

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The community we call the church is continually being shaped by its attention to the word of God. Each day our baptismal callings are formed in Christ for life. Despite any setbacks, misunderstandings, or distractions that we experience, God continues to come close.

Today in our reading from Isaiah, we hear God's word of gathering and promise to foreigners. We are all foreigners in this new and changing world. All the world is now formed of outsiders, strangers, and aliens. In such a time, we hear God's assurance that God will gather the outcasts.

God also says this: "I will gather others to them." Who are these others? I do not have the answer to this, but I'm confident that "others" is never who we expect. Most often, it is the people we were not seeking. It is the ones who do not look like us. Others are the people who are different. They are diverse. They are unexpected. They will have surprising needs, distinct problems, and unique abilities.

Why will they come to be gathered with us if they are so different? The answer here is not so foreign. Hope. Possibility. Healing. Another answer may simply be this: God will make it so. Indeed, God may already be making it so. In order to accomplish this, our gatherings may need to have been broken open, restarted, and re-imagined — so that they can be gathered anew for all the foreigners. As God declares to us through the prophet Isaiah, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

Let Us Be Gathered

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
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 Song

Members of St. Peter Lutheran Church at North Wales, Pennsylvania, lead us in the gathering song “All Are Welcome” (ELW #641). North Wales is just little ways north of Philadelphia — about halfway to Allentown. Here is the video link: <https://vimeo.com/434853476>. (Words are included in the video.)

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray.

God of all peoples,
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 Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Let Us Hear God’s Word

A reading from Isaiah:

¹Thus says the Lord: Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed.
⁶And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant— ⁷these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices
will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.
⁸Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them besides those already gathered. (Isaiah 56)

*The Word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.*

A reading from the Psalms:

¹May God be merciful to us and bless us;
may the light of God’s face shine upon us.
²Let your way be known upon earth,
your saving health among all nations.
³Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
⁴Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity and guide all the nations on earth.
⁵Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
⁶The earth has brought forth its increase;
God, our own God, has blessed us.
⁷May God give us blessing,
and may all the ends of the earth stand in awe.

A reading from Romans:

[Paul writes:] ¹I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. ^{2a}God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.
²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³²For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all. (Romans 11)

Word of God. Word of life.

Thanks be to God.

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matthew 15)

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

Reflection on the Readings

In a broken experience of life, there is nothing better than seeing people who are different come together for a common purpose. Being a witness to such a gathering can feed faith, dreams, forward-facing energy.

Worship itself provides a glimpse of this. When worship is at its best, we see people gathering together with different experiences and at different ages and stages of life. In the midst of that diversity, we share together in collective confession, communal prayer, and congregational music. It makes sense for the gathered people of God to be of one accord in worship.

Underlying this experience is a common—but perhaps oft overlooked—goal for the people of God. We gather to praise God, yes. But there is also the goal that we are sent back out a little different than when we entered that shared time. Hearts are transformed through God's proclaimed word and through the self-offering that comes by way of the grace we bestow on others.

Today, Psalm 67 calls for the entire nation to come together to praise God. The nation gathers to proclaim a central message that God is good and has blessed the people. The unified people come together for a common purpose and a visible witness to the character of the only wise and loving God—a God of hope, mercy, compassion, and justice.

In the experiences of this year of 2020, it is challenging for us to imagine a nation coming together for cohesive and collective praise. Indeed, it may be no easier to picture even a small community gathering with such unity when we abide so much in polarized and divided encampments.

There are denominational differences, various theological perspectives, and arguments about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, what it means to be evangelical, what does it mean to live in a world stripped of grace. There are days when it is hard to tell by our work and our worship if we are all talking about the same faith.

Within near certainty, Psalm 67 was first composed and addressed to people who also experienced human division and strife among the nations as well. And yet that nation of God's own people is being called upon to lift up united voices of praise. "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you."

Perhaps the truth here is that in the face of brokenness and disagreement, praise is what has the power to bring us together. If we begin our days and end our evenings with gratitude to our God, maybe, just maybe, we can find a common thread. If we give praise for life, for health, for strength, for resources, for love, and for each new moment, maybe praise will help us to understand that life is precious and thus we are all—even the others—precious in God's sight.

The call for the nations to come together to glorify God is a call that reminds us what really matters. God must be at the center so that our lives can be centered and re-centered around love, peace, compassion, hope, and justice.

If we don't praise God together, we may be tempted to praise our own efforts—and to stay fixated on circling the wagons of people who are just like us in age, background, experience, or need. But if we praise our God, our God who draws the circles wider than we could ever imagine, maybe we will be held together by God's grace as a holy nation and royal priesthood filled with humility and healing and hope and possibility.

Hymn of the Day

Moving a little westward from Philadelphia, we find leadership for our hymn of the day from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Lancaster. Let us join in singing “When Pain of the World Surrounds Us” (ELW #704). As described by the author and composer, this 1978 song points to “the challenge to overcome a paralyzing despair and to hang on to the vision of what had brought us all together in the first place—to be the church, to be open to the Spirit, to let God’s justice and healing flow through us, to be hopeful, and to embrace our part in God’s future.”

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/C9GbRepA7D4>.

- 1 *When pain of the world surrounds us with darkness and despair,
when searching just confounds us with false hopes ev'rywhere,
when lives are starved for meaning and destiny is bare,
we are called to follow Jesus and let God's healing flow through us.*

- 2 *We see with fear and trembling our aching world in need,
confessing to each other our wastefulness and greed.
May we with steadfast caring the hungry children feed.
We are called to follow Jesus and let God's justice flow through us.*

- 3 *The church is a holy vessel the living waters fill
to nourish all the people, God's purpose to fulfill.
May we with humble courage be open to God's will.
We are called to follow Jesus and let God's Spirit flow through us.*

- 4 *We praise you for our journey and your abundant grace,
your saving word that guided a struggling human race.
O God, with all creation, your future we embrace.
We are called to follow Jesus and let God's changes flow through us.*

Prayers of Intercession

Confident of your care and upheld by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need, responding with the Canaanite woman to each petition “Help us, O Lord.”

A brief silence.

We pray for the Christian church around the world,
for humility where the church is dominant,
for courage where it is oppressed,
and for faithfulness when it cannot assemble for worship:

A brief silence.

Bless your church, faithful God: help us, O Lord.

We pray for your bountiful earth,
for cleaner air,
for the fields on which our food grows,
for the renewal of lands and waters that have suffered from disregard:

A brief silence.

Protect your earth, creative God: help us, O Lord.

We pray for the nations of the earth,
for the peaceful resolution of disputes around the world,
for just policies that care for the poor,
and for the upcoming political conventions in our land:

A brief silence.

Save humankind, sovereign God: help us, O Lord.

We pray for all in need of healing,
for the residents of Beirut and other distressed cities,

for those suffering from hurricane damage,
for those sick and dying of COVID-19 here in our region and around the world,
for the unemployed,
for people without medical care,
for medical workers and researchers,
for the outcasts of our society,
for Martha as she prepares for upcoming surgery,
for Pat as she recovers from follow-up surgery,
for Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa,
Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene, and all we now name.

A brief silence.

Heal the sick, merciful God: help us, O Lord.

We pray for a spirit of respect the world's religions,
for wisdom concerning the many houses of prayer,
and for guidance where religion serves as an arm of the government:

A brief silence.

Direct all people of faith, gracious God: help us, O Lord.

We pray for schools around the globe,
for educators who must plan for the fall,
and for children without the resources to access remote learning:

A brief silence.

Guide us, compassionate God: help us, O Lord.

We pray, finally, for ourselves,
for whenever we feel tormented by demons,
and for all our family and friends:

A longer period of silence.

loving God: help us, O Lord.

We mourn the deaths of those we love,
and we praise you for the lives of all your faithful people.
At the end, gather us all into the joy of your presence.

A brief silence.

Grant us salvation, eternal God: help us, O Lord.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love,
we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Offering Prayer

Please continue to remember and support the ongoing ministries of our church during this time. Offerings may be sent to Peace Lutheran Church, 3100 N St Louis Ave, Joplin MO 64801.

Let us pray.

God of goodness and growth,
all creation is yours,
and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
Water and word, wine and bread:
these are signs of your abundant grace.
Nourish us through these gifts,
that we might proclaim your steadfast love
in our communities and in the world,
through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song.
Amen.

*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.*

Let Us Be Sent in Service

Sending Song

The hymn “Oh, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” (ELW #886) sends us forth today from our worship devotions. Organist Robert Morehead from Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Vienna, Virginia, is back this week to lead our singing.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/UfDpGGBqeO4?t=249>.

(If you’d like to hear Robert talk about the history of this great Charles Wesley hymn before singing it, use this link: <https://youtu.be/UfDpGGBqeO4>.)

- 1 *Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace!*
- 2 *My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honors of your name.*
- 3 *The name of Jesus charms our fears
and bids our sorrows cease,
sings music in the sinner's ears,
brings life and health and peace.*
- 4 *He speaks, and list'ning to his voice,
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice,
the humble poor believe.*
- 5 *Look unto him, your Savior own,
O fallen human race!
Look and be saved through faith alone,
be justified by grace!*
- 6 *To God all glory, praise, and love
be now and ever giv'n
by saints below and saints above,
the church in earth and heav'n.*

Benediction

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.

God, the creator, † Jesus, the Christ,
and the Holy Spirit, the comforter,
bless you and keep you in eternal love.
Amen.