

Pentecost #16

9/20/2020

J.V.Trautwein

Celebrate (Introduction)

“Matthew narrates one of Jesus’ controversial parables in which Jesus says that the reign of God is like that of a landowner who pays his workers the same wage no matter what time of the day they begin to work. When God changes God’s mind about punishing Nineveh for their evil ways, Jonah is angry. Yes God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love.

I Baptism we receive the grace of God that is freely given to all. As Martin Luther wrote, in the presence of God’s mercy we are all beggars.”

We come together in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening Hymn: [“O Christ, Your Heart, Compassionate”](#)

Psalm 145:1-8

¹ I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.

² Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name forever and ever.

³ Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised;
his greatness is unsearchable.

⁴ One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.

⁵ On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

⁶ The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed,
and I will declare your greatness.

⁷ They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

⁸ The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Hymn of Praise: ["Praise the Lord! O Heavens"](#)

Prayer of the Day

"Almighty and eternal God, you show loving kindness to us your servants. Because we cannot rely on our own abilities, grant us your merciful judgment, and train us to embody the generosity of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.. Amen."

1st Reading: [Jonah 3:10-4:11](#)

2nd Reading: [Philippians 1:21-30](#)

The Gospel: [Matthew 20:1-16](#)

Hymn of the Day: ["Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling"](#)

The Message: [\(Video\)](#)

The age of electronics, and specifically what some call the information or communication age, is all new technology but in some ways it fits the saying that there really isn't anything new under the sun. It may also verify the statement that what is new is just a version of what is old. Basic communication has been with mankind throughout his history and the development of the human species. Communication within the ancient societies took two basic forms, the spoken word and the written word. This has held true through the ages even to today.

How we transmit this communication has changed and evolved with first the advent of the printing press, then the telegraph, telephone, radio, TV, and now the computer and the internet. But, through most of the history of civilization there had to be close proximity with others for there to be communication by way of the spoken word. The only long distant form of communication was through the written word. Letter writing was as essential as the telephone and was the basic reason to learn the skill of reading and writing.

With the advent and popularity of the telephone during the 20th century, generations became use to instantaneous communication through the spoken word. Letter writing was time

consuming, slow and became passé. Therefore by the end of the 20th century letter writing and the written word as a means of personal communication almost had become a lost art.

Then came the revolution of the computer age and the internet. Suddenly the written word became as instantaneous as the telephone and the spoken word. It even had advantages over the telephone in that with just one message many people could be contacted and informed. Also, the message does not have to wait until someone is home to answer the phone. So again the art of communication through the written word has returned.

I find this to be a plus since so many times the thought out written word can be a more effective and forthright way of communicating. The written word is often less likely to be misinterpreted than the spoken word. Also, for some reason one's true feelings and emotions can best be expressed through the written word. One only has to read poetry or even write or receive a love letter to realize that. I believe there has been far more accurate expression of one's true feelings in a love letter than is actually found in a one on one spoken exchange. That is why love letters are so cherished.

This all leads me to today's epistle lesson which is from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Out of all of Paul's letters, to me the letter to the Philippians is the most personal and compelling. It almost has the emotional warmth of a love letter in contrast to Paul's other letters which can almost be like business letters. They are rather calculated, cool, instructional, and very theological in nature. It is with his letter to the church at Philippi that we gain a perspective of Paul as being very human with human sensitivities and emotions.

This is as it should be since there was a very special relationship between Paul and the Philippians. It seems to be a closer relationship and friendship well beyond that of any other churches within Paul's writings. It is interesting to note that Paul did not seek any support or gifts from any of his churches except from the church at Philippi. His personal independence was allowed to be breached by those he loved and perhaps thought to be as family. This fact is critical in understanding the special bond he had with that church. This is why this letter of Paul is so special, so warm, so loving, and intimate.

This is also why I personally find Philippians to be my most loved letter of Paul. Grant it, the other letters give much insight into the theology of Christianity but Philippians gives insight into the living relationships within life and the Body of Christ as well as the life of Paul. Just listen to these words as found in the very beginning of this letter. "I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you

to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.”

Are not these the words of a love letter, the words of genuine emotion and the expression of being thankful for their relationship? One cannot be so personally thankful without the most positive of experiences. Paul gives us the example that it is a necessity to not only be appreciative for and to each other but to express our true thanksgiving for being able to openly share our lives with each other.

Here was Paul who had spent his productive years in giving of himself to bring the message of Christ throughout the known world. His life was openly given so that others may know the gift of God’s eternal love. But yet, what happened didn’t seem fair for he was continually harassed, tormented, and persecuted for doing so. He had to constantly watch over his churches and keep them from false prophets and teachings as well as from other detrimental influences. It seems as though he was constantly fighting for the life of his message, his own life, and the life of the church.

But then in the midst of all of this and even his imprisonment he could turn to the Church at Philippi and be embraced by the love of Christ through them. What strength he must have received through this loving Body of Christ. From prison he writes, “Yes and I will continue to rejoice for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance.”

There seemed to be a true two way street of mutual love and witness. This witness came to a crescendo when Paul expressed to the Philippians the truest confession which a Christian can live, believe, and state. It is a confession which should be the ultimate goal of every Christian. “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain.” He goes on to pour out his very soul and tells his beloved friends of his inner conflict, the struggle of choices if his life would have been in his own hands. “I am hard pressed between the two; my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.”

When faced with the possibility of death this is exactly the struggle for the Christian. Through faith we know God’s promise that there is eternal life in the presence of God’s love and with all of the saints who have gone before. But, is this selfish to wish since the reality of such a promise is to leave those left behind in sorrow and without the support and encouragement which we have given them throughout life? That is our ultimate internal struggle and conflict.

It is my belief that we can say all the creeds of Christianity, read and study the Bible from beginning to the end, study all of the great theologians, listen to all of the great preachers, attend church every Sunday and even give of our wealth to help others, but if we do not come to the point to stand with Paul and confess “For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain” then we have missed the true message of Christ. Living in Christ means that we share His message of

love by how we treat each other so that we may live in the hope and promise of God's eternal love. To be able to make that confession is to experience the ultimate joy and motivation in life. "For to me, living is Christ and dying gain." That is our confession of hope, promise, and living. This is the life which is so needed in the troubled world of today

Anthem: ["What The World Needs Now Is Love"](#) - Dionne Warwick

Offering*

We give thee but thine own, what-e'er the gift may be; all that we have is thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from thee.

The Prayer

Our heavenly Father, we give you thanks for another new day and the ability to face the challenges it may present. This new day may bring further hardships to those who are suffering from the pandemic, the hurricane, and the tragic wildfires in the west. Across the world there are those suffering from oppression, persecution, and hunger. Lord, the challenges are great but we know that with your guiding message of love and compassion we may find the ability to help those who are so desperately in need. Let us be renewed in our conviction of your unending love.

Be with all those on the front lines of helping those who have been stricken by the pandemic and the natural disasters. They are giving so much of their lives while placing themselves in danger. We continue to pray for their safety and well-being.

We pray for all whole need your comforting and healing presence especially Pam Ash, Heidi Brackbill, Danny Brackbill, Parker Brennan, the Elshafei family, Betty Fultz, the Johnson Family, Robert Karner, Ray Lambert, Donna Mayhew, Bev and Jim Mertz, Nic Nelson, Wendy Neumann, Elise Oliver, Peter Olsen, Dottie Reitz, Robert Reitz, Colin Shea, Jerry Shea, Tommy Shimer, Jack Smith, the Spiegler family, Linda Stephens, Randy Stephens, Kirk Strobel, Yongyin Sun, Esther and Buck Trautwein, Pastor Jack, and all those who are suffering pain, and sorrow as a result of this pandemic.

We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face shine upon you;
The Lord lift up His presence upon you and give you peace. Amen

And now my brothers and sisters
Live on knowing God's love,
The joy of living this life of love,
And the peace which only come through the power of His presence within you.
So live on in Love, Joy, Peace, and Power.

Closing Hymn: ["Lift High the Cross"](#)

All are welcome to our outdoor Sunday morning service at 9:30 AM weather permitting. Social distancing and face masks are required. Bring a lawn chair.

*Offering to be sent to:

Bob Brackbill
10274 Raleigh Tavern Road
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Epiphany Lutheran Church
9122 Sybert Drive
Columbia Hills
Ellicott City, MD 21043
<https://www.epiphanylutherancolumbia.org/>