

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 3rd, 2023

The prophet Jeremiah speaks of the incurable wound of his suffering yet finds in God's words the delight of his heart. When Peter doesn't grasp Jesus' words about suffering, Jesus tells the disciples they will find their lives in losing them. Such sacrificial love is described by Paul when he urges us to associate with the lowly and not repay evil with evil. In worship we gather as a community that we might offer ourselves for the sake of our suffering world.

Greeting – The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be God,
the one who forms us,
✠ Jesus who bears the cross,
the Spirit who makes our joy complete.
Amen.

Let us bow before God in humility,
confessing our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Steadfast and faithful God,
**you have revealed the ways of justice,
yet we fail to follow you.
We are overwhelmed
by the world's violence and suffering.
We are afraid to risk what we have
for the sake of others.**

**For the harm we have caused,
known and unknown, forgive us.
For the unjust demands we place on others
and your creation, forgive us.
For the ways we turn away
from you and our neighbor, forgive us.
Lead us back to you
and set us on the right path;
in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior.
Amen.**

Beloved in Christ,
God's justice stretches beyond all understanding.
God's compassion is beyond compare.
In Jesus, God is always making a new way for us.
In ✠ Christ, you are already and always forgiven.
Amen.

Gathering Hymn **“Will You Come and Follow Me”**

#798 vs 1,2,4,5

Prayer of the Day

O God, we thank you for your Son, who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world. Humble us by his example, point us to the path of obedience, and give us strength to follow your commands, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Reading: Acts 15:22-35

Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among them and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, ²³ with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the brothers and sisters of gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. ²⁴ Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds,^[a] ²⁵ we have decided unanimously to choose men and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, ²⁶ who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁷ We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled^[b] and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

³⁰ So they were sent off and went down to Antioch. When they gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. ³¹ When they read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation. ³² Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the brothers and sisters. ³³ After they had been there for some time, they were sent off in peace by the brothers and sisters to those who had sent them.^[e] ³⁵ But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, and there, with many others, they taught and proclaimed the word of the Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Children's Message

Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew 16:21-28

²¹From that time on, [after Peter confessed that Jesus was the Messiah,] Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." ²³But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

²⁷"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ

Sermon

People of God, grace to you and peace from God, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN.

We pick up a little bit where we left off last week with Peter and the revelation that the Good News of God's Love for God's People does indeed cross the boundaries that we set up in our own minds and institutions, and we hear because of the spread of the Gospel, and its crossing of boundaries, that the matter comes before a council.

The council meets and decides that it is indeed okay that the Gospel reach the Gentile population.

Truthfully, this is headscratching. They heard the witness of Peter and the ministry that he had done, as the Spirit guided him. They were moved by it. They had their own revelations because of it, and alas, they gather to determine if it really is an okay thing.

Thankfully, they proceed. Yes, it is good that this has happened. So, they send a letter.

"For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose no further burden than these essentials." Ahh yes. It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us to get out of the way and let God work.

BUT WAIT, there's more.

"We impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep from these, you will do well."

Nothing says welcome like, “We are grateful to have you, God is glad you’re with us, as long as you adhere to our rules, you’ll do great!”

The first part of this text may leave you scratching your head a bit. Is this really what it means to bring the Good News of God’s Love for God’s People into the world? To tell them that it comes with a bunch of rules and regulations to abide by? I think Jesus would tell us that the rules and regulations are great, but the greatest rule of them all is to love God with everything you’ve got and love your neighbor as yourself.

And that is what we ought to do. Realizing that, and reading the second part of this text, what comes when the gentiles receive this letter. “When they read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation.” They rejoiced that those claiming to bring the Good News of God’s Love for God’s People actually brought it!

In the time that followed Judas and Silas remained and said much to “encourage and strengthen” their siblings in Christ. It may seem like nothing, but words matter.

It doesn’t say here that Judas and Silas remained in that place to create new siblings in Christ. They remained in order to “encourage and strengthen” what was already there.

Again, seems like nothing, but words matter.

This goes directly back to what we heard in Peter’s call story. Peter discovered that the Good News of God’s Love for God’s People was already beyond the boundaries that had been set up. It was simply that those on the other side of those boundaries were waiting for Peter and those who sent him, were waiting for him to realize it.

As church we so often tell ourselves that we need to go out and create followers of Jesus. After all, that is what the Great Commission tells us, “go and make disciples.”

What if we looked at that word “make” and imagined it as “encourage and strengthen?”

Imagine for a moment if you were part of the demographic that churches say they need to reach with the Gospel. You have group after group come into your life proclaiming the Good News of God’s Love for God’s People as though you’ve never heard or experienced it, when the reality is that you’ve known it all along and you’ve just been waiting for the church to realize it, too. What does that do and say to you?

For so long the church has operated on this premise that we are the gatekeepers of God’s Love for God’s People. And for so long, the God’s People that we are encouraged to accompany, have seen us miss time and time again welcome them to the gate, but tell them it can’t quite be opened.

Part of hearing these stories, the call narratives throughout scripture, is to realize that we don’t always do it as well as we think we do. Thankfully, there is grace for that. God meets us in our moments of not quite living out the Gospel the way God had hoped, or even the way that we preach it, and God nudges us just a bit further.

The question we have to ask ourselves is:

Do we do what we do because we think it is what we are supposed to do and it will make us look good?

Or...

Do we do what we do to strengthen and encourage God’s people, and ourselves, to allow the whole Body of Christ to be built up, and God’s love be truly experienced.

This process isn’t always easy and is rarely comfortable. But, it is always worth it.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN

Song of the Day

“Bind Us Together”

Apostle’s Creed

Prayers of Intercession

Remembering the caring and generous works of God, we pray for the church, creation, and the needs of our neighbors.

A brief silence.

God of life, your words are the joy at the heart of your church. Draw the seeker to you, place messages of hope and healing in the mouths of your witnesses, and open your children to your truth when we stumble. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

God of steadfast love, renew the earth by your Spirit, that lands and oceans reveal the beauty of your creation. Challenge us to live humbly and peaceably as part of your world. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

God of patience, lead those who govern to hold fast to what is good. Guide them to show honor to the people in their care. Overcome evil in all nations and grant peace to peoples and places mired in conflict (*We pray especially for Peyton, Matt, David, Verna, Irene, Clarice, Steve, Kathy, Val, Jacob, Cherri, Keith and JoJo, Bob and Joanne, Bill and Bonnie, Frank and Heather, Bob and Sonja, Bill and Betty, Tom and Kay, Sherm and Mary, family of Verne Schellfeffer*). Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

God of deliverance, remember all who are suffering, lonely, and in pain. Liberate your people being insulted, persecuted, or in the grasp of the ruthless. Give endurance to workers who persevere on this Labor Day and insure fair wages and safe working environments. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

God of justice, equip this congregation to boldly follow you in uncertain times and to remain faithful in prayer when facing challenges. Show us how best to love and care for one another and our communities. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God of glory, we give thanks for the saints who now dwell with you in splendor (*especially*). Nurture us in faith until the day we join their heavenly song. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Remember us according to your steadfast love as we offer these and the prayers of our heart, trusting in your compassion made known through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Offering

Offertory Prayer

God of power, God of plenty,
all things belong to you.

We bring your gifts to the table,
that all might be fed.

Form us into the body of your Beloved,
Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

Words of Institution

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

Communion #471 & #466

Prayer

Blessed be your name, O God,
for we have feasted on your Word,
Christ Jesus, the joy and delight of our hearts.
Strengthened by this food,
send us to gather the world to your banquet,
where none are left out and all are satisfied.

Amen.

Blessing

The God of glory,
✠ Jesus Christ, name above all names,
and the Spirit who lives in you,
bless you now and forever.

Amen.

Sending Song "Sent Forth by God's Blessing" #547

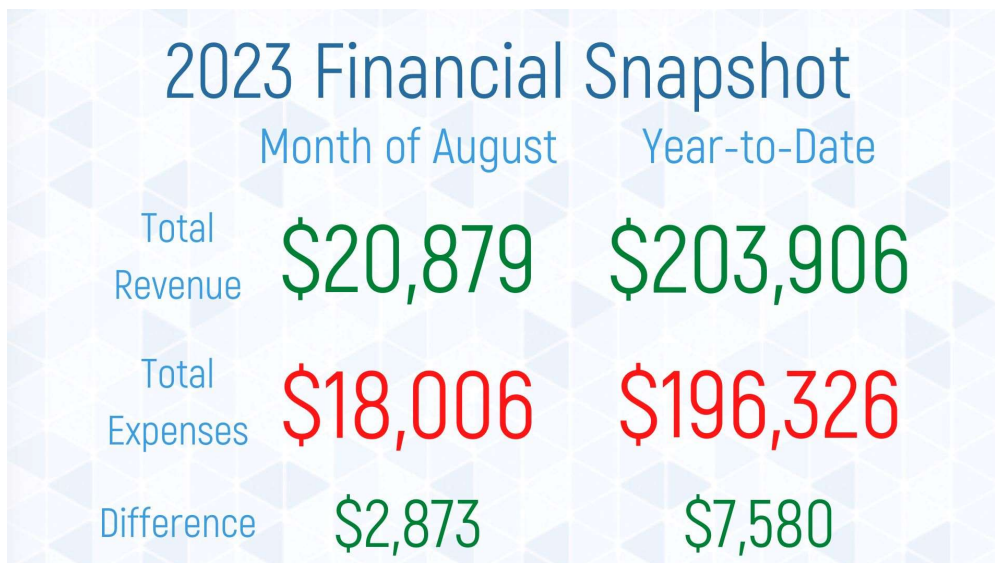
Dismissal

Go in peace. Share the harvest.

Okay! We will! Thanks be to God!

And all of Good Shepherd said...

AMEN!



August Financial Snapshot

Did you know:

We are in the process of welcoming the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin Resource Center into our building. The Synod Resource Center will be moving into what we call "Sacred Grounds." We are excited for this partnership and the traffic and visibility it will give to many of our Outreach Ministries!

Through August 30

Total Revenue **\$20,879**

Total Expenses **\$18,006**

Difference to date:
\$2,873

Welcome Back Weekend 2023 September 9-10

Saturday, September 9 - Work and Play

Property Clean-up, inside and out

Clean out the garages

BYO Picnic Lunch

Supper on the Grill

Sunday, September 10 - Worship and Play

Worship at 9 am

Blessing of Backpacks

Fall Faith Formation Kickoff

Delicious Treats!

