your love so that by their song, all creatures of land and sea and sky, burrowing and soaring, may call us to join with them in praise. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Faithful Savior, you conquer the world not with weapons but with undying love. Plant your word in the hearts of the nations' leaders and give them your Spirit, so that the peoples of the world may live in peace. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Caring Healer, you forget no one and accompany the lonely. Be present with those who are sick or suffering. Provide for those needing homes or medical care and point us towards life-changing responses to these needs in our own communities. Be with the dying. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Gracious God, as a mother comforts her child, you comfort us. Bless mothers and mothering people in our lives. Comfort those who miss their mothers, mothers who grieve, those who grieve because they cannot be mothers, and those who have never known a loving mother. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: For whom or what else do the people of God pray?

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

A: Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: Gentle Redeemer, all who die in you abide in your presence forever. We remember with thanksgiving those who shared your love throughout their lives. Keep us united with them in your lasting love. Lord, in your mercy,

G: **hear our prayer.**

A: In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

G: **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

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

G: **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

and 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.

G: Amen.

Dismissal

P: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

G: Thanks be to God.

Postlude

Psalm 19

Benedetto Marcello (1686–1739)

About today's music

Today's hymn features a contemporary text and a tune written for it by Susan Palo Cherwien and Robert Hobby, respectively. Although we've sung this hymn at QALC previously, it's still fairly new to our community (and may be brand new to some of you). One of the tools in a cantor's toolbox is to use the prelude to the service as a way to help introduce a hymn melody that will be sung later. In today's prelude, I especially highlighted some of places in the hymn's melody that have short "leaps" between pitches in order to help familiarize the listener with these passages. This tune is a great example of a modern melody that has a simplicity to it yet just enough uniqueness to have a fresh sound.

— *Cantor Kyle*