

July 5, 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What do we do in the midst of a pandemic to try to recreate some of the things we have had in the past? Have you perhaps had a pool party with those in your immediate household, where you set-up a child's wading pool, sit in folding chairs around it, and soak your barefeet in the pool's cooling waters? Have you perhaps looked for simple ways to enjoy God's creation? Many of us will not be seeing a fireworks display this year. But, we can sit outside on a summer evening and look at the fireflies lighting up the darkness! Their dancing and playing can be fun, too. They remind us that they are just one of the many amazing creatures that God has created. Fireflies or fireworks? Both can bring us joy and awe.

While most of you will be foregoing trips to see family and friends this Fourth of July weekend, there are opportunities to get outside and enjoy our local area. Recently, I was at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve enjoying a walk on a trail. The fresh air and exercise was so nice. We are fortunate to have Kickapoo Valley, Wildcat Mountain State Park, the bike trail, and other sites nearby where we can "get away" while staying close to home. I also enjoy going to see the flowing water and natural beauty of the area near the intersection (I believe) of "Highway P" and "Highway X" which is north of Coon Valley. This too is a lovely spot!

Our days are different given the pandemic, and they may be different for some time to come. Yet, we can look forward to experiencing the simple joys that come from being out in God's creation: birds and other animals playing; the sun shining, glimmering, dancing on the top of a lake or stream; and the soft wind causing the corn to flutter in the field. All of these things are available to us to see, experience and enjoy.

On this Fourth of July weekend, as we celebrate in new and different ways, may we celebrate the beauty of God's creation and all that God has provided for us. There are things that we can enjoy each and every day. There are things that we can do that do not require money or extensive travel. Let us thank God today, and every day, for the beautiful world that God has created.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Wilton, WI
5th Sunday after Pentecost
July 5, 2020
**Inviting People to Journey with Christ's
Family in Spreading God's Love and Mercy**

The mystery of God's ways is sometimes hidden from the wise and intelligent. Jesus associates with those often excluded from the religious community. Like Paul, we struggle with our own selfish desires and seek God's mercy and forgiveness. We gather to be refreshed by Christ's invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary." Through God, we find rest for our souls.

Gathering

*The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God**

Let the Whole Creation Cry



1 Let the whole cre - a - tion cry, "Glo - ry to the Lord on high!"
2 Ser - vants striv - ing for the Lord, proph - ets burn - ing with the word,
3 Men and wom - en, young and old, raise the an - them loud and bold,



Heav'n and earth, a - wake and sing, "Praise to our al - mighty king!"
those to whom the arts be - long add their voic - es to the song.
and let chil - dren's hap - py hearts in this wor - ship take their parts;



Praise God, an - gel hosts a - bove, ev - er bright and fair in love;
Pow'rs of knowl - edge and of law, to the glo - rious cir - cle draw;
from the north to south - ern pole let the might - y cho - rus roll:



sun and moon, lift up your voice; night and stars, in God re - joice.
all who work and all who wait, sing, "The Lord is good and great!"
"Ho - ly, Ho - ly, Ho - ly One; glo - ry be to God a - lone!"

PRAYER OF THE DAY

You are great, O God, and greatly to be praised. You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Grant that we may believe in you, call upon you, know you, and serve you, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Word

*God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.**

FIRST READING

The coming messianic king will inaugurate an era of disarmament and prosperity. Because of God's covenant with Israel, the people are designated as "prisoners of hope."

Zechariah 9:9-12

⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war-horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall command peace to the nations;
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

¹²Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Psalm 145:8-14

⁸The LORD is gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

⁹**LORD, you are good to all,
and your compassion is over all your works.**

¹⁰All your works shall praise you, O LORD,
and your faithful ones shall bless you.

¹¹**They shall tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your power,**

¹²that all people may know of your power
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

¹³**Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; your dominion endures throughout all ages.
You, LORD, are faithful in all your words, and loving in all your works.**

¹⁴The Lord upholds all those who fall
and lifts up those who are bowed down.

SECOND READING

Life captive to sin is a catch-22 existence in which we know good but do not do it and do things we know to be wrong. Through Jesus Christ, God has set us free from such a futile existence.

Romans 7:15-25a

¹⁵I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ^{25a}Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Al - le - lu - ia. Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of e - ter - nal life. Al - le - lu - ia.

Jesus chides people who find fault with both his ministry and that of John the Baptist. He thanks God that wisdom and intelligence are not needed to receive what God has to offer.

The gospel according to Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Glory to you, O Lord.

[Jesus spoke to the crowd saying:] ¹⁶“To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

¹⁷‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

²⁵At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon

On Wednesday of this past week, I was watching the game show, Jeopardy. The final question was about a board game that was originally produced in the 1860's. The game board included squares with the words, "poverty, intemperance, and suicide." What was the name of the game? Answer: "The Game of Life."

I was not aware that "Life" had been around so long, or that it had changed so much over the years. It was originally created by Milton Bradley in 1860, and by 1861, it was distributed as a game pack and even sent to Civil War soldiers. (Edwards, Phil, "*Why the game of Life used to have poverty, suicide, and ruin*," January 13, 2020, Vox online). The game I recall, takes each player on an adventure through an imaginary life. It includes paths that lead one to different opportunities, such as college, work, marriage, and children. Players accumulate money along the way. How one's life progresses depends on spinning a dial, moving the assigned number of squares with one's marker, and facing one's fate. But as the Jeopardy question suggested, the original game was different. It included squares for "poverty, intemperance and suicide," plus other perils such as "crime" (where you would be sent to prison), "gambling" (where you would be sent to ruin), "disgrace," "prison" (where you must lose one move), "ruin" and "jail".

The online article mentions that there were also squares for "honesty, perseverance, and industry!" Jennifer Snyder states, "Everything Milton Bradley published had a really strong moral tone to it when he was still in charge of the company."... "He viewed everything as an educational opportunity. It was an opportunity for people to be educated in the way he thought they should be. The game of Life is very much about taking the

moral high road and walking the appropriate path." (Snyder, Vox) The goal of the original game wasn't to earn money, but to earn points toward a "happy old age." After Milton Bradley died, the game became (per Vox's Danielle Kurtzleben), "a reflection of a more materialistic American dream."

The titles on the squares in the early version of "Life," were sinful or moral options found in everyday life. But "Life" was, and continues to be, a game. It is not reality, and the goals may not be sought out by all persons. The original game could be depressing. The newer version creates a fantasy existence that encourages values prevalent in the world today---materialism, striving for wealth, and an easy retirement, among other things.

Does one's fantasy "Game of Life," bear resemblance to one's real life? That is something to ask on this weekend of the Fourth of July, when the United States celebrates its independence. It is also something to ask in light of "The Game of Life" having been played by some of the soldiers in the Civil War. For it was played by those who fought against each other; the North to gain freedom for slaves, and the South to continue servitude for slaves. Even Christian brothers fought against other Christian brothers, in a war about freedom and independence.

For many of us who are white, who have many privileges because of our color, it may seem possible that "The Game of Life" could bear resemble to our lives. But, the game does not accurately reflect our current society. It does not reflect the often unspoken prejudicial attitudes, economic disparities, gender and racial gaps in pay, and other factors that can negatively affect persons' lives. The game does not reflect these very real inequities in our culture. It does not reflect the real lives and opportunities of many persons of color, women, those of different gender identities, of some ethnic groups, of those who were not brought up with wealth, etc... These persons may never achieve in real life the societal goals of materialism, wealth or an easy retirement. They may only achieve these goals when they play, "The Game of Life".

The context for our pericope today, takes us back to earlier verses in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 11. It reminds us of the disciples of John the Baptist coming to Jesus and asking, "Are you the one who is to come,

or are we to wait for another?" (Matthew 11:3) In other words, are you Jesus, the Messiah, the one whom John had proclaimed saying, 'Prepare the way of the Lord'? Their question reflects that they know John, but they do not know if this is Jesus.

Our gospel passage begins with two verses about the folly of human beings and their capriciousness. Jesus compares those of the "present" generation to children playing games. Jesus notes that the foolish are being critical of him, and of John the Baptist, for the company they keep. They are being critical of Jesus and John, because of their own limited perceptions. While the subject of their complaint (eating) is the same for both Jesus and John, their reasons for chastising both are just the opposite! John the Baptist is criticized for "neither eating or drinking, and they say 'he has a demon;' the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (vs. 18-19a)

Jesus is speaking about the generation that he is teaching while he is on earth; those who will not see the truth, because they judge quickly and superficially. They judge based on another's looks and/or the company they keep. The critics do not see the truth about John or Jesus. They do not see John as the one who came to prepare the way for Jesus, whose speech is more judgmental and bold. They do not see Jesus as the true Messiah, whose style is often softer, grace-filled with gentle words and acts of healing. Both styles are instructive and proclaim the kingdom of God. Yet those who hear Jesus' instruction and do not heed it, are often foolish. They lack knowledge of him, and they will not accept him as the Messiah. As such, they are persons who do not know the truth and who have not obtained true wisdom.

Later in the passage, Jesus speaks of those who do know him, whom he calls "infants." They are the ones whose simple, childlike faith in Jesus allow them to hear his word and message. They are able to see Jesus for who he truly is. They too are able to be a part of Jesus' kingdom. Jesus does not limit his kingdom to those who have power, material goods, and wealth; the persons who have obtained "success" in the eyes of society. They are not guaranteed that they will truly know Jesus. Rather, it is those who are open to hearing Jesus' word, open to accepting Jesus' teachings, open to calling him their Messiah and open to believing in him. They are the ones who know the truth. They are the ones who have obtained or hope to obtain, true wisdom.

But the paths that they will take are not without peril. Yes, all persons will commit sins along their life's path. They will have setbacks, even those who are faithfully trying to follow Jesus' teachings. And those who face societal injustices, oppression, hardships, inequality, and economic uncertainties will feel additional burdens. But Jesus said to all people, "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (vs. 11:28-30)

The generation that Jesus addressed, was not unlike our present generation. We too will sin and fall short of God's hopes for us. We too must look at our lives and question ourselves and our choices. Are we among the foolish ones who judge others for superficial reasons? Are we ones who cast our burdens on others to lift ourselves up? Are we ones who oppress, stereotype, and otherwise diminish other people? Do we choose materialism, wealth, and an easy retirement, over those things that God desires for us? Do we see these present day goals as being above the goal of knowing God and being faithful to God? Do we devalue our neighbors who are less fortunate? Do we stand in their way of accomplishing things due to our superficial judgments, prejudicial attitudes and actions? Do we cast burdens on them with our thoughts, words and deeds? If so, then we too are carrying heavy burdens! Jesus says, "Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."

What are we seeking in our life? Are we seeking Jesus, learning from his word and accepting him as the Messiah? Are we seeing him not in superficial ways, but as he is? Are we seeking his truth and wisdom; his kingdom?

And what of this present day and time? We have new burdens that all of us carry because of the pandemic. We may have worries and doubts about our jobs, bank accounts, health, and even whether we will have or will continue to have an easy retirement. We may not be able to have the social connections with other family members and friends that we have enjoyed in the past. But, God is with us. God is with us even during this challenging time. No matter which path we choose, or whichever path is presented to us, we know that Jesus, who died on the cross for all humanity, is there. Jesus, chose his path, too. Jesus chose to bear the sins of all humanity on the cross, so that those who believe in him would know of his grace, mercy and love. Grace,

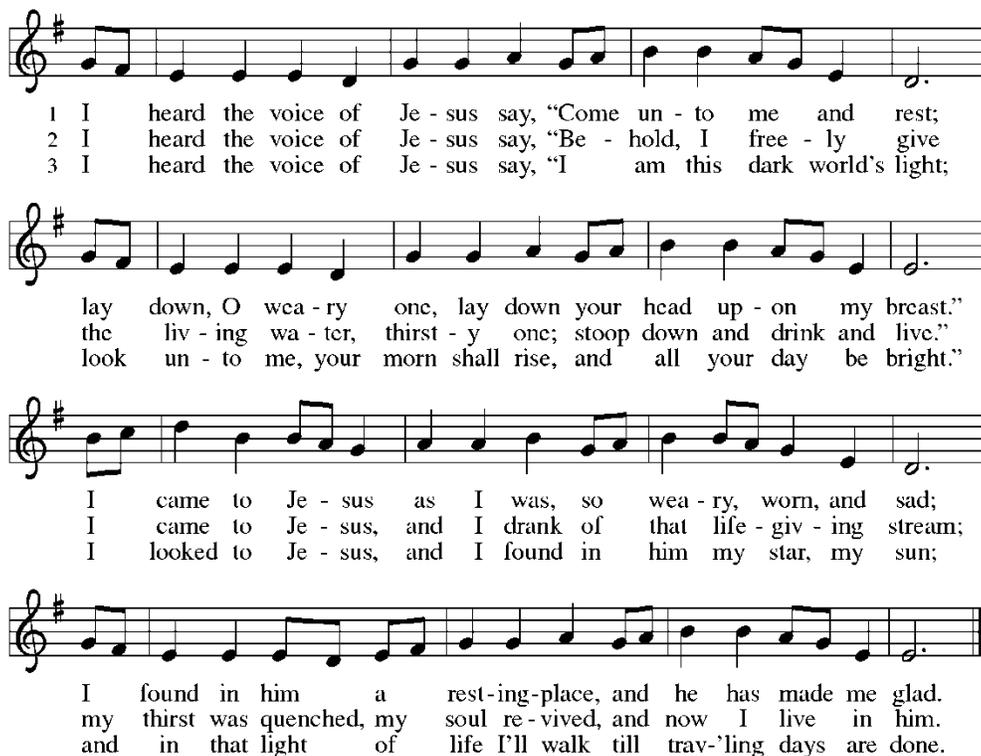
when we fall short of his hopes for us. Grace, that forgives a multitude of sins. Grace, that leads to the possibility of new life with Jesus, our savior and Lord.

No matter what path we take, whether we win or lose in "The Game of Life," if we believe in God, and seek to understand God's truth and wisdom, we can live "a happy life." For Jesus takes our burdens, all our burdens upon him. He takes our cares, our worries, our sadness, our fears, the perils we face, and the many other challenges that we endure in this world, upon himself. Through knowing him, we find rest for our weary souls.

The path we take in life has many perils, including those of setting one's sights on things that move one away from Jesus. Yet, Jesus calls us. Jesus calls us to be his children. Jesus offers us respite today and every day of our lives. Jesus will take on our burdens, if we believe in him and trust in his word. For his yoke is easy and his burden is light. May we rest in the Lord all the days of our lives. Amen.

Hymn

I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say



1 I heard the voice of Je - sus say, "Come un - to me and rest;
2 I heard the voice of Je - sus say, "Be - hold, I free - ly give
3 I heard the voice of Je - sus say, "I am this dark world's light;

lay down, O wea - ry one, lay down your head up - on my breast."
the liv - ing wa - ter, thirst - y one; stoop down and drink and live."
look un - to me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright."

I came to Je - sus as I was, so wea - ry, worn, and sad;
I came to Je - sus, and I drank of that life - giv - ing stream;
I looked to Je - sus, and I found in him my star, my sun;

I found in him a rest - ing - place, and he has made me glad.
my thirst was quenched, my soul re - vived, and now I live in him.
and in that light of life I'll walk till trav - 'ling days are done.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

We pray for the church. Sustain us as we share your word while we worship away from one another. Embrace us as we struggle to find our common ground. Lift up leaders with powerful and prophetic voices. Free us from stagnant faith. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for the well-being of creation. Protect the air, water, and land from abuse and pollution. Free us from apathy in our care of creation and direct us toward sustainable living. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for the nations. Guide leaders in developing just policies and guide difficult conversations. Free us from patriotism that hinders relationship-building. Lead us to expansive love for our neighbors here and throughout your world. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for all in need. For all who are tired, feeling despair, sick, or oppressed, especially Katie, Bill, Dakota, Carla, Ruth, Judy, Alrita, Dick, Donna, Brad, Lisa, and all those we name aloud and in our hearts. Take their yoke upon you and ease their burdens. Give your consolation and free us from all that keeps us bound. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for this congregation. Bless our bishops, Elizabeth Eaton and James Arends; assistant to the bishop, Libby Howe; Pastor1 Morris and other congregational leaders. Energize children's ministry volunteers, our church secretary and organist, our church custodian, and others who maintain our building. Shine in this place that we might notice the ways your love transforms our lives. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We give thanks for those who have died in faith (*especially*). Welcome them into your eternal rest and comfort us in our grief until we are joined with them in new life. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

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

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.

Amen.

SENDING
God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.*

Lord of All Hopefulness



1 Lord of all hope - ful - ness, Lord of all joy,
 2 Lord of all ea - ger - ness, Lord of all faith,
 3 Lord of all kind - li - ness, Lord of all grace,
 4 Lord of all gen - tle - ness, Lord of all calm,



whose trust, ev - er child - like, no cares could de - stroy:
 whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe:
 your hands swift to wel - come, your arms to em - brace:
 whose voice is con - tent - ment, whose pres - ence is balm:



be there at our wak - ing, and give us, we pray,
 be there at our la - bors, and give us, we pray,
 be there at our hom - ing, and give us, we pray,
 be there at our sleep - ing, and give us, we pray,



your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.
 your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.
 your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.
 your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

Text: Jan Struther, 1901–1953
 Music: SLANE, Irish traditional
 Text © Oxford University Press 1931.

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Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
 Thanks be to God.

IN OUR PRAYERS

Katie Wallace, Bill Collar, Dakota Holiday, Carla Von Haden, Ruth Johnson, Judy Bever, Alrita Ornes, Dick Krause, Donna Welch, Brad Bever, Lisa Rhodes.

IN THE MILITARY

Jacob Picha, Todd Nofsinger, Dylan Dougherty, Danelle Dougherty, Seth Tormoen, Robert Cale.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Next Sunday, July 12, we will be holding a drive-in service at 9:00 AM. Please park your car in front of the church. We will then advise you to turn your radio to a specific FM frequency. Pastor Morris will lead us in worship will include Holy Communion.

We ask for your patience as this is as new to us as it will be for you.

CONTACTS DURING CORONAVIRUS CLOSURE

In case of emergency, contact Pastor Cathleen, via text, 608-865-1074, Justin Arndt (608-435-6336) (414-587-6642) or Nalani Bever (608-387-2311).

To activate the prayer chain, please contact Nalani or Louise Buchholz (608-435-6435).

Additional Contact Information:

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*The Sunday Assembly, Lorraine S. Brugh, Gordon W. Lathrop, Augsburg Fortress, 2008

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