

Sunday, June 28, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The welcome of baptism is for all God's children. This baptismal gift sets us free from the power of sin and death. In today's gospel, Christ promises that the disciple who gives a cup of cold water to the little ones serves Christ himself. From worship we are sent on our baptismal mission: to serve the little ones of this world and to be a sign of God's merciful welcome.

### **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**

Pastor Minna Bothwell from Capitol Hill Lutheran Church in Des Moines, Iowa, leads us today in singing "Baptized and Set Free" (ELW #453).

Here is the video link: <https://vimeo.com/432281408>. (Note: There is no "video" to this recording—just good audio for listening!)

#### **Prayer of the Day**

Let us pray.  
O God, you direct our lives by your grace,  
and your words of justice and mercy reshape the world.  
Mold us into a people who welcome your word and serve one another,  
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

## Let Us Hear God's Word

### *A reading from Jeremiah:*

<sup>5</sup>The prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord; <sup>6</sup>and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfill the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the Lord, and all the exiles. <sup>7</sup>But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. <sup>8</sup>The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. <sup>9</sup>As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet." (Jeremiah 28)

*The Word of the Lord.*

*Thanks be to God.*

### *A reading from the Psalms:*

<sup>1</sup>Your love, O Lord, forever will I sing;  
from age to age my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness.  
<sup>2</sup>For I am persuaded that your steadfast love is established forever;  
you have set your faithfulness firmly in the heavens.  
<sup>3</sup>"I have made a covenant with my chosen one;  
I have sworn an oath to David my servant:  
<sup>4</sup>I will establish your line forever,  
and preserve your throne for all generations."  
<sup>15</sup>Happy are the people who know the festal shout!  
They walk, O Lord, in the light of your presence.  
<sup>16</sup>They rejoice daily in your name;  
they are jubilant in your righteousness.  
<sup>17</sup>For you are the glory of their strength,  
and by your favor our might is exalted.  
<sup>18</sup>Truly, our shield belongs to the Lord;  
our king to the Holy One of Israel. (Psalm 89)

### *A reading from Romans:*

<sup>12</sup>Do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. <sup>13</sup>No longer present your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. <sup>14</sup>For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

<sup>15</sup>What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup>Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? <sup>17</sup>But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, <sup>18</sup>and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. <sup>19</sup>I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

<sup>20</sup>When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. <sup>21</sup>So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. <sup>22</sup>But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. <sup>23</sup>For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6)

*Word of God. Word of life.*

*Thanks be to God.*

*The holy gospel according to Matthew.*

*Glory to you, O Lord.*

[Jesus said to the twelve:]<sup>40</sup>“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.”<sup>41</sup>Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous;<sup>42</sup>and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.” (Matthew 10)

*The Gospel of the Lord.*

*Praise to you, O Christ.*

### **Reflection on the Readings**

Which prophet speaks the truth? Which leader should the people follow? Which voice should we head?

The questions that arise out of today’s reading from Jeremiah are certainly relevant to our world and our community today.

As the writer Rachel Sophia Baard puts it, the passage describes a “prophetic showdown” between the prophets Hananiah and Jeremiah. At stake was nothing less than the future of the nation and its people. It was a crisis moment in which the people were called to discern the truth and respond accordingly. Later, when people look back, they will realize they were not just standing on a cliff—they were leaning far out over that edge.

In that moment, the prophet Hananiah is convinced that the time of struggle is almost over, that the yoke of hardship and difficulty and despair will soon be broken. His message is one that everyone would like to welcome and believe. It is popular. It is appealing. It sounds not just good, but awesome and great! Even Jeremiah says, perhaps sarcastically, that he hope Hananiah is right. Who would not want to see an end to this time and the experience of these days?

However, as it is so often with Jeremiah, he is called to be the bearer of difficult news. Wearing a yoke around his neck to symbolize the suffering and pain that everyone is enduring, he warns the people that there will be no magic cure. If the people want to live, they will need to follow the road that is not so easy. He adds that history will show which one of them is the true prophet.

Since history did, tragically, show Jeremiah to be the true prophet, it could be tempting for us to dismiss Hananiah as a foolish con artist who ended up dead within the year. After all, Hananiah is a bit of an opportunistic showman who simply makes use of popularized theory and opinion. But that may not be entirely fair. From another angle, it is possible to look at the difference between the two prophets as conflicting political advice rooted in conflicting visions of God and God’s plans.

After all, in the previous century, a similar positive message from Isaiah did turn out to be true. Indeed, from that point of view, one could argue that Jeremiah’s message represented a lack of trust in God.

Hananiah’s message is rooted in a belief that God’s covenantal faithfulness means that God will now release the people from the hardship they are experiencing. Hananiah forgets, though, that God’s faithfulness does not mean easy grace.

Jeremiah may wish that he, too, could be the bringer of glad tidings waiting just over the next hill. But Jeremiah also knows this: the overwhelming message of the prophets has been a word of judgment.

In light of that prophecy, it would be foolish to trust a feel-good prophecy unless there really is good ground to do so. Jeremiah knows all too well that the God who has called him to speak, despite his own protests, is a sovereign God. Yes, the God of the covenant is faithful. But this covenantal faithfulness is not an insurance policy that automatically kicks in when things get tough and challenging.

No. Rather God’s faithfulness is rooted in an ongoing, living relationship that requires asking, “What is God’s will today?” We cannot look to the past or the present in simplistic ways. God’s faithfulness remains the same, but the manifestation of that faithfulness is complex and may look very different each and every day.

The difference between the easy message of Hananiah and the difficult message of Jeremiah is much more than a difference between a message of prosperity and a message of doom. They operate with fundamentally different understandings of God and God's covenantal faithfulness.

Like the people of Jeremiah's time, we too are often faced with the questions, "How do we choose between conflicting claims of truth? How do we choose between conflicting paths and conflicting visions of the future?" The questions become especially important in times of historical crisis—in times like the ones we are experiencing right now.

For the people of God's assembly, this question takes on a special urgency as we struggle to discern the will of God for our own lives, as well as for our church, our community, our nation, and our world.

Jeremiah does not offer a recipe for avoiding disaster and ultimately leaves it up to history to decide. He does, however, help us to understand that the quick and easy route, the popular position, the position held by the charming prophet, is not necessarily the true one. Jeremiah's message still rings true: beware of easy answers and simple solution; beware of resting on God's grace as if we own it.

Discerning the truth is not an easy matter, especially since we are so inclined to be influenced by what we already want or what we think will serve our interests. Rather, there is a critical cost for truth and peace and justice.

Today's message from the prophet Jeremiah—the one that proved to be true—is critical for us today. Facing the scope of pandemic not previously seen within our own lives, facing recognition of the continuing effects of racism and the need for both understanding and acting on needs for diversity, inclusivity, and equity in our society, facing the growing impact of technological advances, and facing the full realization of humanity's impact on earth's climate, it is far too tempting to announce a message of comfort and the expense of announcing the cost. Jeremiah, Paul, and Matthew all remind us in these difficult days that, within God's covenantal faithfulness, God does not remove us from this world. Not by easy words. Not by being set free from sin. Not by becoming Jesus' disciples. Instead, God bring us ever more consequentially into relationship with it.

The good news for all of us in this comes in Jesus' opening words to us today, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me." As we seek to serve complex words of peace, truth, justice, mercy, and grace, we can trust that we are joined to Jesus in all. "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me."

In this, we are set free to join Jeremiah and become bold voices of radical truth-telling and radical hope. As described by theologian Walter Brueggemann during a conference 15 years ago, "There are two great pathologies in our culture today. One of them is denial. The other great pathology is despair." Radical truth-telling is the antidote to denial. Radical hope, grounded in community, is the antidote to despair.

In baptism, God raises us and set us free to become slaves to such radical action. We can demonstrate that radical servanthood right now. Jesus said, "Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

Or, to put it more concretely in terms that matter today: whoever, in the name of a disciple, puts on a face mask in the presence of these little ones—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.

It's not the popular, simple thing to do. It's not the self-serving thing to do. Neither is it the only the thing to do. It's not what Hananiah would prophesy. But it is part of the radical truth-telling that is needed and it is part of the radical hope and the radical grace the our communities need to hear.

### **Hymn of the Day**

Zion Lutheran Church in Perry, Oklahoma, provides leadership for our hymn of the day—Amazing Grace (ELW #779).

Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/BvFqkzMzqng>. (Words are included in the video.)

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Let us pray for the church of Jesus Christ around the world.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for our own congregation and for its leadership.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for the health of the earth – its lands, its seas, its animals.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for those who work in our fields and produce our food.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for peace between and within nations.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for mayors, county leaders, and town councils.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for a right observance of the Fourth of July.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for those who are oppressed, or enslaved, or poverty-stricken.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for an end to racism.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for both protesters and police.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for all who are sick, especially Pat, Valetta, Paul, Vallie, LaVaune, Kathy, Frank, Lisa, Rita, April, Bev, Bob, Beth, Marlene, and all those we name before you now.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for all who are sick or sorrowing from the coronavirus.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for medical workers and researchers.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us pray for families facing an unprecedented summertime.

*A time for prayer.*

Hear us, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

Let us thank God for all those who have died in the faith, and let us pray that at our end we will join them in God's presence.

*A time for prayer.*

Receive our praise, O God, our light and our shield. **Your mercy is great.**

O God, the Holy One, you are yourself the cup of cold water we crave, relieving our deep thirst. Receive these prayers for the sake of Jesus Christ, for your mercy is great, now and forever. **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**

### **Sending Song**

Naoko Okada leads us today in singing, "Give to Our God Immortal Praise!" (ELW #848).  
Here is the video link: <https://youtu.be/u1oEdyU27tl>.

- 1      *Give to our God immortal praise!  
Mercy and truth are all his ways.  
Wonders of grace to God belong;  
repeat his mercies in your song.*
  
- 2      *God sent his Son with pow'r to save  
from guilt and darkness and the grave.  
Wonders of grace to God belong;  
repeat his mercies in your song.*
  
- 3      *Give to the Lord of lords renown;  
the King of kings with glory crown.  
His mercies ever shall endure  
when lords and kings are known no more!*

### **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.