

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“It’s not fair.”

These are the words of complaint that arise from today’s first reading. “It’s not fair that we have to suffer because of what others did.” “It’s not fair that the world is becoming more difficult.” “It’s not fair that my generation has to deal with this mess.” “It’s not fair that God now places this on us.” “It’s not fair that I have to change how I do things.” “It’s not fair that we just can’t do what we want—that someone is saying, ‘No.’” “It’s not fair, it’s not fair, it’s not fair!”

In the midst of this complaining, God cuts everyone short. “As I live,” says God, “you won’t be reciting this proverb anymore.” Stop blaming other people. Stop creating situations and divisions in which you can then blame other people. God’s speech grounds peoples’ responsibility in the fact that God is a living God, dynamic, engaged in the present life of the people. “All lives are mine,” says God. The life of the present generation is God’s, and what God brings into the present is *for them* and *about them*. They can stop looking back, and start looking around. This is their moment with God.

The prophet Ezekiel shows us that the way forward is through repentance. In other words, it is through change. In order to find the way out of death to life, we must change our ways, our practices, and our patterns. We cannot look to the familiar. We cannot glue ourselves to a world that no longer exists. We cannot use measures of success that no longer apply.

“But it’s not fair!” we cry out.

God’s answer is that *God’s* measures—measure of *change*—are certainly right and salutary. It is the people who are using faulty measures. They are willing to throw away their own life and the lives of their neighbors as well, which are worth everything. They are willing to flirt with the temptations of death. God turns the charge around to show that it is not about fairness after all. It is about the ultimate value: life.

Let Us Be Gathered

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God,
who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation.
Amen.

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God.
Silence is kept for reflection.

Faithful God,
have mercy on us.
We confess that we are captive to sin
and cannot free ourselves.
We turn from your loving embrace
and go our own ways.
We pass judgment on one another
before examining ourselves.
We place our own needs before those of our neighbors.
We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves.
Make us humble, cast away our transgressions,
and turn us again to life in you
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

God hears the cries of all who call out in need,
and through his death and resurrection,
Christ has made us his own.

Hear the truth that God proclaims:
Your sins are forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ.
Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness
to do God's work in the world.
Amen.

Gathering Song

The always energetic organist of Halifax Lutheran Church in Nova Scotia is back with us this week to lead our gathering music. Please join in singing, "Dearest Jesus, at Your Word" (ELW #520).

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/a2gPU5TjGZQ>

- 1 *Dearest Jesus, at your word
we have come again to hear you;
let our thoughts and hearts be stirred
and in glowing faith be near you
as the promises here given
draw us wholly up to heaven.*

- 2 *All our knowledge, sense, and sight
lie in deepest darkness shrouded
till your Spirit breaks the night,
filling us with light unclouded.
All good thoughts and all good living
come but by your gracious giving.*

- 3 *Radiance of God's glory bright,
Light of light from God proceeding,
Jesus, send your blessed light;
help our hearing, speaking, heeding,
that our prayers and songs may please you,
as with grateful hearts we praise you.*

- 4 *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
praise to you and adoration!
Grant us what we need the most:
all your gospel's consolation
while we here on earth await you,
till in heav'n with praise we greet you.*

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray.
God of love, giver of life,
you know our frailties and failings.
Give us your grace to overcome them,
keep us from those things that harm us,
and guide us in the way of salvation,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

Let Us Hear God's Word

A reading from Ezekiel:

¹The word of the Lord came to me: ²What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? ³As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. ⁴Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.

²⁵Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? ²⁶When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. ²⁷Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. ²⁸Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. ²⁹Yet the house of Israel says, "The way of the Lord is unfair." O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

³⁰Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. ³¹Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live. (Ezekiel 18)

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

A reading from the Psalms:

¹To you, O Lord,
I lift up my soul.
²My God, I put my trust in you; let me not be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
³Let none who look to you be put to shame;
rather let those be put to shame who are treacherous.
⁴Show me your ways, O Lord,
and teach me your paths.
⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.
⁶Remember, O Lord, your compassion and love,
for they are from everlasting.
⁷Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;
remember me according to your steadfast love and for the sake of your goodness, O Lord.
⁸You are gracious and upright, O Lord;
therefore you teach sinners in your way.
⁹You lead the lowly in justice
and teach the lowly your way.

A reading from Philippians:

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
¹²Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much
more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at
work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2)

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

*The holy gospel according to Matthew.
Glory to you, O Lord.*

²³When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he
was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this
authority?" ²⁴Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will
also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it
of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why
then did you not believe him?' ²⁶But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all
regard John as a prophet." ²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither
will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the
vineyard today.' ²⁹He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰The father went
to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did
the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and
the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you in the way of
righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and
even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him." (Matthew 21)

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

Reflection on the Readings

In his 1947 Pulitzer Prize winning publication *The Age of Anxiety*, the poet W.H. Auden observes:

We would rather be ruined than changed.
We would rather die in our dread
Than climb the cross of the moment
And let our illusions die.

It's time to let our illusions die.
It's time for changes.
It's time to climb the cross of the moment.
It's time, as Ezekiel puts it, for a new heart.

In the passage this week from the prophet Ezekiel, God is calling us out. God is calling us out from
behind the cardboard cutouts of our self-created images. God is not interested in "getting back to

normal” or recovering the patterns of the past. God is unimpressed by signs, flags, the colors we wear, or whatever else we may be hiding behind in order to protect and project our image of righteousness or freedom or liberty or happiness. At the same time, God does not seem particularly interested in our iniquities. Hiding our shame, self-doubt, and all of our failings is also not of interest to God. We may sort and assign worth: Righteous ones are good. Those with iniquity are bad. But God does not seem interested.

God seems to have other things in mind. According to Ezekiel, God is more interested in what we are going to do rather than what we have done. Jesus’ parable of the two sons seems to emphasize this as well. God is more interested in what we are going to do today and tomorrow than what was we might have done or left undone yesterday. God is calling us out.

But that is just the first move—what comes next is rather amazing. Ezekiel tells us, don’t just go about tinkering with your old ways to make them more appealing. Go out and get yourself new heart and a new spirit all together. Don’t tinker. Dump it all together. Start again, fresh! Get yourself a new heart and a new spirit. It’s a new world—you’ll need to do things in new ways.

This does not mean that it doesn’t matter what we have done or what we have left undone. There is great wisdom in the practice of reviewing our days in the light of God’s love, giving thanks for all that was and bringing into prayer whatever things, bad or good, have touched us deeply. There is wisdom in taking up practices that help us out of our hiding.

And then, Ezekiel tells us, God wants us to cast it away. God wants us to empty ourselves (as Paul puts it to the Philippians) so that when we awake the next day we will be ready: ready to ask God that the same mind may be in us that was in Christ Jesus. When we do this, we will finally be freed to stop being so caught up with what we are doing or not doing and to be caught up instead with what God is doing. And that is where it all begins.

Through Christ’s death and resurrection, God is at work in us. For a change—for letting our illusions dies and gaining a new heart—we are together given the mind of Christ. There is indeed much consolation, compassion and sharing of the Spirit in this word. Starting again, in humility, we may look to the needs of others in a profoundly new—and yet still needy—world and dream new routes, new possibilities, new ways of sharing this hope for healing and life.

Hymn of the Day

With a double dose of leadership and enthusiasm from Halifax Lutheran Church today, let’s join in singing “Change My Heart, O God” (ELW #801).

Here is the video link: https://youtu.be/qsLDg_AUhM4.

*Change my heart, O God;
make it ever true.*

*Change my heart, O God;
may I be like you.*

*You are the potter;
I am the clay.*

*Mold me and make me;
this is what I pray.*

*Change my heart, O God;
make it ever true.*

*Change my heart, O God;
may I be like you.*

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need, responding to each petition with the words “Hear our laments, and receive our prayers.”

A brief silence.

Throughout the globe is the church: many assemblies are postponed by the virus, our songs quieted, our leaders searching for new ways forward. That you will continue to inspire all the baptized with the mind of Christ, we pray to you, faithful God. Hear our laments, and receive our prayers.

Around us nature is strained: polar ice is melting, excessive rains ravage the land, fires consume forests, fields, and homes, and animals are deprived of habitat. That you will preserve and protect the earth, we pray to you, mighty God: Hear our laments, and receive our prayers.

Around us is a needy world: governments allow injustice, violence threatens stability, people experience prejudice, reforms are thwarted, workers are unemployed, medical facilities are strained, children are abused. That you will save the people in all the nations of the world, we pray to you, compassionate God: Hear our laments, and receive our prayers.

In our nation’s courts, we see justice delayed and justice denied. Yet we thank you for the life of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and for her passion for equality under the law. That you will uphold honest judges and insightful juries throughout our criminal justice system, and that you will assist our nation in its task of filling the Supreme Court, we pray to you, righteous God: Hear our laments, and receive our prayers.

Around us are the sick: there is starvation, the virus continues, many persons receive no medical attention, our neighbors and dear ones are ill. That you will bless all ministries of care and will relieve the suffering of those who are ill in body, mind, or spirit, especially Marge, Sue, Mary and her parents, Carolyn, Marsha, Martha, Pat, Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, and Marlene, we pray to you, merciful God: Hear our laments, and receive our prayers.

Nearby are needs of which we are unaware. That you will send your holy angels to uphold all who face personal troubles, we pray to you, benevolent God: Hear our laments, and receive our prayers.

Inside many hearts there is both joy and sorrow. We pray now for ourselves. That you will give us new hearts and a new spirit, we pray to you, loving God: Hear our laments, and receive our prayers.

Before us lived countless of the faithful — the famous and the forgotten, our relatives and strangers. We lament their deaths, and we praise their witness. That we may confess Jesus Christ as Lord through our life and at our death, we pray to you, eternal God: Hear our laments, and receive our prayers.

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Offering Prayer

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

Let us pray.

Blessed are you, O God, maker of all things.
You have set before us gifts of your good creation.

Prepare us for your heavenly banquet,
nourish us with rich food and drink,
and send us forth to set tables in the midst of a suffering world,
through the bread of life, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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

In change and repentance, there is hope. God's mercy, love, and forgiveness enables us to live (not die) into the truth and possibility of such change. Let us turn from the thunderclouds and storms of the past. May we be freed to dreams of future life. The Missouri Southern Concert Chorale leads us today in voicing this hope as we are sent into our baptismal callings. Recorded this past spring from choir members' homes and released over the summer, the choir sings and arrangement of U2's "MLK" that blends seamlessly into the spiritual "There Is a Balm in Gilead" (ELW #614).

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/VdYUS13rBy4>.

*Sleep
Sleep tonight
And may your dreams
Be realized
If the thundercloud
Passes rain
So let it rain
Rain down on him
Mmm
So let it be
Mmm
So let it be*

*Sleep
Sleep tonight
And may your dreams
Be realized
If the thundercloud*

*Passes rain
So let it rain
Let it rain
Rain on him*

*There is a balm in Gilead
to make the wounded whole*

*There is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sin-sick soul*

Benediction

Mothering God,
Father, ✠ Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life.
Amen.