

8th Sunday after Pentecost, July 26, 2020
Living Faith Lutheran Church
Sechelt, BC

Order for Confession and Forgiveness

Wherever you may be reading this, please turn to the person(s) with you, or bring to mind the face(s) and name(s) of others near and dear to you, please turn to those family or friends and say to them these four very important words:

Please forgive me. I forgive you. I love you. Thank you.

Then, speak or hear and listen to these words of grace:

*You are forgiven, loved and accepted by God who looks upon and sees Christ—
Christ surrounding you, covering you, within you, beneath you and above you.*

Therefore, be at peace with yourself, with one another, and with all creation and all creatures who are also filled with the life and love and mercy of Christ.

GATHERING

Gathering Song #687 “Come to Us, Creative Spirit

1. Come to us, creative Spirit, in this holy house;
 ev’ry human talent hallow, hidden skills arouse,
 that within your earthly temple, wise and simple may rejoice.
2. Poet, painter, music maker, all your treasures bring;
 craftsman, actor, graceful dancer, make your offering;
 join your hands in celebration; let creation shout and sing.
3. Word from God eternal springing, fill our minds, we pray;
 and in all artistic vision give integrity;
 may the flame within us burning kindle yearning day by day.
4. In all places and forever glory be expressed to the Son,
 with God the Father and the Spirit blest;
 in our worship and our living keep us striving for the best.

Greeting and Prayer of the Day

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, (+)
and the companionship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all and be with us always. Amen.

Let us pray. Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. By your Spirit, give us your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

WORD

First Reading Genesis 29:15-28

¹⁵Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. ¹⁸Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." ²⁰So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

²¹Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." ²²So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. ²³But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. ²⁴(Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) ²⁵When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" ²⁶Laban said, "This is not done in our country — giving the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." ²⁸Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

Word of God. Word of Life. Thanks be to God

Second Reading Romans 8:26-39

²⁶Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Word of God. Word of Life. Thanks be to God.

Lesson Hymn #692 “We Are An Offering”

We lift our voices, we lift our hands, we lift our lives up to you;
we are an offering.

Lord, use our voices, Lord, use our hands. Lord, use our lives, they are yours.
we are an offering.

All that we have, all that we are, all that we hope to be,
we give to you, we give to you.

We lift our voices, we lift our hands, we lift our lives up to you;
we are an offering, we are an offering.

Holy Gospel Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 *Glory to you, O Lord.*

³¹He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

³³He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

⁴⁴The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹Have you understood all this? They answered, "Yes." ⁵²And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

The gospel of our Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.

Sermon

Pentecost 8a, July 26, 2020

Matthew 13:44-52

LFLC

In his book **One Generation After**, Elie Wiesel,
a Nazi concentration camp survivor and Nobel prize winner,
tells a moving story which he calls “The Watch.”

You see, April, 1944, was an evil time for European Jewry,
especially for his family who was deported first to Auschwitz-Birkenau
where his mother and one sister died immediately upon their arrival.
Later he and his father were transferred to Buchenwald
where his father was killed just prior to the liberation of the camp.

And it was many years later that Wiesel wrote his book
which included the story I mentioned a moment ago.

The story centres on a pocket-watch that he received
when he was a child at the time of his Bar Mitzvah—
the Jewish rite of passage for boys signaling their entry into adulthood.

In April of 1944, when he was 15, the Eastern European village he lived in
decided to expel all its Jews in order to be able to proclaim its racial purity.

Upon hearing of this plan, the Jewish population of the town
decided to bury its treasures in the earth for safekeeping
in the mistaken notion that, someday, all this turmoil
would pass and they would then return.

The young boy buried his most prized possession—a watch—
in a carefully measured spot between a fence and a tree.

20 years later, being one of the town's few holocaust survivors,
he returned to the village and, in the middle of the night,
went to the field where he had buried the watch.

Pacing off the distance from the fence to the tree,
he began to dig with his bare hands and eventually uncovered a box.
And, in the box, Wiesel found his watch which was now
in an advanced state of decomposition.

He stared at it for some time, allowing the joyful and painful memories
it brought back to wash over him.

Then, deliberately and carefully, he placed it back in the box
and returned it to the earth, with the hope that, in later years,
another person might find it and learn that
“once upon a time, among in the inhabitants of that town,
there had been Jews and Jewish children robbed of their future.”

I wonder, did the man in one of the parables in this morning's text
ever imagine that his good fortune might be the result of someone else
being robbed of their future. . .their hopes. . .their dreams?

I mean, whenever someone wrestles a treasure
out of the reluctant earth or the possessive sea,
that treasure always has a story to tell—a story of sadness and joy,
a story of delight and disappointment.

Who buried it? And why?
Whose future is being forfeited and lost
so that another's life might be surprised and blessed?

A parent whose dying child receives a liver or heart transplant
would understand easily what I mean because they realize
that their happiness is only made possible by some other parents' sadness—
and, in that knowledge, their tears of joy are tempered by melancholy and pity.

Finding a treasure is not all fun and games.

And not only is the one who buried the treasure
the only one who is saddened, for the one who finds the treasure
is also torn by a mixture of joy and sorrow.
Why sorrow, you ask? Well, the parable tells us that this man is so poor
that he has to sell everything he owns in order to raise the necessary cash
to buy the land in which the treasure is buried.

Can you imagine the anguish he has go through in making the decision
to sell all his possessions, including his land?
I mean, like the family farm on the prairies, land was a precious possession
passed down from generation to generation.

And yet, here he is, in a situation which requires that he sell this land—
and, along with it, the lives and memories which make up a family's history—
a treasure of memories entrusted to this man
in confidence that he will keep them intact.

And remember, he sells, not only his land, but all his possessions as well.
That must have been difficult, too—
trying to put a price tag on his wife's dowry,
on his mother's silverware and his father's tools,
on his grandmother's dining room set,
and his grandfather's rocking chair and footstool.

There must have been great regret in all of this.
Treasure hunts can be dangerous to your emotional health.

And we're not done yet, either, because sadness also touches
the person in whose field the treasure is buried.
I mean, here's a guy who is about to be taken to the cleaners.

He's like the unsuspecting farmer who had poured his life into the land
and then sells it for a price he considers to be an outstanding price—
not knowing that it is destined to be the site
of a lucrative industrial project or a multiple home development
and therefore worth considerably more than he got for it.

Or he is like someone who sells her stock in a company
just days before the company is swallowed up by a huge conglomerate

whose takeover causes the company's stock price to skyrocket. . .
and it is the CEO and the executives on the inside
who end up making the big bucks.

You have to wonder if there isn't some basic dishonesty
going on here in this parable. I mean, shouldn't the treasure hunter
have to make some kind of goodwill offer to the former owner?
After all, the seller is bound to be heartbroken
when the discovery of the treasure is revealed—
along with the fact that he has been ripped off lock, stock, and barrel.

“Finders keepers; losers weepers” isn't just a children's chant.
It is the truth; often a hard and difficult truth.

And what do all the neighbours of the treasure finder think about all this hubbub?
Its a small village where everybody knows everybody else's business.
And so they would know he was selling his land
and would, therefore, naturally be puzzled,
wondering what he will do now without his land—
without this land which had sustained him and his family
and gave them a sense of worth and belonging.
We can almost hear the locals asking: “What's going on? Why is he doing this?”

Well, the reason he is willing to take the gamble
of letting go of everything that equals safety and security
is because of the possibility of what exercise instructors and personal trainers
often say to their students or clients: “No pain; no gain”.

In other words, he takes the risk of losing what he has because he is convinced
that he will end up with something much better. . .something more valuable.
And, if that is the case with earthly treasure, Jesus is implying,
then just imagine how much more his disciples should be willing to give up
once they have seen the treasure which can be theirs in the kingdom of God.

Or, to put it another way: When we come to know
just how generous God has been and is to us in Christ,
then nothing else can be seen as important. . .
or, perhaps, it would be better to say that everything else becomes secondary—
and able to be offered into God's service and placed at God's beck and call.

Now, before we go on, I want to clarify something here.
Neither Jesus, nor I, are implying that these two parables
mean that we are supposed to give away everything we own.
Instead, the point here is that we are to use
the valuable things we own in order to gain something
even more valuable. . .something more precious.

So, keeping that in mind, I don't want you to think
that the point of today's parables. . .and sermon. . .
is that "true" Christians or "real" disciples must be ready
to sell everything they own and give it to the poor.

On the contrary. What I am saying, and I believe what Jesus is saying,
is that once we understand and grasp just how generous
God has been to us, then we are set free
to act in ways that are equally generous.

For example, a wealthy business owner who takes a personal interest
in high-school students from a poor part of town—
and offers to support them through college or university
by paying their tuition, room and board—

such a person is far wiser and a more useful steward,
both to God and to society, than a financial tycoon
who gives his entire fortune away to charity and then enters a monastery
where he lives a life of penance as a way of paying for the sins
he committed in amassing his fortune as a "robber baron."

The first uses the fruits of her treasure over and over again
while the second uses his fortune only once
and then is liberated from any further obligations
to act responsibly and beneficially.

Research and development; relief and hunger funds;
sponsorship of the arts and culture;
scholarships for promising students, lessons for budding musicians--
these, and many others, are ways of finding, enjoying, and sharing treasures.

And maybe that is why, in the midst of a string of parables,
why Matthew puts these two back-to-back—
in order to help us recognize that both skill and luck
are involved in Christian discipleship and Christian stewardship. . .
and that we need to be smart enough to determine just how much
each are responsible for the good fortune and the creature comforts you and I enjoy.

For example, in the case of the parable of pearl merchant
Jesus indicates that a prepared mind is a great virtue.
I mean, it is true that the merchant was lucky
to have that particular pearl come into his hands.
But, without the skill he had developed over the years
of studying the properties and values of pearls,
he would never have been able to recognize the value

of his unexpected find and so make this big score.

As they say on the golf course and the hockey net: “You have to be good to be lucky.”

On the other hand, Jesus doesn't suggest that the one who finds the treasure in the field has done a lot of legwork prior to his discovery. . .other than the fact that he is open to the possibility of stumbling across something new and then acting upon what he finds. . . even though he knows that the price he will have to pay to possess that treasure is incredibly high. . .and will hurt-- hurt so much he will barely be able to keep from laughing out loud at the realtor's office while signing the bill of sale.

So, with those thoughts rattling around in our heads,
let me try and answer the question I said last week
that we should always ask at the end of every sermon--
the question, “What does this mean?”

With that in question in mind, let me close this off with two points.

First, if you have been fortunate enough—that is, blessed enough—
to have more brains or time or money or abilities or personality
than you think you rightly deserve, then, let me encourage you
to put those gifts at God's disposal by using them in ways
that are beneficial to yourself and others.

After all, your personal treasures probably didn't come to you
totally and completely as a result of hard work.
Instead, some, if not most, were gifts to you—gifts of God's grace
that you can and should enjoy to the fullest and then find equal delight in passing on.

My second point is this: Whenever there is a possibility
of your coming into some kind of treasure,
be ready to risk everything in order to have it. . .and share it.
I mean, these material things that we think we own,
but, in reality, which we are actually just leasing. . .
these things that give us such comfort and security--
none of them really, truly, ultimately important
in comparison to the treasure of God's kingdom, God's reign.

I mean, would you give up your place in heaven for your expensive watch?
For your bedroom set? For your house? Your car?
Is there anything you own or any investment you have socked away
that you would not give up in a minute
if your grandchild's life depended upon it?

Or how about leaving a small. . .or even large. . .bequest in your will
to a little white church in Davis Bay?

I suppose the answer we give to that or any of these questions
depends entirely upon our definition of “treasure.”

You see, everybody likes the idea of finding buried treasure
but very few of us are prepared to do what it takes to gain it. . .
and maybe that is part of what Jesus meant
when he said in another place and at another time:
“Where your treasure is, there will your heart also be.”

Think about that, okay?

Amen. SDG

Song of the Day #678 “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending”

1. God, whose giving knows no ending, from your rich and endless story;
nature’s wonder, Jesus’ wisdom, costly cross, grave’s shuttered door,
gifted by you, we turn to you, off’ring up ourselves in praise;
thankful song shall rise forever, gracious donor of our days.
2. Skills and time are ours for pressing toward the goals of Christ, your Son;
all at peace in health and freedom, races joined, the church made one.
Now direct our daily labour, lest we strive for self alone;
born with talents, make us servants fit to answer at your throne.
3. Treasure, too, you have entrusted, gain through pow’rs your grace conferred;
our to use for home and kindred, and to spread the gospel word.
Open wide our hands in sharing, as we heed Christ’s ageless call,
healing, teaching, and reclaiming, serving you by loving all.

Prayers of Intercession

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world,
and all who are in need. *A brief silence is kept*

Generous God, your reign is revealed to us in common things: a mustard shrub, a woman baking
bread, a fishing net. Help your church witness to the surprising yet common ways you encounter
us in daily life. Surprising One, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

When your word is heard, it gives light and understanding. Increase our understanding and awe
of your creation; guide the work of scientists and researchers. Treasuring the earth, may we live
as grateful and responsible caretakers of our home. Imaginative One, in your mercy, **hear our
prayer.**

As the birds of the air nest in branches of trees, gather the nations of the world into the welcoming shade of your merciful reign. Direct leaders of nations to build trust with each other and walk in the way of peace and healing, especially in these days when the human family struggles together, suffers together, cares for others together and holds out hope together. Compassionate One, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Your Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for the saints according to your will. Help us when we do not know how to pray. Give comfort to the dying, refuge to the weary, justice to those who are oppressed, and healing to the sick (*especially those we name now aloud or in silence. . . Erika, Bud, Ed and Gwen, Ingrid, Dorothy, Inez, Elizabeth, Sher and Maury, Kathy, Michelle. . . as well as those known to us and loved by us. . .*). Tender One, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You show steadfast love and direct us to ask of you what we need. Help this community of faith as well as other congregations or gatherings of believers everywhere who ask boldly. . . or timidly. . . for what is most needed. Refresh us with new dreams of being your people in this place and time. Abundant One, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In you our lives are never lost. Strengthen us by the inspiring witness of your people in all times and places. Embolden our witness now and one day gather us with all your saints in light (*especially those whose faces, names and memories bring us joy. . .*). Living One, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Sharing of the Peace May the peace of Christ be with us all and always.

Offering Prayer

God of abundance, in this holy house and in holy houses across this community, this country and around the world, we who worship and thank you set before you the precious fruits of your creation, and with them our very lives. Teach us patience and hope as we do what we can to care for all those in need until the coming of your Son, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

MEAL

Those who are communing at home are to have bread and wine/grape juice close at hand. All may either participate in the Thanksgiving and the Meal by following the printed order below or by resuming the video in which the Presider leads the Thanksgiving. The bread and wine may be raised when they are blessed as a reminder of Christ's being "lifted up" on the cross as the offering of himself for us.

God is with us. Therefore, let us celebrate and rejoice at the gifts of Christ's presence, love, strength and peace given to us in this foretaste of the feast to come.

Holy God, our Bread of life, our Table, and our Food,
you created a world in which all might be satisfied by your abundance.

You dined with Abraham and Sarah, promising them life,
and fed your people Israel with manna from heaven.

You sent your Son to eat with sinners
and to become food for the world.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; (+)
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, (+) and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore, his life given for us and his rising from the grave,
we await his coming again to share with us the everlasting feast.

By your Spirit nurture and sustain us with this meal:
strengthen us to serve all in hunger and want,
and by this bread and cup make of us the body of your Son.

Through him all glory and honour is yours, gracious and steadfast One,
with the Holy Spirit, in your holy Church, both now and forever. Amen

Let us pray together with all who have gathered in space and in time to say:

Our Father/Mother 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.

Sharing of the Meal

*In this blessed "one-ness" with Christ and with all others who are one in Christ,
our Saviour grants us grace, forgiveness, new life and wholeness*

A Song before, during or after the Meal #691 "Accept, O Lord, the Gifts We Bring"

1. Accept, O Lord, the gifts we bring to place upon your table.
We do not worship as we ought but only as we're able.
2. The vines were planted, seeds were sown. They grew in your good pleasure.
What once was common, daily food becomes a holy treasure.

3. Our hopes and dreams, our toils and cares we lift in prayer before you.
Lord, by your grace now come to us, as humbly we adore you.

Prayer after communing

O God, our life, our strength, our food, we give you thanks for sustaining us with the living presence of your Son. By your Holy Spirit, enliven us to be his body in the world, that more and more we will give you praise and serve your earth and its many peoples, through Jesus Christ, our Rescuer, Healer and Friend. **Amen.**

Blessing

May the Eternal One bless us and keep us.

May the face of the Ancient of Days shine on us with grace and mercy.

May our Rock and our Fortress look upon us with favour and ✝ give us peace. Amen.

Sending Song #689 "Praise and Thanksgiving"

1. Praise and thanksgiving, God, we would offer for all things living, you have made good;
harvest of sown fields, fruits of the orchard,
hay from the mown fields, blossom and wood.
2. God, bless the labour we bring to serve you, that with our neighbour we may be fed.
Sowing or tilling, we would work with you, harvesting, milling for daily bread.
3. Mother, providing food for your children, by Wisdom's guiding teach us to share
one with another, so that, rejoicing with us, all others may know your care.
4. Then will your blessing reach ev'ry people, freely confessing your gracious hand.
Where you are reigning, no one will hunger;
your love, sustaining, showers the land.

Dismissal Let us go in peace and gladly share
what has been gladly given and gladly received.
May it be so now and always.