

Sunday, June 14, 2020

Dear Sister and Brothers in Christ,

In today's gospel reading, Jesus speaks of the church's mission with images drawn from daily life. The harvest is already plentiful, he says, but laborers are needed for work in the fields of daily life. What are we to do? We are to do what our worship invites us to do: let our conversation be shaped by the good news, extend Christ's peace wherever we find ourselves, and share our bread with the hungry.

In confession and forgiveness, the whole assembly is invited to make the sign of the cross two different times. Each place is marked with the symbol ✠. As we prepare for the day when we can again gather the assembly, now is a good time to practice this reminder of our baptisms. Here is a video from the pastor of a 3-point ELCA parish in rural Nebraska demonstrating two ways to do the sign of the cross: <https://youtu.be/PhDirWRgwcc>.

While going left shoulder to right shoulder is a common way of doing the sign of the cross, it is also quite alright to go from right shoulder to left shoulder. Indeed, within Orthodox assemblies, right-to-left is the usual practice. I myself tend to use both ways. If you make the sign of the cross using your right hand, going left-to-right creates a pulling in motion. At the beginning of worship, this motion can be a reminder of being centered and gathered within God's church. When you go right-to-left with your right hand, though, the resulting motion is outward in direction. This motion can be a reminder of being sent out for mission. Because of this, I tend to use that direction at the end of worship during the blessing and sending. It is a reminder that ties very well with today's gospel reading.

### **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.

### **Song**

Today, from her home in Camano Island, Washington, Lutheran YouTube pianist and musician MaryRuth72 leads our gathering song, ELW #532 – "Gather Us In." The words are included in the video.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/eiLPr5BmCL8>

### **Prayer of the Day**

Let us pray.  
God of compassion,  
you have opened the way for us and brought us to yourself.  
Pour your love into our hearts, that, overflowing with joy,  
we may freely share the blessings of your realm  
and faithfully proclaim the good news of your Son,  
Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.  
Amen.

### **Let Us Hear God's Word**

*A reading from Exodus:*

<sup>2</sup>[The Israelites] had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain.<sup>3</sup>Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: <sup>4</sup>You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup>Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup>but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

<sup>7</sup>So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. <sup>8a</sup>The people all answered as one: "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do." (Exodus 19)

*The Word of the Lord.*

*Thanks be to God.*

*A reading from the Psalms:*

- <sup>1</sup>Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all you lands!  
<sup>2</sup>Serve the Lord with gladness; come into God's presence with a song.  
<sup>3</sup>Know that the Lord is God, our maker to whom we belong;  
we are God's people and the sheep of God's pasture.  
<sup>4</sup>Enter the gates of the Lord with thanksgiving and the courts with praise;  
give thanks and bless God's holy name.  
<sup>5</sup>Good indeed is the Lord, whose steadfast love is everlasting,  
whose faithfulness endures from age to age. (Psalm 100)

*A reading from Romans:*

- <sup>1</sup>Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup>through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. <sup>3</sup>And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, <sup>4</sup>and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, <sup>5</sup>and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.  
<sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. <sup>8</sup>But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. (Romans 5)

*Word of God. Word of life.  
Thanks be to God.*

*The holy gospel according to Matthew.*

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

<sup>9:35</sup>Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. <sup>36</sup>When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. <sup>37</sup>Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; <sup>38</sup>therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

<sup>10:1</sup>Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. <sup>2</sup>These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; <sup>3</sup>Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; <sup>4</sup>Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

<sup>5</sup>These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, <sup>6</sup>but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. <sup>7</sup>As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' <sup>8</sup>Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment." (Matthew 9-10)

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

## Reflection on the Readings

On Friday of this coming week, the United States will commemorate the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ending of slavery and the beginning of national healing. It was on June 19, 1865, that the Emancipation Proclamation finally reached Texas, the most remote of the Confederate slave states, and was publicly read in Galveston. We now name and remember this date as Juneteenth.

The date has other names as well. Freedom Day. Jubilee Day. Cel-Liberation Day. The first celebrations of Juneteenth began in Texas church-centered community gatherings in 1866. Today, Juneteenth is now an official state holiday in Texas and is locally celebrated throughout the country and beyond. Traditions for the day include reading the [Emancipation Proclamation](#) that was first issued by President Lincoln in 1863 and also singing such hymns and songs as "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (<https://youtu.be/uyZkRgQ4ZnQ>) and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" (listen to the oldest known recording of this spiritual here: <https://youtu.be/GUvBGZnL9rE>).

This coming week, as we witness and celebrate the 154<sup>th</sup> Juneteenth, the need for healing and liberation in our world is still very real and very present. The beginning of such healing and liberation is now history, but we have not yet seen the final chapter.

The same was true for Jesus and the apostles.

As Professor Greg Carey of the Lancaster Theological Seminary (United Church of Christ) once noted about today's gospel reading, "Healing and liberation certify the presence of the realm of heaven. Both Jesus' own mission and that of the Twelve bring not only proclamation but also healing. Jesus sends forth the Twelve to perform his own works, the very works that have defined his ministry from the beginning.

In commissioning his disciples, Jesus calls us not just to the same servant role but also to advance beyond him into new and emergent contexts. Whether with Jesus or commissioned by Jesus, the proclamation of God's realm is always marked by healing and liberation.

Like the apostles and first disciples, we may want clear instructions for every issue, but instructions only take us so far. The Bible is not that kind of guide or manual.

Rather, when we think about things like racism, economics, government, pandemics, and the consequences of climate change, we don't ask the Bible to tell us how to manage things directly. Instead, we ask how the God's Word may inform our vision of a just society. Yes, slavery exists in various contexts and settings of certain Bible stories, but that is neither the thrust nor direction of God's Word. The thrust is this: grace and mercy. The directions in which we follow Jesus are these: compassion, honesty, and love.

When we get caught up in looking for instruction, we get side-tracked from the main thing. All we need to know is this: where the realm of heaven is breaking out, we will healing and liberation.

Jesus' ministry and that of his disciples entail the exorcism of demons. Instead of getting caught up in the exorcism details of arcane rituals or movie scenes, we should think more deeply. Even if we cannot get our imaginations around real demons tormenting poor individuals, we can certainly relate to what it means to be bound by a power one feels powerless to resist.

We can remember that "demons" like this are not be found only in "those" people. They reside whenever and wherever evil has us firmly in its grip. All of us can find ourselves bound by behaviors, patterns, or structures we cannot escape. We can even curse ourselves when we repeat the same behavior time and again. So, when we imagine the realm of exorcism, a more meaningful way in which we can do that to imagine liberation and freedom from powers that constrain us and prevent us from living full human lives.

As we await the day when we will gather anew as God's assembly, what does Jesus' commissioning mean for us in today's world? Through Matthew's witness to the Gospel and good news of Jesus Christ, we are invited to see the church in the story of the disciples. We are invited to see that story as our own story.

In that story, the disciples imitate Jesus. In that story, Jesus not only proclaims the realm of heaven but demonstrates its nature. In that story, when the realm of heaven is near, healing and liberation take place. In that story, the disciples finds themselves cast into the world and empowered to take Jesus' message beyond his instructions and into surprising new contexts.

What can you do right now and this week? Start by learning more of how that story connects to our own church. Just last year, on June 27, 2019, the Church Council of the ELCA adopted a declaration addressed to people of African descent. This declaration was made in conjunction with the Lutheran World Federation's "Resolution on Commemorating the 2019 Quad-centennial of the Forced Transatlantic Voyage of Enslaved African Peoples to the Americas—Human Beings Not for Sale!," adopted at the LWF Council meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, June 13-18, 2019, during the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the first forced transatlantic voyage of enslaved African peoples.

Take time this coming week to read the full declaration. You can find it here:

[https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Slavery\\_Apology\\_Explanation.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Slavery_Apology_Explanation.pdf). The main statement is only 9 pages long. So, if you read about only two pages per day, you will have read it through in time for Friday's Juneteenth celebration!

When we gather again in-person, we will be gathered as church in a new world. This learning action can be our start to bringing the message of God's healing and liberation to that new world.

*(Note: If you are ambitious, you can also take up reading another important document. The ELCA's Social Statement "Freed in Christ" takes up the topic of race, ethnicity, and culture. It was signed at the third ELCA Churchwide Assembly on August 31, 1993, at Kansas City, Missouri, right here in our own synod! You can download and read that statement here: [https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/RaceSS.pdf?\\_ga=2.153994296.1402356691.1592059914-1130908180.1583250154](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/RaceSS.pdf?_ga=2.153994296.1402356691.1592059914-1130908180.1583250154).)*

Let us pray.

Holy and righteous God, you created us in your image.

Grant us grace to contend fearlessly against evil  
and to make no peace with oppression.

Help us, like those of generations before us  
who resisted the evil of slavery and human bondage  
in any form and any manner of oppression.

Help us to use our freedoms to bring justice among people and nations everywhere,  
to the glory of your Holy name through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

### **Hymn of the Day**

“Will You Come and Follow Me – The Summons” is our hymn of the day today. Pianist Clea Arbogast leads the music for this hymn as we listen (or maybe even take up singing to her accompaniment) and consider the question posed in the song’s conclusion, “Will you use the faith you’ve found to reshape the world around through my sight and touch and sound in you, and you in me?” Words are included in the video.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/IEWdXI91m4>.

“Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world. Now I’ve been free, I know what a dreadful condition slavery is. I have seen hundreds of escaped slaves, but I never saw one who was willing to go back and be a slave.”

—Harriet Tubman

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us join together to pray for the church, our nation, and for all who are in need, responding to each petition with the words, “Graciously hear our prayer.”

*A brief silence.*

O God, the Holy One of blessing, send your Spirit of tender might throughout your church and to all its leaders, especially Bishop Eaton. Strengthen the believers who cannot assemble for worship. Guide the church’s use of technology, and make yourself known to those who have no access to such materials.

*A brief silence.*

Your steadfast love is everlasting: Graciously hear our prayer.

O God, the Holy One of truth, we pray for your Spirit on teachers, preachers, and missionaries. Empower the church as it uses both historic and innovative words to proclaim your gospel across the street and around the globe.

*A brief silence.*

Your steadfast love is everlasting: Graciously hear our prayer.

O God, Holy One of creation, continue your care for the earth. Where there was fire or flooding, drought or storm, bring renewal of the land. Bless farmers and ranchers, and protect migrant farm workers as they toil in the sun to harvest our food.

*A brief silence.*

Your steadfast love is everlasting: Graciously hear our prayer.

O God, Holy One of unity, as we commemorate this week the martyrdom of the Emanuel Nine, who in 2015 were killed while assembled in their Charleston church for Bible study, we pray: end the scourge of racism and white supremacy; protect protestors; halt those who intend violence; preserve our democracy. Raise up leaders who model repentance and reconciliation, and support legislators who seek justice in our land.

*A brief silence.*

Your steadfast love is everlasting: Graciously hear our prayer.

O God, Holy One of compassion, heal the sick, and embrace the fearful. Visit the millions who are suffering from the coronavirus. Protect us from another wave of disease. Uphold health care workers and medical researchers as they work on our behalf. Assist the unemployed in finding a job. Show us how to provide safe housing and daily food for the homeless in our nation and around the world. We pray also for the 79 (and more) local people who were diagnosed with COVID-19 this past week within our community, for Pat, Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene, and all those we name before you now.

*A brief silence.*

Your steadfast love is everlasting: Graciously hear our prayer.

O God, Holy One of hope, sustain those who cannot endure their suffering but are led only to despair. Pour your grace into their hearts.

*A brief silence.*

Your steadfast love is everlasting: Graciously hear our prayer.

O God, Holy One of mercy, we pray finally also for ourselves.

*A longer time of silence.*

Your steadfast love is everlasting: Graciously hear our prayer.

O God, Holy eternal One, we praise you for the lives of all the faithful departed, both the famous and the forgotten. At the end of all things, bring to yourself all your treasured people, to abide in your presence forever.

*A brief silence.*

Your steadfast love is everlasting: Graciously hear our prayer.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those desires too deep for words, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

### **Offering Prayer**

God of goodness and growth,  
all creation is yours,  
and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.  
Water and word are signs of your abundant grace.  
Sustain 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.

### **Let Us Be Sent in Service**

### **Song**

Our sending song today is "Rise Up, O Saints of God" — but with a slight twist.

ELCA pastor and chaplain Megan Rohrer leads us today in a re-imagined version of the traditional hymn. Although recorded one year ago, Megan's version is even more relevant today. As she describes her musical offering, it is intended "to help folk understand the steps of transforming our hearts and mind for justice. #nonviolence #protest #reform." Words are included in the video. Also, you may need to turn up your volume because the recording is just a little quiet (at least is sounded that way to me).

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/KC1yR5MITpU>.

### **Sending Prayer**

Let us 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.

### **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.