

Sunday, June 7, 2020

Dear Sister and Brothers in Christ,

This is the First Sunday after Pentecost – the Sunday of the Holy Trinity.

The festival of the Holy Trinity celebrates the wonder of relationship with God. Indeed, it celebrates that expression of God does not occur apart from relationship. Relationships fundamentally are based on mutual sharing — both giving and receiving, both communicating and listening, both greeting and saying farewell. We are blessed to be invited into this fundamental relationship that flows from the Trinitarian presence of God. Within it, we are created, saved, and brought further into relationship with both God and neighbor.

This year, as we simultaneously struggle in the midst of both ongoing pandemic (this past week has witnessed a spike of COVID-19 across the counties of our region not seen since mid April) and eyes freshly opened to the dreadful impact of systemic racism across our nation, we are ever more in need of renewed relationship with God, with one another, and with neighbors. Our words of being at war and in battle with one another are not fruitful ones. They have led to horrific brutalities, escalated conflict, and wicked acts of desecration.

The God of the Holy Trinity provides and welcomes us to different words and a different mode of relating. And so, we pray for God to inspire fresh, innovative ideas of God, neighbor, and community in this present moment.

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

Our gathering song today is "Come, Join the Dance of Trinity." This is song #412 in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Members of St. John Lutheran Church in Wilmette, Illinois, lead our singing today. Wilmette is located on the north side of Chicago and is the town where I completed Ministry in Context training during my second year at seminary. I was assigned to Wilmette Lutheran Church (which has since closed), but Amy and I also attended a few worship services at St. John.)

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/GstpXOo0MCK>

*1 Come, join the dance of Trinity,
before all worlds begun—
the interweaving of the Three,
the Father, Spirit, Son.
The universe of space and time
did not arise by chance,
but as the Three, in love and hope,
made room within their dance.*

*2 Come, see the face of Trinity,
newborn in Bethlehem;
then bloodied by a crown of thorns
outside Jerusalem.
The dance of Trinity is meant
for human flesh and bone;
when fear confines the dance in death,
God rolls away the stone.*

*3 Come, speak aloud of Trinity,
as wind and tongues of flame
set people free at Pentecost
to tell the Savior's name.
We know the yoke of sin and death,
our necks have worn it smooth;
go tell the world of weight and woe
that we are free to move!*

*4 Within the dance of Trinity,
before all worlds begun,
we sing the praises of the Three,
the Father, Spirit, Son.
Let voices rise and interweave,
by love and hope set free,
to shape in song this joy, this life:
the dance of Trinity*

Prayer of the Day

Let us pray.

Almighty Creator and ever-living God:
we worship your glory, eternal Three-in-One,
and we praise your power, majestic One-in-Three.
Keep us steadfast in this faith,

defend us in all adversity,
and bring us at last into your presence,
where you live in endless joy and love,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Let Us Hear God's Word

A reading from the Psalms:

¹O Lord our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!—
²you whose glory is chanted above the heavens out of the mouths of infants and children;
you have set up a fortress against your enemies, to silence the foe and avenger.
³When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,
⁴what are mere mortals that you should be mindful of them,
human beings that you should care for them?
⁵Yet you have made them little less than divine;
with glory and hon- or you crown them.
⁶You have made them rule over the works of your hands;
you have put all things un- der their feet:
⁷all flocks and cattle,
even the wild beasts of the field,
⁸the birds of the air, the fish of the sea,
and whatever passes along the paths of the sea.
⁹O Lord our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8)

A reading from Second Corinthians:

[Paul writes:] ¹¹Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. ¹²Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

¹³The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. (2 Corinthians 13)

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

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

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28)

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

Reflection on the Readings

On this Holy Trinity Sunday, you have options for reflecting in God's Word. Presiding Bishop Eaton has provided a sermon intended for the whole of the ELCA. Links to Bishop Eaton's sermon (both video and transcript) are below in the section marked "Sermon." In addition to her message, I also offer my own reflective thoughts, Feel free to take up either or both in your worship devotions.

Together in Christ, Rich

In today's reading from Second Corinthians, we hear Paul's farewell instructions:

Put things in order.
Listen to my appeal.
Agree with one another.
Live in peace.
Greet one another with a holy kiss.

It sounds so simple, doesn't it? If we put on our Nikes (or our work boots) and just do it, it will all be okay. Except it's not.

Order (and law) isn't the answer that it first seems to be. We regularly fail to listen – even when we mean the best. It is so much easier to divide than it is to agree with one another. (How many times do you hear about churches or churches bodies coming together or even merging in agreement?) As for peace – the namesake for our assembly – well, we hear our elected leaders, police, news commentators, and neighbors talking ever more often about how the route to peace is through battles, fights, arrests, curfews, fences, tear gas, swinging batons, broken windows, looted merchandise, riot gear, rubber bullets, broken bodies, force, power, shoving, burning, unidentified mercenary soldiers, naming journalists and reporters as enemies, the abdication of responsibility, the withdrawal of apology, the amplification of hate, the desecration of holy ground, and enough lies to drown the world in flames. Really? That's how we think we're going to find the way to living in peace?

Fortunately, God is not bound by human ability, human choice, or human action. As we hear in our gospel reading, God's authority – Jesus' authority – is not routed through us. But it is routed toward us! Jesus uses his authority to instruct, lead, and command. He uses that authority for good – for putting things in order when we fail, for guiding us to listen when our ears are closed, for helping us to find agreement even as things are breaking apart, for showing us how to live in peace when we are sinking in despair, and for demonstrating “holy kiss” greetings that bear love, healing, and compassion for all. (Not all “of us” or all “of them” – but simply “all.”)

How do we know this? How can we trust this? How we continue to have faith and believe?

The signs for “how” are embedded within the very images and headlines and news that call us to question hope for the future. It's there in the headline, “Indianapolis police response has shifted from tear gas to hugs. What happened?” And this one, too, from Houston, “Moment white police officer hugs tearful 5-year-old black girl after she asks, ‘Are you gonna shoot us?’” It's there in the video of a young black man on his knees pleading to be heard and letting a line of police officers know that he is not an enemy — it's there even though the video ends with the young man being arrested simply for his speech.

But even more than that, it's there in Jesus' enduring promise, “I am with you until the end of the age.” I certainly know that I am feeling that we are the end of an age. We are in a pandemic wrapped around an economic depression intersecting with an awareness of just how cruel we can be to one another based on race, ethnicity, language, and so many other little differences that shouldn't matter at all. We are on the cusp of a fourth industrial revolution that will reshape our sense of vocation and calling in the world. We are have edged past any realistic hope of curtailing the climate impact of humanity's consumption of carbon fuels. Yes, this could very well be the end of the age.

That Jesus could see an end to the age is a sign of hope itself. That Jesus would promise to be with us even now is a promise to which we can hold fast. And, to be honest, we don't even need to be worried about whether we can hold fast or not – Jesus' promise it to be with us. Period. No conditions. No requirements. No restriction. “I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Why does that matter? It matters because Jesus is God's Word. More than that — Jesus is God's living Word. That Jesus is with us even in times that look like the end means that God's living Word is with us. The same Word that brought the world and the universe into being. The same Word that put the moon and the stars in their courses (as the psalmist put it). The same Word that is joined to the wind and breath of the Holy Spirit. The same Word that calls us forth into the most difficult of circumstances. The same Word that sustained Jacob and Joseph, Ruth and Mary, Joshua and John, Miriam and Martha.

The same Word brought salvation for Noah from flood and for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from fire. The same Word that brought life for Lazarus and that greeted Easter morning with an empty tomb.

This is the living Word that is with us in Jesus' promise to be with us always. This is the living Word that will raise us to new life, new love, new peace, new agreement, new ability to listen, new ways to be in "order" with one another. Indeed, it is this Word that sets us free to be servants called to service in the world — to be disciples and to share a new word about God's Word with someone else through protest, through a hug, through a hand-made sign, through acts of kindness, justice, and love, through being in a relationship that flows from the Holy Trinity and is rooting in both giving and receiving, both communicating and listening, both greeting and saying farewell.

Yes, we are the end of an age. And because of that, the time for silence about God's presence with all is also at an end.

Let us pray.

Save us, O God, from ourselves,
from racism often cloaked in pious words,
from the machinations of white supremacy hidden in calls for civility,
from micro aggressions thinly veiled in arrogance,
from apologies when they don't give way to action,
from forgiveness without facing the truth,
from reconciliation without reparation.

Deliver us, O God, from expecting siblings of color to continue to bear this emotional work,
which is not theirs to do.

Grateful for the long arc that bends toward justice, we pray:

Grant us wisdom,
give us courage for the facing of these days,
by the power of the Spirit, all for the sake of the kin-dom that we share in Christ Jesus.
Amen.

Sermon

Presiding Bishop Elizabteh Eaton has provided a Holy Trinity sermon for the entire Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

You are invited to listen to Bishop Eaton's sermon at this link: <https://youtu.be/OCxlyckuam4>.

If you prefer to read or print a transcript of the sermon, it is available here:

<https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Reso...>

Hymn of the Day

On this festival Sunday of the Holy Trinity, our hymn of the day is the well-known "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty" – song #413 in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. Today, organist Jared Croal from St. Benilde Catholic Church in the New Orleans area of Louisiana, leads our music with his own arrangement.

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/zJE9jKAuEkE>.

Prayers of Intercession

We are called into unity with one another. Yet especially this week our nation is experiencing painful and profound disunity. Let us preface our prayers with several minutes of silence, meditating on the sorrows of our country, its history of racial injustice, and its resistance in bringing about liberty and equality for all.

A period of silence.

Held together in the mercy of the triune God, let us join with one another to pray for the many needs of the world.

A brief silence.

O triune God, bless the preaching and reception of your Word, and pour your Spirit onto congregational leaders and all the baptized. Give wisdom and stamina to those who work in national church offices for their unprecedented tasks. Hold the churches of all denominations together in one, as you are one.

A brief silence.

Holy One, Holy Three, for the church we pray: Grant your threefold blessing.

O triune God, as at the beginning of time your word and spirit visited the earth, so now sustain this planet with your renewing care. Teach us to care for the very good earth that you have created. Calm the summer's storms, and send rain where there is drought.

A brief silence.

Holy One, Holy Three, for the earth we pray: Grant your threefold blessing.

O triune God, in whom Three are One, guide with your powerful mercy our troubled nation, where relationships are fractured and injustice marks the land. Heal our wounded people. Give hope to the despairing. Protect the protestors. Preserve our cities from more tumult, and keep away those intent on destruction. Guard stores and homes from fire, and save us from bloodshed. Control our police and national guard as they stand against violence. Sustain firefighters and other emergency workers in their care for their cities, especially Suellen's friend's son in the Twin Cities, Jeremie Baker.

A brief silence.

Holy One, Holy Three, for our nation we pray: Grant your threefold blessing.

O triune God, bless the aboriginal peoples in lands around the globe. We commemorate before you today Chief Seattle, and we ask you to protect the native peoples of this land from yet more dangers, from outside aggression, and from internal despair.

A brief silence.

Holy One, Holy Three, for all tribes and clans we pray: Grant your threefold blessing.

O triune God, open our eyes to see your likeness in everyone. Heal the sick, uphold all who face oppression, feed the hungry. Visit refugee camps with power to save. We ask your mercy on the millions who suffer from the coronavirus – the sick, the dying, the bereaved, the unemployed. Uphold medical workers, and accompany researchers as they seek a vaccine. Embrace the children who live confused and sad. We pray especially for those we remember here before you: Amber's best friend Ryan (whose grandmother died in a car accident this past week), Pat as she recovers from surgery this past Thursday, Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene, and all those we name before you now.

A brief silence.

Holy One, Holy Three, for all in need we pray: Grant your threefold blessing.

O triune God, as summer begins, give safety to those who travel and contentment to those who cannot. Give a sense of sabbath rest to those whose vacation plans have been canceled, and grant activities to the children who cannot attend summer camp. Shine your sun on farmers' fields, so that enough food will grow for our needs. Shield all farm workers from the worst of the heat.

A brief silence.

Holy One, Holy Three, for summertime we pray: Grant your threefold blessing.

O God, bring us into the mystery of your triune life. We praise you as Life-giver, Pain-bearer, Mercy-maker. Accept now the petitions of our own hearts.

A longer time of silence.

Holy One, Holy Three, for ourselves we pray: Grant your threefold blessing.

O triune God, we praise you for all the saints who, in the past and the present, have lived and died in you. At the end, bring us all into the tender power of your presence.

A brief silence.

Holy One, Holy Three, for now and forever we pray: Grant your threefold blessing.

Hear these words, O God, and receive also those petitions that are too deep for words, joining our prayers with those of Jesus Christ, who intercedes for us, now and forever. Amen.

Offering

With the start of a new church season and a new month, 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.

Offering Prayer

God of goodness and growth,
all creation is yours,
and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
Water is a permanent sign of your abundant grace given in baptism.
Nourish us through this gift,
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

“Holy God, We Praise Your Name” (ELW #414) is our sending song today. Musicians from St. Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, lead us in this new recording from this past Wednesday. (It’s not just here in Joplin and the United States that Lutherans continue to join in worship from home – it’s also Lutherans in Canada and all around the world!)

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/RLOiQKZ1ofc>.

Sending Prayer

Let us pray.

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us to the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. 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.

Benediction

Almighty God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless us now and forever.
Amen.