

THE 17TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 24, 2023



Christ Lutheran Church of St. Catharines, ON

140 Russell Avenue
St. Catharines, Ontario L2R 1W1
Church: 905-685-8294
www.christlutheransc.ca

Office Hours: Tuesday to Friday—9 a.m. – 12 noon
Bulletin Announcements: Please send to secretary@christlutheransc.ca.
Deadline for submission is Thursday at 9 a.m.

Pastor: Pastor Todd Hoeffs (289-362-0113) pastortoddhoeffs@gmail.com
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A recording of Sunday's service will be uploaded to YouTube at:
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpING_TKT19c_OIBbMqGwLw

Prayer: O God, without whose blessing we are not able to please You, mercifully grant that Your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and govern our hearts; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer for Ukraine: Please continue to remember in prayer our brothers and sisters of the Synod of Lutheran Churches in Ukraine (SELCU). Those enduring major fires in Canada and around the world.

DAILY SCRIPTURE MEDITATIONS:

Monday: Lam. 3: 22-33 Wednesday: Job 2: 1-10 Friday: Heb. 10: 35-39
Tuesday: Heb. 12: 4-11 Thursday: Eph. 6: 18-20 Saturday: Luke 21: 10-19

Musicians: Mayumi Munoz
Reader: Dan Figueroa
Greeters: Rev. Gary & Wendy Kuenzel

EVENTS THIS WEEK:

Today: 9:00 am – Sunday School
9:00 – 9:50 am – Coffee Hour
9:10 – 9:50 am – Confirmation
10:00 am – Worship – Lay Service of the Word
Monday: 10:00 - 11:00 am – Luther Manor Bible Study
Tuesday: 9:30 - 11:00 am – Precious Moments
Thursday: 10:00 - 11:30 am – SOUL
Saturday: 10:00 a.m. – 2 p.m. – Annual Fall-fest at St. John's Lutheran Church (*see note below*)
4:30 p.m. – Country & Western Jamboree

SUNDAY, OCT. 1: LWML Sunday/Holy Communion Sunday

SUNDAY SCHOOL: Today we learned how 1600 years after creation, Noah was part of God's plan to save His people; the rainbow is the reminder of His special promise.

Memory Verse: Isaiah 12:2 ***"God is my salvation, I will trust and will not be afraid."***

LWML-C SUNDAY: October 1. We will be collecting "mites". Based on the Biblical story of the widow's mite (Luke 21:1-4) in the King James Version (more recent versions refer to a small coin worth less than a penny). Mites collected are – offerings above and beyond, and not in competition to, the support given to the congregation and the church body. Mites are a reminder: to share blessings from God, to pray for mission projects, to thank the Lord for mission opportunities. *Praise God from whom all blessings flow!*

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH ANNUAL FALLFEST: 3837 Netherby Road, Stevensville.
Saturday, September 30th, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m. Lunch served—Fresh pies and baked goods—Homemade pottery—Apple pressing—Wood crafts—Crafts—Handiwork, Jams and more!



MMM, what is that delicious smell?

CHRIST'S CAFÉ

where coffee and salvation are always free!

See you downstairs for
Coffee, Tea and Treats
Sundays, 9:00 - 9:45 a.m.

Anyone willing to help serve or bring treats, please
contact Judy Mason 905-641-7546



COUNTRY WESTERN JAMBOREE

The Fellowship Committee is hosting a fellowship event on **Saturday, September 30th**. Doors open 4:30 pm, event starts at 5:00 pm. Tickets \$10 pp. Live band, pulled pork on a bun & baked beans, photo booth, etc. It should be a lot of fun!



LWML-C Zone/National Events: You are invited to any or all of the events below.

October 1 – LWML–C Sunday

October 13th – 14 – Retreat in Cambridge *“Follow the Road!”*

October 31st – Deadline for submission of Mission Grant Proposals. Those mission grants will be voted on at Convention in London, Ontario in July, 2024. Please see Lorraine for more details.

LWML-C/Mary Martha Christ Lutheran Events:

Tuesday, September 19th: 7 p.m.—Bible Study

Tuesday, October 17th – 7 p.m. — Planning for the Bazaar and flower arrangements.

Tuesday, November 21st --7 p.m. – Packaging *“Warm feet for the Streets”* Care Kits for the “Out of the Cold” program

Saturday, November 25th – Christmas Bazaar

Tuesday, December 19th – 5:30pm – Advent/Christmas Potluck (blessing) Dinner & Program

YOUTH, CONFIRMANDS & FRIENDS: Pumpkin Carving - Friday, Oct. 13, 7:15 p.m.

Last Sunday Attendance: September 17th, 2023 Attn: 10 a.m. – 96 SOUL: 26

	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Weekly Need</u>	<u>Last Sunday</u>	<u>Year To Date</u>	<u>+ or – (--)</u>
Current	297,841.00	5,840.02	2,973.34	150,490.30	(61,435.03)
LCC Missions	17,000.00	333.33	800.00	12,380.50	(284.35)
Property Improvement:			789.00	4,915.05	



Concordia Lutheran Seminary Guild's

Annual Harvest Day 2023

Saturday, October 21.

Mark your calendars as we work together to fill up our Food Pantry shelves, gathering in support of the seminary and to spend some quality time with our fellow members and students in God's glory.

Deadline for registration is Thursday, October 12th, 2023

Our meal will be catered by Chef Paul and will feature a buffet of finger foods: veggies, fresh fruit, cheese and crackers, a variety of sandwiches on white and whole bread (egg salad, turkey, Black forest ham, and roast beef), and dessert squares.

The day will be marked particularly by a presentation by our special guest, Rev. Saulo Bledoff. Thank you for your continued support and we look forward to seeing you all in person this fall as we begin the new academic year!

8:45 am – 9:15 am Registration and Coffee Fellowship begins the day

You can read the Fall Newsletter and get a registration form etc. at this link:

[Seminary Guild Newsletter 2023-09 \(2\).pdf](#)



You can read the Fall Newsletter and get a registration form etc. at this link:

[Seminary Guild Newsletter 2023-09 \(2\).pdf](#)

FLOWERS have been placed on the altar this morning to the Glory of God by Kathy DeKouchay in celebration of her parent's Wedding Anniversary tomorrow, September 25th.

THANKSGIVING DONATIONS / DISPLAY!!! As we do each year in thanks to God for His

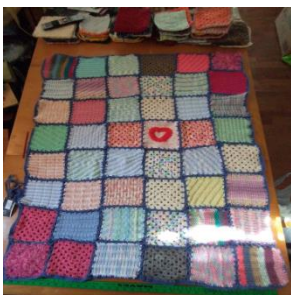


rich blessings to us, we are gathering food, both produce & non-perishable goods to use in our Thanksgiving Display (October 9th). We display these things as a way of focusing our attention on God's abundant blessings to us. We will then donate the food items to the Seminary Pantry, and so we multiply our thanks because of their thankfulness to God for our generosity. *Please place in the collection bin at the back of church. Thank You!!*

GREETERS: A sign-up sheet is posted on the bulletin board and we would ask that anyone who is interested in assisting for the coming year to please sign up. It is a wonderful opportunity to get to know everyone in the congregation.

NEEDED: Men's shoes and boots. The Niagara Mobile Closet is in need of men's shoes and boots for the homeless. Please drop off in the box at the back of the church. Thank You!

EASY BOARD GAMES FOR SOUL! Thank you to those who have donated board games. Please share any others you might have today or this week before Thursday. You may speak to Pastor Todd or Jennifer if you have spare games to share.



Granny Squares still needed: This is an ongoing project we will gratefully accept more completed 6 inch knitted or crocheted Granny Squares in any pattern or colour. We would also appreciate any yarn that you may have, leftover yarn or full balls of yarn. In the narthex there is a white cube with yarn and hooks that you are welcome to take (or donate). There is another basket for completed squares. Once there are enough, we will make a Caring Squares blanket for whoever may be in need of a hug. On behalf of the Caring Squares, if you have any questions, call Lorraine at 905 964 5837)

From your Refugee Committee:

We had a meeting on Wednesday, September 20th to discuss what we need to do to prepare for Kareem and his family to live here with us in St. Catharines.



Ameer who will soon be 6 has his first loose tooth. Ameer and Asser have just recently been given a number of marbles of all different colours. Ameer has started school again and has been taught the way to write the Greek alphabet. Ameer has a backpack with sports balls on it to go to school. Asser wants to go to school as well but he is not old enough, and he has a backpack with Spiderman on it. Yes Spiderman has invaded the refugee camps too!!!!

- *Ameer was born on November 15, 2017*, so he will be 6 years old in November
- *Asser was born on January 9, 2020*, so will be 4 in the new year.

Who will be the first to celebrate their birthday in Canada???????

We will continue to give you news and updates each week.

We discussed the budget that had been presented to the Council last week.

REFUGEE SUPPORT FOR A YEAR:

A very preliminary budget looks like it may be \$38,208 minimum to support them for the year.

The original estimate from 2020 as per the government was \$25,000. But housing costs have increased the budget dramatically. We have been blessed that the gifts of money have been given to the Refugee Fund totaling \$33,252 to date. So there is still a need for more donations. Please pray about this.

We are obligated to provide: a basic needs allowance, monthly housing allowance, Monthly bus pass, internet and phones.

IF ANYONE KNOWS OF OR HAS A LEAD ON A SUITABLE 2 BEDROOM APARTMENT PLEASE INFORM PASTOR JOHN, 289-407-7662, Thank you.

START UP COSTS:

We are also obligated to provide certain startup costs separate from the ongoing monthly monetary support. We had planned from the start to minimize this cost through physical donations from the congregation and community.

Start-up costs include: **a staple allowance; basic clothing allowance; winter clothing allowance, basic household needs; furniture allowance, linens, and utility installation.**

The only requirement in this category is that **all mattresses and shoes and boots must be purchased new.** Plus a \$150 school start-up per school age child.

We are in the process of compiling a list of what is needed for each room in the apartment, plus a list of linens, a list of staples to start out in the kitchen, and any other miscellaneous other things required for setting up an apartment.

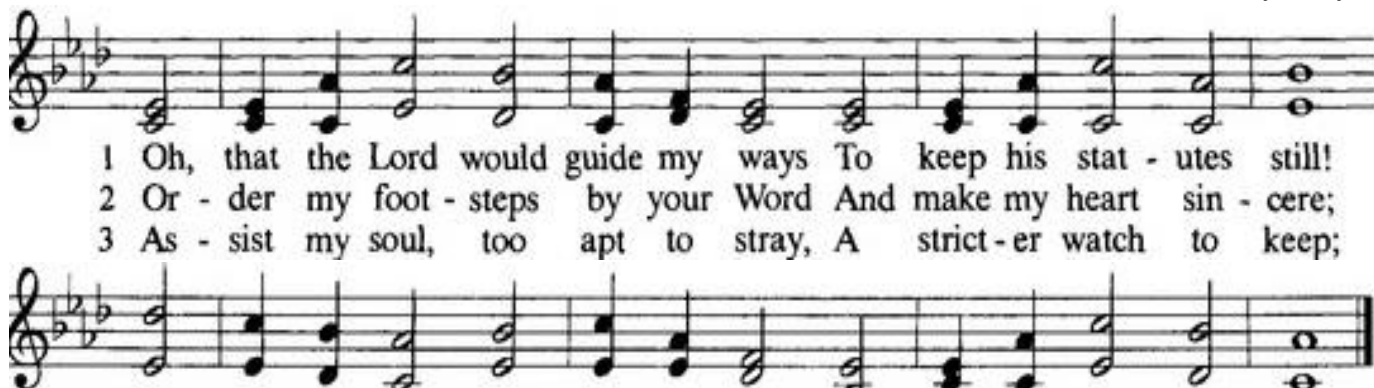
Once the lists have been completed we will post them for anyone who wishes to donate items. Donations of good used things are acceptable, and of course any food staples donated must have a current date.

CHRIST LUTHERAN CHURCH
Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Hymnal Supplement '98
THE 17TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
September 24, 2023 + 10 AM Worship

OPENING HYMN:

“Oh That The Lord Would Guide”

www.hymnary.org/LSB



1 Oh, that the Lord would guide my ways To keep his stat - utes still!
2 Or - der my foot - steps by your Word And make my heart sin - cere;
3 As - sist my soul, too apt to stray, A strict - er watch to keep;

Oh, that my God would grant me grace To know and do his will!
Let sin have no do - min - ion, Lord, But keep my con - science clear.
And should I e'er for - get your way, Re - store your wan - d'ring sheep.

*Text: Isaac Watts, 1674–1748, alt.
Tune: William H. Havergal, 1793–1870*

EVAN
CM

INVOCATION, CONFESSION & FORGIVENESS

In the name of the Father and of the Son + and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins,

O Lord, who could stand?

But with You there is forgiveness,

therefore, You are honoured.

[Brief silence for prayerful reflection]

O Almighty God, merciful Father,

I, a poor, troubled sinner, confess to You all my sins and wrongdoing, with which I have ever offended You, and justly deserve Your punishment now and forever. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them and I pray You of Your boundless mercy, and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death, of Your Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor sinful being. Forgive me and send me Your Holy Spirit so that I am walk in Your ways. Amen.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, has had mercy on us, and has given his only Son to die for us, and for his sake forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in his name he has given the right to become children of God and has given them his Holy Spirit. Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved. Grant this, Lord, to us all. **Amen.**

LORD, HAVE MERCY

Lord, have mer - cy on us; Christ, have mer - cy
on us; Lord, have mer - cy on us.

The musical notation is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff contains the melody for the first line of lyrics, and the second staff contains the melody for the second line. The melody is simple and melodic, with a final cadence at the end of the second line.

HYMN OF PRAISE

"Glory To God"

Woodlands tune

1 Glo - ry to God, we give You thanks and praise;
2 Lord Je - sus Christ, the Fa - ther's on - ly Son,
3 A - lone, O Christ, You on - ly are the Lord,
Of heav'n - ly joy and earth - ly peace we sing.
You bore for us the load of this world's sin.
At God's right hand in maj - es - ty most high:
We wor - ship You, to You our hearts we raise,
O Lamb of God, Your glo - rious vic - t'ry won,
Who, with the Spir - it wor - shipped and a - dored,
Lord God, al - might - y Fa - ther, heav'n - ly King.
Re - ceive our prayer, grant us Your peace with - in.
With all the heav'n - ly host we glo - ri - fy.

The musical notation is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves. Each staff is followed by a line of lyrics. The melody is simple and melodic, with a final cadence at the end of the fourth line.

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

We pray: Lord God, Heavenly Father, since we cannot come before You relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word and promises; we pray through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE WORD

The Old Testament: *Jonah 3:10 – 4:11*

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it....But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning, for I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city. The Lord God appointed a bush and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort, so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." Then the Lord said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹ And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also many animals?" This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Wonderful Grace of Jesus (Choir)

Wonderful grace of Jesus greater than all my sin
How shall my tongue describe it Where shall its praise begin
Taking away my burden setting my spirit free
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.

Chorus:

Wonderful the matchless grace of Jesus
Deeper than the mighty rolling sea
Higher than the mountain sparkling like a fountain
All-sufficient grace for even me
Broader than the scope of my transgressions
Greater far than all my sin and shame
O magnify the precious name of Jesus
Praise His name.

Wonderful grace of Jesus reaching to all the lost
By it I have been pardoned saved to the uttermost
Chains have been torn asunder giving me liberty
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me

Chorus:

Wonderful grace of Jesus reaching the most defiled
By its transforming power Making him God's dear child
Purchasing peace and heaven for all eternity
For the wonderful grace of Jesus reaches me.

Chorus:

CCLI Song # 17054 Haldor Lillenas Words and Music: Public Domain

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The Epistle: *Philippians 1:21-30*

[St. Paul writes:] For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me, yet I cannot say which I will choose. 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. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that, by my presence again with you, your boast might abound in Christ Jesus because of me. Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel and in no way frightened by those opposing you. For them, this is evidence of their destruction but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ but of suffering for him as well, since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

ALLELUIA & VERSE:



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.



These things are writ-ten that you may be - lieve that



Je - sus is the Christ, the Son of God. *John 20:31*



Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

The Holy Gospel: *St. Matthew 20:1-16*

The Holy Gospel, according to St. Matthew, the 20th chapter:

Glory to You, O Lord.

Jesus says: "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around, and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received a denarius. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

This is the Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to You, O Christ.**

THE APOSTLES' CREED:

As God's people through our baptism into Christ, let us confess our faith.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his 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 into hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven,

and sits at the right hand of God, the Father almighty,

from thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church,

the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

CHILDRENS' MESSAGE

GOSPEL HYMN:

"There's A Wideness In God's Mercy"

www.hymnary.org



1 There's a wide-ness in God's mer - cy, like the wide-ness of the sea.
2 For the love of God is broad-er than the mea - sures of the mind.



There's a kind-ness in God's jus - tice, which is more than lib - er - ty.
And the heart of the E - ter - nal is most won - der - ful - ly kind.



There is no place where earth's sor - rows are more felt than up in heaven.
If our love were but more faith - ful, we would glad - ly trust God's word,



There is no place where earth's fail - ings have such kind - ly judg - ment given.
and our lives re - flect thanks - giv - ing for the good - ness of our Lord.

WORDS: Frederick William Faber (1814-1863)
MUSIC: Dutch melody; arr. Julius Röntgen (1855-1932)

IN BABILONE
8.7.8.7.D.

MESSAGE: Written by: *Rev. Todd Hoeffs*

Delivered by: *James Hyatt*

OFFERINGS *are gathered.*

THE PRAYERS

Eternal God, our Fatherly Protector, as we travel on through life, teach us to trust in your loving direction, blessed with faith in your dear Son, knowing that you will bring us safely home to you;

Hear us, O God: **Your mercy is great.**

Be with our parishes, our Synod and her leaders. We commend to you our Synod leaders, our Regional Pastor, and all men and women, young and old, who serve You. Uphold all in their daily callings with true faith and a godly life.

Hear us, O God: **Your mercy is great.**

Bless our country, Canada, and help those in authority to strive for harmony, honesty and justice. Remember our King, Charles, our Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, our Premier, Mayor, those in our local government, and all who maintain order and safety.

Hear us, O God: **Your mercy is great.**

Guide our industry, our education, our arts, culture and leisure activities, our mass media, our science and technology. Be with the unemployed and the overworked, the sick and the aged, the poor, the needy and the lonely. We especially remember today (*names added here...*).

Hear us, O God: **Your mercy is great.**

Help us to care for the land and protect its fragile environment, so that the blessings you give can be passed on to future generations. Bring unity among the different peoples of our land; those born here and those from overseas; the rich and the poor, the creative and the pragmatic, the visionaries and the planners.

Hear us, O God: **Your mercy is great.**

Since You have given us grace at this time with one faithful voice to make our common concerns to You and have promised that when two or three are gathered in Your name You will give help in Your own time and fulfill the desires and prayers of Your servants, as may be best for them; giving us in this world knowledge of Your truth, and in the world to come, everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray, Who lives and rules with You, O Father, and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Lord, remember us in your kingdom, and teach us to pray:

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. 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

CLOSING PRAYER: *[Pray together]*

Lord, you have called us to journey with you. You have promised to provide for our needs. We go forward into an unknown future, certain of your guiding hand, aware of your presence, and trusting in you for all that may come. In the name of Him Who gave Himself up for us, Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

CLOSING BLESSING: The blessing of Almighty God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and always. **Amen.**

LAST HYMN: *"For the Fruit Of All Creation"* Hope Publishers © 2020

1 For the fruit of all cre - a - tion, thanks be to God.
2 In the just re - ward of la - bor, God's will is done.
3 For the har - vests of the Spir - it, thanks be to God.

For his gifts to ev - ery na - tion, thanks be to God.
In the help we give our neigh - bor, God's will is done.
For the good we all in - her - it, thanks be to God.

For the plow - ing, sow - ing, reap - ing, si - lent growth while we are
In our world - wide task of car - ing for the hun - gry and de -
For the won - ders that as - tound us, for the truths that still con -

sleep - ing, fu - ture needs in earth's safe - keep - ing, thanks be to God.
spair - ing, in the har - vests we are shar - ing, God's will is done.
found us, most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.

WORDS: Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000), alt.
MUSIC: Welsh melody; harm. Luther O. Emerson (1820-1915)
Words © 1970 Hope Publishing Company

AR HYD Y NOS
8.4.8.4.8.8.8.4.

<https://www.hopepublishing.com/find-hymns-hw/hw3560.aspx>

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WE OFFER OUR THANKS to Donald Fretz, for leading the service today and James Hyatt, for delivering the message.

REV. TODD HOEFFS & JAMES HYATT

Pentecost 17

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16

September 24, 2023

Have you ever been jealous? Have you ever watched as someone else received the recognition or reward you expected? You had to smile and congratulate someone who *you knew* didn't deserve this prize any more than you did, while inside you wish *you'd* be the one getting the pats on the back. Been there? Sometimes, life just isn't fair. Sometimes others get what we think we should have. And it's no fun. Our human nature wants to see the pie divided evenly. We want everyone to be treated fairly, but we especially want to be treated *more* fairly than anyone else. And when we have to stand aside and watch someone else get the glory, or the promotion or the better job or the nicer house or the best deal, it gives us pain. We get what the ancient Greeks called the "evil eye" – that green-eyed monster, envy, ruins our joy. Comparison is the thief of joy. The grass in the neighbour's yard isn't any greener than yours. It's perspective. It's trust. It's value. It's Who is really your GOD? Matthew's Gospel spends a lot of time presenting Jesus as the key to God's Kingdom. Following Jesus means confronting those who've wronged us. And that means forgiving over and over again, far beyond the expectations of reasonably polite behaviour. Jesus today is showing us the real problem is US and how that is resolved deep inside each one of us. This parable story of the Vineyard workers is an easy message for Jesus' audience then. But Jesus offers a unique angle that would be very unusual. Vineyard owners in ancient times were the top 1 percent of the culture. They don't hire workers. Managers do that. We would not expect Bezos to be hiring packers for the Amazon conveyor belt. This is part of the uniqueness of the message. God is the Vineyard owner. Managers have come and gone. Biblical vineyard "managers" are the patriarchs, prophets, judges, kings, Like Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Malachi; then 400 years of prophetic silence. The Vineyard owner keeps going to the marketplace to find new workers Because GOD had to come back down to earth And re-create all that had become overgrown. This is also unique: Wealthy landowners did not do this. That is below their stature and reputation. And if he "did" do this out of strangeness, he'd do it 1st thing in the morning and know exactly how many is needed. Even for those listening in on this, they would not only think rich folks did this, but they believed God would not do this either. How many people you may know who feel God is far removed, away, gone, Not caring what goes on here. Abandoned us. Religious leaders then made sure the space between human and God was far away. They felt it was better for people to keep trying to get close to God, Do more, give more, sacrifice more, yet not move one step closer. Jesus is a master storyteller. He knows the way to set up the scene to grab his hearers' attention. Jewish history records that after the great Temple had been re-built by Herod, 18,000 workers were unemployed. To meet their needs,

and to make sure the Temple treasury was never so full of money that it would draw the attention of the Romans, it became customary for the Temple to “hire” workers to do minimal labor, while receiving a full day’s pay.

That is a denarius. A low normal day’s pay. 10am – 4pm. Consider life under Roman rule with Roman currency. A young Roman foot soldier, for example, would take home: 11,800 denarii a year. Food for wife and children: 9,600 denarii per year. Care for sword and helmet by servant: 600 denarii per year. New footwear: 100 denarii a year. Remaining pay: 1500 denarii a year = \$15,000 2023 money! Not bad as a slush fund! Yet, most things costing 1 denarius was food in the marketplace. Loaves of fresh bread cost 4-6 denarii.

It puts into perspective the money isn’t great, but believable to Jesus’ audience And makes sense. To many, this guy is a gracious landowner or foolish with his cash. The Law of God insist that laborers be paid at the end of each day they work. Before sun down.

This way it can be spent on food to keep them alive. Workers and their pay are understood in light of the Vineyard owner’s generosity. Those willing to enter and become part of the Vineyard life, are rewarded with pay. Those idly wasting time are any outsiders who refuse to enjoy the life God offers. Free life and yet gives rewards! How overly generous.

The day’s wages are given to each person no matter how much or little they work. God treats us all alike and yet comes to us individually at different times and in different stations in our lives and helps us according to our need. Some work in the hot sun all day and get the same denarius As the ones who come in at the end and do very little. Because it’s not the amount of hard work that is valued. Entering into the Vineyard life with the owner and helping him as best you can Is really all he seems to care about. How often have we heard things like this in the life of the church from our own Experiences on committees and teams and councils.

“You better put those candles up there cuz I bought them and I want them used.”

I was in a church once. On the altar sat a very old, ornate and large Bible with gold trim on the sides and lots of names written in the front cover like a monk signed it in pen and ink.

A pastor removed it from the altar to place his prayer book there, and a member made a bee line to him who outwardly looked mad. “Don’t remove that Bible! It’s been there for 48 yrs. My parents bought it, opened it to the Psalm 23 passage and it hasn’t been touched since!” That’s a problem. Salvation is not favoritism and it’s never tied to things. God’s love moves above and beyond territory and ownership. All that we have is from God.

We are all invited into His Vineyard and we are given free access and a wage at the end of the day. Pretty nice deal. The work in the Vineyard is our faith. We witness that faith every day. We share with those in need no matter if it be time, talents or our treasures.

But faith is a gift from God by Baptism into His Son and His Kingdom. Complaining about who is in 1st, or who works harder is ridiculous. It’s part of our sin which wants recognition for being the best. There’s no such thing as perfection plus. Just as being a wayward living, Over-indulgent abuser of everything imaginable Doesn’t make the late day wage of the Gospel sweeter or better. Whatever hang-ups, or addictions, or bad habits we might have, Those same stubborn sin we’ve had for years, are no big deal -- Compared to those who break all the 10 commandments wildly every day. That’s an unhealthy comparison.

We can easily start to feel self-conscious about our sin! Not that we’re ashamed of it— it’s almost that we’re ashamed that we don’t have a more interesting list of sins to confess!

As if sin adds to our value somehow! And we might even begin to think that since our own sins are so much less serious than those of hardened criminals, maybe we don’t really need to confess them and have Jesus forgive us? This is the trap the vineyard workers have fallen

into. And it's so easy. And it makes Satan so happy when we allow ourselves to start thinking along these lines.

Because that's the little open door he needs to slide in to our lives, and pretty soon, we are getting worse. And if we aren't careful, suddenly we've become the hardened, Angry, bitter people. That life that we admired and envied, like those vineyard workers, envying the idleness of the latecomers, has suddenly become ours. Except it's worse, because we've moved from the safety of the vineyard, back into the idleness of the daily world. A Christian has further to fall. His or her poor witness hurts us all. Rather may we rejoice in the pleasant surprise When we all get to share in this wonderful reward, How wonderful that the Vineyard owner is a generous spirit. Then the work is a joy. The work of the Gospel is a humbled privilege. That God takes care of everyone, the last, the lost, the lonely, the loved, and the loyal. Wow. All workers in God's Vineyard are debt free. Grace is dangerous. It reverses business as usual. "So the last will be first, and the first will be last." That's not how a wage based society works. Our understanding of fairness does not have priority in the kingdom of heaven where grace is the rule not the exception. Grace looks beyond our productivity, our appearance, our dress, our race or ethnicity, our accomplishments, our failures. Grace recognizes there is more to you and who you are than what you have or haven't done. This is what eventually killed the Vineyard owner's Son. Religious and political and sinful human forces hated God's love And killed Jesus' wide loving welcome, Who embraces all into His waiting arms Outstretched on the wood not from a vineyard But from a tree of death. A cross of torture which secures our peace and place in the Kingdom. Jesus' precious Blood becomes the Royal Wine we share as we celebrate our unity That no matter how old or young, new member of old time believer, We are one and the same. We are the Body of Jesus, The Body we're baptized into, the Body we eat in the Bread of peace. God's grace isn't something you can earn or something you deserve because you've been working in the vineyard since the sun came up. God's grace is freely given to all who receive the Son of God by faith And live a life of worship and serving in the Vineyard garden of life on this earth. The length of time matters not. So that everyone has time to enjoy the way to life with God. Living in grace leaves no room for envy or anger. Jesus inspires us with His Spirit to *make disciples, not comparisons*. Instead of whining about what used to be or what some other church has, Christ simply has us show His face to the world when we show them ours. Today is the day of grace. No more comparing; no more competing; Community and Communion in our Vineyard Venture. Amen.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Cowboys and the Wild West

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ARIZONA CREW

BANDANA OWN

BISON UNIT

BLACKHAT

BLUEJEANS

BOOTS ON FOOT

BRONCO

BUCKAROO

BULLWHIP

BUSTING

CALVES

CAMPFIRE

CATTLE

CHAPS

COWBOYS

COWGIRLS

COWPOKE

COYOTE

FRONTIER

GRASSLAND

GUITARS

HERDER

HORSE

KANSAS

KNIFE

LASSO

LEATHER

LEGEND

LONGHORN

MIDWEST