



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
 Wilton, WI
 Fifth Sunday in Lent
 March 21, 2021
**Inviting People to
 Journey with Christ's Family
 in Spreading God's Love and Mercy**

God promises Jeremiah that a "new covenant" will be made in the future: a covenant that will allow all the people to know God by heart. The church sees this promise fulfilled in Christ, who draws all people to himself when he is lifted up on the cross. Our baptismal covenant draws us to God's heart through Christ and draws God's love and truth into our hearts. We join together in worship, sharing in word, song, and meal, and leave strengthened to share God's love with all the world.

Word of God, Come Down on Earth



1 Word of God, come down on earth, liv - ing rain from
 2 Word e - ter - nal, throned on high, Word that brought to
 3 Word that speaks God's ten - der love, one with God be -



heav'n de - scend - ing; touch our hearts and bring to birth
 life cre - a - tion, Word that came from heav'n to die,
 yond all tell - ing, Word that sends us from a - bove



faith and hope and love un - end - ing. Word al - might - y,
 cru - ci - fied for our sal - va - tion, sav - ing Word, the
 God the Spir - it, with us dwell - ing, Word of truth, to



we re - vere you; Word made flesh, we long to hear you.
 world re - stor - ing, speak to us, your love out - pour - ing.
 all truth lead us; Word of life, with one bread feed us.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, with steadfast love you draw us to yourself, and in mercy you receive our prayers. Strengthen us to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, that through life and death we may live in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

WORD

FIRST READING

The Judeans in Babylon blamed their exile on their ancestors, who had broken the covenant established at Sinai. Here the prophet looks to a day when God will make a new covenant with the people. There will be no need to teach the law, because God will write it on their hearts.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Psalm 51:1-12

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;
in your great compassion blot out my offenses.
²Wash me through and through from my wickedness,
and cleanse me from my sin.
³For I know my offenses,
and my sin is ever before me.
⁴Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are justified when you speak and right in your judgment.
⁵Indeed, I was born steeped in wickedness,
a sinner from my mother’s womb.
⁶Indeed, you delight in truth deep within me,
and would have me know wisdom deep within.
⁷Remove my sins with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be purer than snow.
⁸Let me hear joy and gladness;
that the body you have broken may rejoice.
⁹Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my wickedness.
¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
¹¹Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.
¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit.

SECOND READING

Using priestly imagery and references to the Old Testament, the author explains how Christ lived in trusting obedience to God, and so God has made Christ the source of our eternal salvation.

Hebrews 5:5-10

⁵Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”; ⁶as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.” ⁷In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

HOLY GOSPEL

Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time to celebrate the Passover festival. Here Jesus’ words about seeds planted in the ground turn the disaster of his death into the promise of a harvest in which everyone will be gathered.

John 12:20-33

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

SERMON

My sermon for today includes the theme of gathering. This past year, we have gathered in ways unlike any other time in our lives. We have gathered together through our shared experiences with people from all over the world during this time of the Coronavirus pandemic. We have gathered together in solidarity with those who have been discriminated against, because of their race, ethnicity, or some other construct. We have gathered in prayer, individually yet collectively, for those who have been affected by storms, flooding, wildfires, tornados and other natural and human disasters. We have gathered together while staying physically apart. We have gathered together in our separate cars during the drive-in worship services. We have gathered together through Zoom, by participating in virtual worship opportunities and meetings. We have gathered together in ways we never imagined or expected! But, most importantly, we have gathered together in these new and different ways to glorify God.

Two weeks ago, our gospel lesson was about Jesus in the temple. At that time, I spoke of the church as being less about any brick and mortar building, and more about God and God's people gathered together. We know that God is present with us wherever we may be, and we can worship anywhere that two or more are gathered. But, the church is about worship and praise offered to God by God's people. The church is a gathering-community of believers. We are God's people who are drawn together to worship and praise God. While we do not need to be in a physical building, we gather together to hear God's word in scripture reading, preaching and song. We gather together to experience God through the use of our senses. We gather together to collectively uplift others and to be uplifted by others. We gather together, because God created the church to first and foremost be a community that glorifies God! That is why we gather! And, we glorify God, when we are God's disciples--supporting one another's spiritual needs, welcoming the stranger and outcast, and sharing what we have to support ministries and missions here and throughout the world.

This week, a friend sent me a text message saying that her son and his family were completing a volunteer project in Texas. Their assistance was coordinated by a Christian nonprofit organization, "Eight Days of Hope." They had traveled more than 1,100 miles (one way) to assist people they did not know. They had traveled to gather together with people of different races, ethnicities and cultures, who had been affected by the recent ice/snow storms that resulted in power outages, broken water pipes, and additional damage. They had traveled individually, yet collectively. with people of diverse races, cultures and backgrounds from across the United States, to assist, to provide comfort, to let those affected know that their plight had not gone unnoticed/unseen/unheard. A testimonial from the "Eight Days of Hope" homepage states, "It is amazing. Believers from all walks of life, all ages, cities, and towns coming together all for the glory of God..." (Adam and Whitney, EDOH volunteers from Kentucky).

My friends' son was helping with plumbing projects around Houston. He sent his parents a newspaper article along with a note, "This is a house that I helped re-pipe this past week. Other homes I have been in are not as destroyed, but they still haven't had water in 3 weeks." How welcome it must have been for the homeowner's to see God's disciples gathered there to glorify God and assist them with their needs.

The context for our gospel passage for today, occurs after Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Jesus has returned to Jerusalem for his final ministry with the people there. They are a more diverse assembly than usual. The passage begins with "the Greeks" asking to see Jesus. (Per Mary Hinkle Slone, this may actually mean the Jews of the diaspora [those dispersed and living away from their home]). They are present, along with the Israelites and the Gentiles. They want to see and to hear Jesus. That is why they have come. They want to experience Jesus with their senses, so that they too might believe in him.

We do not know if "the Greeks" meet with Jesus, because the pericope does not tell us. Instead, Jesus goes into a discourse about a seed of grain! As is common in Jesus' teaching, especially in his parables, we listen to his words in light of his use of metaphors. In this example, Jesus is the grain of wheat, the seed that will fall and die, and yet produce much fruit. Jesus uses imagery that is readily understood by farmers and others whose survival is dependent on eating grains and plants. They know that in order for the wheat, the plant, to

grow and flourish, it must change its form: it cannot remain a seed and accomplish its intended purpose.

How Jesus--the seed that will die, and yet produce much fruit--will do this, requires Jesus' submission. It requires Jesus' full submission to God and Jesus' glorification of God's name. We hear Jesus' words, "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say--'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name" (John 27-28a). This is not a statement that speaks of Jesus' own wants and needs. It is not a statement of grumbling or complaining or saying, "Why me?" It is a statement that demonstrates Jesus' respect for God and God's authority. And the reply he receives is, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

Jesus is accepting his fate; he must die, and through his death, God's name will be glorified. Jesus as the Son of God, will be glorified not once, but twice! For Jesus will not only be resurrected, he will later ascend to heaven! The seed will die, and be resurrected! The seed will die, and ascend to heaven! Yet, those gathered together in this place, who hear the exchange, do not yet recognize God's voice. They think it is thunder or an angel! They do not recognize the voice as the voice of God. But, it is. It is God's voice. It is God the Father who responds, and those who do not yet see, who do not yet hear, will soon see, hear, and recognize Jesus in all his glory. Jesus is the grain of wheat, the seed that will fall and die, and yet through his death, he will produce much fruit. Through his death, he will offer forgiveness of sins, grace, salvation, and new life to those who believe in him!

Yes, Jesus is present among those gathered. He is present on earth, but his actions point to God's glory. People gathered together in this place want to see, hear, know, experience and believe in Jesus. Yet, they do not understand Jesus' words: Jesus, the grain of wheat must die, in order for God's greatest glory to be revealed! Mary Hinkle Slone states,

Jesus will be lifted up (see also John 3:14, 8:28). As the result of his crucifixion (being lifted up on a cross), resurrection (being lifted up from death) and ascension (being lifted up from the earth to return to the Father), people will see that he and the Father were always one. Questions about who Jesus is, where he has come from, and with what authority he speaks will be answered. Jesus holds out hope that these events will reveal him to those who could not before recognize him as the only Son of the Father (*Working Preacher*, 2018).

Slone further clarifies how Jesus was rejected by humanity--

...in John, the word "hate" means "reject"; it usually refers to what the world does to Jesus and by extension, to his disciples (see also John 7:7; 15:18-19, 23-25). So when Jesus says, "those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (John 12:25b), he is encouraging others to follow his lead in hating (or rejecting) this world's definition of life as a small and isolated existence. He will not--and his followers should not--grasp and hold the seed and thereby fail to bear much fruit.

Are we holding on to something that keeps us from experiencing the height, and depth, and breadth (and anything else) of knowing God and God's glory? Are we doing things for our own glory with our own gain in mind? We are God's disciples, who have been instructed to hate (reject) the evil in the world that draws us away

from God. We are to move away from self-centered preoccupations in our lives by moving toward God and giving our praise and glory to God. Jesus has pointed the way to God, and we too are to point the way to God! When we experience God and hear God's word, our hearts overflow, so that we desire to give God glory, honor and praise. Not for selfish gain, but for the furthering of God's kingdom. All glory and praise be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, both now and forever. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

You wash us through and through and remember our sin no more. Make your church a community of forgiveness throughout the world. Give your people courage to forgive; through them show the world new possibilities. Bless ministries of repentance and reconciliation; assist leaders in creating new ministries to aid those who deal with discrimination, prejudice and oppression. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You fill the earth—from tiny grains of wheat to the mighty thunder—with your presence, and you call us to attend to your will for all creation. Grant weather that prepares the soil for seeds; protect all from violent storms, flooding, and wildfires. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You promise to write your law on our hearts. Guide citizens throughout the world to shape communities that reflect your mercy, justice, and peace, and give them creativity to work for the welfare of all. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You sustain us with your bountiful Spirit. Restore the joy of all who need to know your presence those who are lonely or feel unforgivable, those who need healing of mind, body, or spirit, including Katie, Judy, Darlene, Paul, Pam, Alrita, Jeff, Tessa, Lisa, Bud, Jim, those with Coronavirus, and those we name aloud and in our hearts. Comfort all those who are dying, and all who grieve. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Jesus calls us to follow him in life and death. Empower this congregation in discipleship. Equip your children of all ages for ministry to those in need. Give us your truth and wisdom and teach us to follow Jesus. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

In the cross of Christ, your name is glorified. We praise you for those who have given us words to worship you. With all those who have died in Christ, bring us into life everlasting. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Almighty God, giver of all good gifts, look on your church with grace and guide the minds of those who shall choose the bishop of the La Crosse Area Synod, that we may receive a faithful servant who will care for your people and equip us for our ministries. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We entrust all our prayers and ourselves to you, O faithful God, 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

Lord, I Lift Your Name on High

857

Lord, I lift your name on high; Lord, I love to sing your prais-es.

I'm so glad you're in my life, I'm so glad you came to save us.

You came from heav-en to earth to show the way, from the earth

to the cross, my debt to pay, from the cross to the grave,

from the grave to the sky; Lord, I lift your name on high.

The musical score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. It consists of five staves of music. The lyrics are placed below the notes, with some words split across lines. The melody is simple and hymn-like, with a final cadence at the end of the fifth staff.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Last Thursday, I had the opportunity to watch Wisconsin Public Television's production of, "Nancy Zieman: Extraordinary Grace." I will confess that I am not a person who sews or quilts (although I greatly appreciate our Quilting group and other persons with sewing skills). Nor do I remember ever watching more than a few minutes of her television series. However, I knew a little about Nancy Zieman, and that was enough to encourage me to want to know more about her. So, I watched the television special about her life. (Note: Nancy Zieman passed away from cancer in 2017, but reruns of her show, "Sewing with Nancy" are still being broadcast on PBS.)

There are aspects of her life to which most of us can relate, and other aspects that give us food for thought--she grew up on a farm in Wisconsin and learned about sewing through her 4-H club; she developed Bell's Palsy as a child, which caused one side of her face to be disfigured; she was a Christian and her faith was very important to her; she graduated from UW-Stout, married, had children and grandchildren; she owned a store in Beaver Dam called "Nancy's Notions;" she created her own sewing/quilting supply company that was very successful; she authored more than 40-books, and she continued to do her T.V show up until a few months before her death.

In watching the PBS special, I could not help but to reflect on the many connections that one could make between her life and a variety of sermon topics. While many persons with facial disfiguration would not even think of being on television, or in the public eye, she did not let that stop her. She did not let societies' prejudicial judgments hold her back. In fact, she used her challenges as opportunities to educate others! She created a show that was broadcast first on a small scale, and then, nationally.

I believe that her faith, and the support of her family, gave her the requisite courage to take on a role that others would have avoided. I believe her faith and the support of her family, helped her to approach her challenges and not let them control her. I believe that her faith and the support of her family, helped her, so that she could become a leader for others, persevere through two cancer diagnoses, and face her terminal illness.

Last week, I asked Barb Ornes if she had seen the special. I thought of Barb as I watched the program, because of her sewing shop and her volunteer work with the 4-H, Brookwood schools, and other community groups. Barb said that she had seen the special before. Barb also mentioned that Nancy Zieman had maintained her connection with the 4-H Club, and even gave discounts through her sewing business to 4-H members. Nancy Zieman was also very generous in supporting several charities.

The title of the special, "Nancy Zieman: Extraordinary Grace," speaks to me too, of her offering grace, God's grace, as a disciple of God, to others. A quote from the show is, "The gift is in the giving." How appropriate for us to hear these words, for we know that God's grace is an extraordinary gift worth giving. Hearing these words reminds us once again, that God gives grace to us, and we in turn are to offer grace to others. May we remember and take to heart these words, "The gift is in the giving."

Peace,

Pastor Cathy