

September 6, 2020 Lect A Worship at Home

We will have **Holy Communion** together - separately this worship time.

You will need either wine or grape juice and bread of some kind.

You may use what cups & plates you have – do not go out & purchase.

Here is a list:

- a white cloth,
- large cup or individual ones,
- a large paten(plate) for bread or small, depending on the size of your family,
- a Cross and a candle.

Preparing for worship:

Good morning – welcome to worship,

Gather everyone in your household together this morning. If you are not alone - assign parts of this beforehand. If you don't have a Bible you can google the scripture readings and print them out too. Perhaps print out copies of this for everyone present. This Liturgy is from the Lutheran Book of Worship and the modified prayers this morning are based on those from Sundays & Seasons.com Hymns are from the ELW & LBW.

Shut off all the distractions in your home. Sit in the quiet for a bit – take some deep breaths. Light the candle.

GATHERING TOGETHER

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

Hymn: 793 Be Thou My Vision

The Lord be with you – and also with you

Let us pray:

O God, enliven and preserve all with your perpetual mercy. We need your help, else we will fail. Remove us from all things that are harmful. Lead us to ward all that gives light and life, through your Son, Jesus Christ our sovereign and our Savior. Amen.

THE WORD

Ezekiel 33:7-11 Psalm 119: 33-40 Romans 13:8-14 Matthew 18:15-20

The sermon is presented today by Bishop Larry Kochendorfer Bishop, Synod of Alberta and the Territories

Welcome to this sermon series that our Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada is providing for congregations throughout the summer months and into September. I am Larry Kochendorfer and I serve as the Bishop of the Synod of Alberta and the Territories. It is great to be with you this Sunday.

As I prepared for today's brief sermon I want to acknowledge my appreciation for the writings of The Rev. Dr. David Lose who currently serves as Senior Pastor at Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, and The Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis, professor at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. I have significantly borrowed their wisdom and insights, and their words, in the shaping of today's sermon.

Let us pray: God of grace and mercy, enliven and strengthen each faith community with the promise of your presence, in Jesus' name.

We begin today by singing a simple text and beautiful melody, used with permission of the composer, Bruce Harding. "Where Two or Three Are Gathered" was written as a gathering song for Sunday worship during the 2002 Easter season, using the text of Matthew 18:20.

The text of the song is very simple: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there, I am there." Please join me in singing as you become familiar with the text and melody (or use the following link to see composer, Bruce, and Cheryl Harding singing the song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=26xik5R19j0>).

"Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there, I am there." These words seem particularly poignant in our COVID-19 pandemic reality. A word for our present experience where many are gathered in twos or threes, as families, as cohort units, as bubbles. A word of promise, for this time, that Jesus is with us, "I am there."

This word is good news for us this long weekend, in our present reality. It is good news proclaimed elsewhere in this gospel according to Matthew, too. At Jesus' birth, the child is to be named Emmanuel, which means, "God with us." And the final words of this Gospel proclaim a similar promise, "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

As we enter today's reading mindful of this good news, of Jesus' promise: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them...." I wonder if we hear today's reading as about rules or as about relationships? Are we here being given rules to live by or are we being invited to consider relationships over, well, over just about everything else in our life as followers of Jesus?

I have most often understood this reading as about rules. Maybe you have, too. Rules quoted in constitutions or bylaws about how we are to maintain order in the Christian community. I have heard them used by those who are more than eager to "go and point out the fault" of another. They have often been cited as a way of handling disputes and then used as a rationale of why someone should be shunned.

If this reading is about rules it is rather simple and straightforward: if someone offends you, confront them. If that does not work, try an intervention. If that fails, cut them off and toss them out. Excommunicate, exile, shake off the dust from one's feet, wash one's hands of the person, and move on.

But what if this reading is not about rules, but about relationships? What if it is not about providing simple and straightforward instructions, but about the never simple and often complicated work of building authentic Christian community? What if the intention here is not about systems or procedures or a rulebook to follow, but more about reconciling and restoring to the community a sister or a brother, a sibling in Christ? And what if this gospel writer's primary concern is not actually about settling disputes within the community of faith, but about creating a space, environment, room, opportunity where Jesus' presence, where two or three gathered, is able to bring forgiveness, healing, joy, hope, and life?

Let us briefly look at the context of today's reading. The verses immediately before tell of the shepherd's delight in restoring to the flock a sheep that has strayed and the command to beware despising others, even those who seem of little importance. And the verses that follow set a new standard for forgiveness, first multiplying Peter's sense of appropriate forgiveness beyond imagination: "not seven times, but...seventy-seven times," and then suggesting that our ability to forgive others may be the key as to whether we ourselves are forgiven.

Preceded by the story of the lost sheep and followed by a new standard for forgiveness, today's reading, seen in its context, is about relationships, about community, about reconciliation and restoration. It is offered by someone who knows that relationships take work to maintain and that community is much more difficult to create and nurture than we might imagine. That working out conflict and disputes as a community together rather than simply declaring judgement can be very, very hard.

Jesus urges those in the faith community to have honest conversation in private with the offending party. No passive-aggressive behavior, no "triangulation," just straightforward conversation. This is so hard, I would rather complain to others about the one who has offended me than to talk to the offending person, but Jesus leaves no room for such behavior.

If the offending member refuses to listen, Jesus advises bringing along one or two others as witnesses for further conversation. And if the member still refuses to listen, the matter may be brought before the whole community. And if the member refuses to listen to the whole assembly of the faithful, then and only then is the member to be treated "as a Gentile and a tax collector."

Even here, dear friends, in the context of the Gospel according to Matthew, a Gentile or a tax collector is not someone who is beyond the reach of God's mercy, for throughout this Gospel Jesus makes a point of reaching out to the Gentiles and tax collectors. Religious leaders were outraged that at every opportunity Jesus extended himself graciously to them, even eating and drinking with them. He was known as a friend of tax collectors and sinners (Matthew 11:19).

Again, it is about relationships, about reconciliation and restoration, about forgiveness, healing, joy, hope, and life in community. And if it becomes necessary to exclude someone from the faith community for the sake of the integrity and well-being of the community, this is never a final judgment.

A community shaped by Jesus, by his life, message and cross, is a community always seeking to reconcile and to restore.

Make no mistake, the work of seeking authentic community, where two or three are gathered, is hard. But also, powerful. And healing. And, an incredible witness. It is difficult, it is challenging, to be sure, but also worth it. Always.

And when we grow weary following the path Jesus set, let us remind one another of the good news, that we have Jesus' promise that each and every time we try, where two or three are gathered, he is there with us –instructing us in the way of love, urging us on, forgiving us, and sending us to be a people, a community, of reconciliation and restoration, accompanying us wherever we may go.

Join me in singing: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there, I am there." Amen

Hymn: LBW 476 Have no fear little flock

Our Response

The Apostles' Creed:

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE - READ BY JOY STATHAM

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

Unite your church, O God. Grant us the gifts of repentance and reconciliation. Bless the cooperative work of churches in our communities. Strengthen ecumenical partnerships; guide the work of the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Protect your creation, O God. Teach us ways that do not harm what you have entrusted to our care. Renew and enliven places suffering from drought, flood, storms, or pollution.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Turn nations and leaders from ways that lead to death. Shape new paths toward peace and cooperation, teaching us to recognize one another as neighbors. Guide legislators, civil servants, judges, and police toward laws that protect the well-being of all.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Tend to all in need of your compassion. Hear the cries of those awaiting justice and those yearning for forgiveness. Give community to the lonely and neighbors to the outcast. Shelter all who are vulnerable in body, mind, or spirit. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Sustain us in our work, O God, and give work to those who need it. Shape societies to ensure fair treatment for all who labor. Help us to love our neighbors in and through our work. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We remember with thanksgiving those who have died in faith. As you equipped them, equip us with your protection and power, until with them we see your salvation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

OFFERING PRAYER

God of goodness and growth, all creation is yours, and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. Water and word, wine and bread: these are signs of your abundant grace. Nourish us through these gifts, that we might proclaim your steadfast love in our communities and in the world, through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song. **Amen.**

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ✙ one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Faithful God,

have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways.

We pass judgment on one another before examining ourselves.

We place our own needs before those of our neighbors. We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves. Make us humble, cast away our transgressions, and turn us again to life in you through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims:

Your sins are forgiven in the name of ✝ Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world. **Amen.**

DIALOGUE

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

PREFACE

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ; who on this day overcame death and the grave, and by his glorious resurrection opened to us the way of everlasting life. And so, with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven, we praise your name.

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.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father 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.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Come to the banquet table where Christ gives himself as food and drink. Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord, and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord; to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, now and forever. **Amen.**

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We give you thanks, gracious God, that you have once again fed us with food beyond compare, the body and blood of Christ. Lead us from this place, nourished and forgiven, into your beloved vineyard to wipe away the tears of all who hunger and thirst, guided by the example of the same Jesus Christ and led by the Holy Spirit, now and forever. **Amen.**

HYMN ELW 836 - LBW 551 JOYFUL JOYFUL WE ADORE THEE

BLESSING

Mothering God, Father, ✝ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life. **Amen.**

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Remember the poor. **Thanks be to God**