



Pentecost +16

September 17, 2023 + 9:00 AM

Welcome to our worship of the living God on this 16th Sunday after Pentecost! In today's second reading, the apostle Paul questions why we judge one another, since we all stand before the judgment of God. Indeed, we all sin against one another—and Jesus' challenge that we forgive "seventy times seven" reveals God's boundless mercy. When we hear the words of forgiveness in worship and mark ourselves with the sign of the cross, we're renewed in our Baptism to be signs of reconciliation in the world.

Congregational responses are in **boldface italics**.

GATHERING

GATHERING MUSIC

INVOCATION, CONFESSION, AND FORGIVENESS:

Blest are You, Holy and Triune God:

***The Wellspring of Life, the + Embodiment of Love,
the Spirit of Holy Communion!***

You love us with an everlasting, death-defying love,

***and yet we keep turning away from Your loving embrace
and going our own ways.***

We pass judgment on one another before examining ourselves;

We place our own needs and desires above those of our neighbors;

We hear Your word of love freely given to us, yet we expect others to earn it,

and so we fail to be ministers of Your reconciling love in the world.

Hear us, O God, as we confess the sin that everyone knows
and the sins we fear to name:

Silence for personal reflection and confession.

For the sake of Your Son, Christ Jesus our Savior,
have mercy on us and forgive us our sins!

***Humble us by His example, transform us by Your Holy Spirit,
and recommit us to the healing of Your whole creation. Amen.***

God hears the cries of all who call to Him,
and through His death and resurrection Christ Jesus has made us His own.

So hear the Good News, brothers and sisters:

Your sins are forgiven in the name of + Christ Jesus!

Now live in the freedom born of that forgiveness to do God's work in the world.

Amen. Thanks be to God!

HYMN OF PRAISE: "Now the Feast and Celebration" ELW 167


Refrain



Now the feast and cel - e - bra - tion, all of cre - a - tion



sings for joy to the God of life and love and free-dom;



praise and glo - ry for - ev - er - more!



1 Now is the feast of the Lamb once slain, whose blood has



freed and u - nit-ed us to be one great peo-ple of God. *Refrain*



2 Pow - er and rich-es, wis-dom and might, all hon - or and



glo - ry to Christ for - ev - er.



3 For God has come to dwell with us, to make us peo-ple of



God; to make all things new.

Text and music: Marty Haugen, b. 1950

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GREETING AND PRAYER OF THE DAY:

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

And also with you.

Then let's pray: Lord God, our merciful judge,
Your forgiveness transcends whatever wrong exists between us.
Grant us the courage to forgive others and to practice reconciliation
by the kindness of our speaking, the sharing of our resources,
and the honoring of Your desire for good for all people
through Your Son, Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

WORD AND PRAYER

FIRST READING:**Genesis 50.15-21**

NRSVUE

Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they approached Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, ¹⁷ 'Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now, therefore, please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father."

Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, "We're here as your slaves!" ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid! Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as He's doing today. ²¹ So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

This is holy wisdom; this is holy word.

Thanks be to God!

SECOND READING:**Romans 14.1-12**

NRSVUE

St Paul writes: Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. ² Some believe in eating anything, while the "weak" eat only vegetables. ³ Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat, for God has welcomed them. ⁴ Who are **you** to pass judgment on slaves of another? It's before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they **will** be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. ⁶ Those who observe the day, observe it for the Lord. Also those who eat, eat for the Lord, since they give thanks to God, while those who abstain, abstain for the Lord and give thanks to God. ⁷ For we don't live to ourselves, and we don't die to ourselves. ⁸ If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we're the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we'll all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it's written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹² So then, each one of us will be held accountable.

This is holy wisdom; this is holy word.

Thanks be to God!

Congregation:

Al - le - lu - ia, Al - le - lu - ia. Lord, to whom shall we

go? You have the words of e - ter - nal

life. Al - le - lu - ia!

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THE HOLY GOSPEL:

Matthew 18.21-35

NRSVUE

The Holy Gospel according to St Matthew, the 18th chapter. *Glory to You, O Lord!*

Then Peter came and said to *Jesus*, “Lord, if my brother or sister sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” ²² Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times!

²³ “For this reason, the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him, ²⁵ and, as he couldn’t pay, the lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I’ll pay you everything!’ ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt.

²⁸ “But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe!’ ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I’ll pay you.’ ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt.

³¹“When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ ³⁴And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he’d pay his entire debt. ³⁵So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you don’t forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

This is the Gospel of our Lord.

Praise to You, O Christ!

*Alleluia! Alleluia! Lord, to whom shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life. Alleluia!*

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOOD NEWS

HYMN OF THE DAY: “Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven!”

ELW 864

*Praise, my soul, the God of heaven! Joyfully your tribute bring!
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, evermore God’s praises sing.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praises everlasting ring!*

*God be praised for grace and favor to our forebears in distress.
God be praised, the same forever, slow to chide and swift to bless.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Glorious is God’s faithfulness!
Frail as summer’s flow’r we flourish, blows the wind and it is gone;
But, as mortals rise and perish, God endures unchanging on.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise the great Eternal One!*

*Angels sing in adoration, in God’s presence, face to face.
Sun and moon and all creation, all who dwell in time and space.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Praise with us the God of grace!*

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION:

Drawn together in the compassion of God,
let’s pray for the Church, the world, and all those in need:

Good and gracious God, we give You thanks and praise, for in Your Son Jesus the Christ, Your Reign of love and mercy has embraced all who live, and even in our weaknesses You uphold us. You welcome us when we're weak in faith and invite us to discover Your loving purpose for us by following You and learning not simply from study, but from our experience with You. Uphold Your Church throughout the world and make us a community of welcome. Strengthen our discipleship through Bible studies, confirmation classes, youth ministries, and other ministries of faith formation. Merciful God, ***receive our prayer.***

In all of our learning, Lord, teach us to forgive. Remind us that You don't always accuse us; still our tongues when we're tempted to pass judgment on others and argue over opinions. Make this congregation a community of mercy for one another and for all our neighbors. Merciful God, ***receive our prayer.***

The heights of the heavens show us the vastness of Your steadfast love. Have compassion on Your beautiful and broken creation. Where our human selfishness has brought ruin and destruction, transform our hearts and efforts to heal, renew, and redeem Your world. Bring new life to places suffering from drought, wildfires, floods, earthquakes, or pollution. Merciful God, ***receive our prayer.***

Make Your ways known in every home, every community, and every nation, and turn us from the ways of isolation and death. Speak kindness to our bitter grudges; settle our hearts when we want to settle accounts with violence. Bless our leaders with patience, wisdom, humility, and grace, that they may see beyond the lure of retribution and exercise new and creative ways of restorative justice. Bring healing to those ravaged by terror, oppression, violence, greed, and abuse; and help us recognize Your holy image in each and every person. Merciful God, ***receive our prayer.***

Bring healing and justice wherever harm is dealt. Grant true vindication to all who are oppressed, and don't let us shame or turn away those in need. Set free those who are held captive in forced labor and human trafficking; deliver those who are bound by debt; reshape our economy to provide fair treatment and living wages to all workers, and help us all to love our neighbors in and through our work. Feed those who are hungry, shelter those who are homeless, and guard refugees fleeing famine, poverty, and war. Merciful God, ***receive our prayer.***

Have mercy on all who are lonely or despairing, sick or grieving, and pour out Your healing Holy Spirit upon them, that they may be renewed in strength and life and rejoice in Christ's death-defying life taking shape in their own experience. We especially seek Your healing grace for our brothers and sisters... Merciful God, ***receive our prayer.***

We give You thanks, O God, that whether we live or die, we belong to You. We thank You for those who've shown us faithfulness, for the knees that taught us how to bow before You and the tongues that taught us to praise You, and especially today for Hildegard of Bingen. Help us to follow in their footsteps of discipleship, to testify to those who don't know Your love, and to faithfully embody Your love for those who come after us. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

For into Your hands, O God, we commend ourselves and all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

The peace of the Lord is with you always.

And also with you.

Reconciled to God and to one another, we share with those around us a sign of God's peace.

MEAL

OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS AND OURSELVES, WITH ANTHEM:

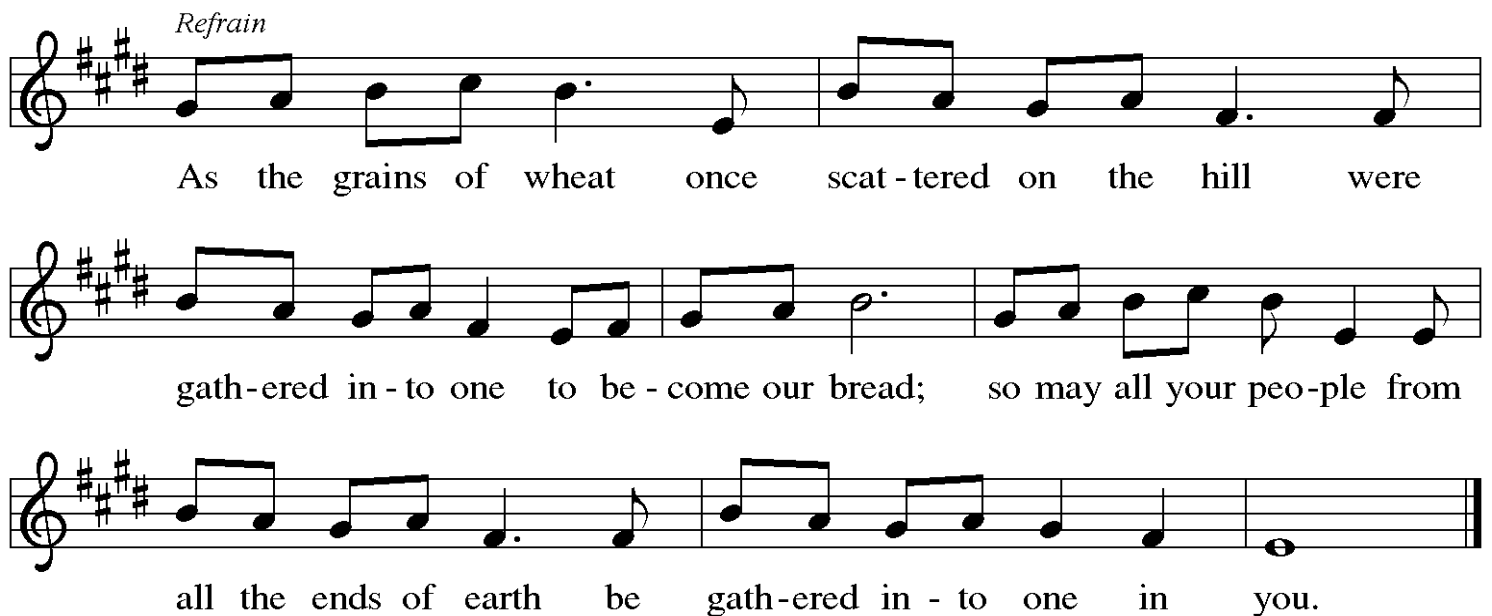
"This is God's Church"

-- Words and Music by Stan Pethel

OFFERTORY HYMN: "As the Grains of Wheat"

ELW 465

Refrain



As the grains of wheat once scat-tered on the hill were
gath-ered in - to one to be - come our bread; so may all your peo-ple from
all the ends of earth be gath-ered in - to one in you.



1 As this cup of bless - ing is shared with - in our midst,
 2 Let this be a fore - taste of all that is to come when



may we share the pres - ence of your love.
 all cre - a - tion shares this feast with you.

Text: Didache, 2nd cent.; Marty Haugen, b. 1950

Music: AS THE GRAINS, Marty Haugen

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EUCHARISTIC PRAYER:

The Lord is with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts!

We lift them to the Lord!

Let's give thanks to the Lord our God.

It's right to give our thanks and praise!

It's indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should always and everywhere give thanks and praise to You, O Lord, holy Father, through Christ Jesus our Lord, who poured out His life for us even unto death on the cross, that filled with the Spirit of His resurrection, we might have eternal life in Him. And so with the Church on earth and the whole company of heaven, we praise Your Name and join their unending hymn:



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly are you, God of pow - er and



might; Heav - en and earth are filled with your

glo - ry. Ho - san - na in the high - est! Bless - ed is the
 One who comes in your name. Ho - san - na in the
 high - est, ho - san - na in the high - est!

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In the night in which He was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread,
 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."

So with thanksgiving, we take this bread and cup and proclaim the mystery of faith:
Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!

Now send Your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts,
 that we may receive our Lord with a living faith as He comes to us in His holy Supper.

***Empower us by that same Spirit to love and forgive,
 that our lives may anticipate that day when You'll make all things new.***

All this we pray with joy through our Lord Jesus Christ, who's taught us to pray:

***Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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.

Breaking this bread, drinking this cup, we share the body and blood of Christ.
 Jesus Himself invites you to this table— so come, eat and live!

CANTICLE:

"Lamb of God"



Congregation: *Congregation or Assistant:*

Lamb of God, you take a - way the sin of the
* you break the chains of ha - tred and
you are the way of jus - tice and
you are the way of mer - cy and

Congregation:

world:
fear: have mer - cy on us, mer - cy on us,
peace:
love:

mer - cy on us. Lamb of God, you

Congregation:

take a - way the sin of the world: grant us peace,

grant us peace, grant us peace.

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THE HOLY COMMUNION

*Now we share God's consecrated gifts among God's consecrated people, knowing that our living Lord Jesus is fully present with us in His Supper, giving Himself to us in bread and wine and forgiving love. Today, we'll share the Lord's Supper by receiving the body and blood of Christ at communion "stations" at the altar rail. Come forward a pew at a time; take a glass already filled with grape juice if necessary. Receive "**the body of Christ, given for you**" from the Pastor; then, by dipping the bread into the wine ("intinction"), receive "**the blood of Christ, shed for you**" from our communion assistant. We'll pause for silent prayer after we've all communed...*

*If you're joining us from your home, we invite you to share the bread and cup with one another. When giving the bread to your neighbor, say "**The body of Christ, given for you.**" When giving the wine/grape juice say, "**The blood of Christ, shed for you.**" Whatever's left over may be reverently eaten and drunk by everyone after our worship is over. Once we've all shared in the body and blood of Christ, we continue in blessing and prayer:*

SENDING

THANKSGIVING, PRAYER, AND BENEDICTION:

May the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ
strengthen us and keep us in His grace.

Amen.

Blessed be Your name, O God, for here we've feasted on Your living Word,
Christ Jesus, the joy and delight of our hearts!

Strengthened by this food, may we gather the world to Your banquet,
where none are left out and all are satisfied through Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

Now may God our Creator mark you out for salvation;
may Christ Jesus be present among you always;
may the Holy Spirit fulfil the law of love among you;
and Almighty God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

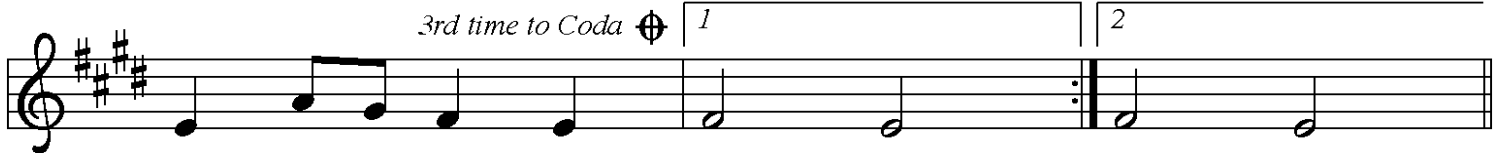
Amen.



1 Praise to you, O God of mer - cy: thanks be to you for -
 2 From of old you loved and sought us: thanks be to you for -
 3 Praise to you, O God of mer - cy: thanks be to you for -



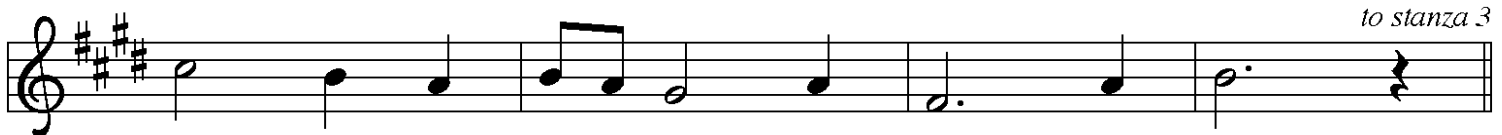
ev - er! Rais - ing high the weak and low - ly:
 ev - er! Truth and jus - tice you have taught us:
 ev - er! Rais - ing high the weak and low - ly:



thanks be to you for - ev - er!
 thanks be to you for - ev - er!
 thanks be to you for -



Strong is your faith - ful-ness, strong is your love, re -



mem - b'ring your cov - e - nant of life with us.

⊕ Coda



ev - er! Thanks be to you for - ev - er!

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ANNOUNCEMENTS AND DISMISSAL:

God has a plan.

We're it!

What's our part in God's plan?

Sharing God's love in joyful service!

Then let's go in peace, live in joy, and serve the Lord!

Thanks be to God!

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“Am I in the Place of God?”

“Am I in the place of God?” That wasn't just a rhetorical question for Joseph. Despised as a twerp by his older brothers, sold into slavery to the Egyptians, wrongly imprisoned and left to rot, he nevertheless had risen to become second-in-command of all Egypt, the sole distributor of food in the midst of a great famine. And now his scheming brothers were groveling at his feet, just as he'd dreamed, and seeking forgiveness. It was payback time for Joseph, and the power of revenge was finally his to command! But instead, Joseph says to them, “Am I in the place of God?” After all, it was God's place to avenge, not Joseph's— and it was God's grace that had brought them all to this place where life could be spared, not wasted...

“Am I in the place of God?” That's the question the unforgiving servant of Jesus' parable should've asked himself. When he, the servant, was brought before the king— literally “the lord”— he was forgiven his debt, even though it was infinitely beyond his means to repay. But when he met a fellow servant who owed him a few bucks, he acted as though he himself were the lord and demanded repayment. He didn't know his place! And in forgetting his place, he chose the path of unforgiveness. His condemnation finally came— not in getting thrown in jail (quite honestly, he was already imprisoned in his own score-keeping, debt-and-payback way of living in the world), but in the real lord pointing out to the unforgiving servant his true identity: “You wicked *slave!*”

“Am I in the place of God?” That’s the question an old man in my first parish should’ve asked as well. He was a bitter man, angry at the whole world. His anger finally focused on one person in particular, a fellow parishioner who’d given him a tongue-lashing a long time ago. When I mentioned to him that God forgives us infinitely and calls us to forgive others, he lashed out at me with the words, “Forgive that S.O.B. after what he did to me?! Over my dead body!!”

No, no: **he made himself out to be the wrong person!** There’s already someone else who filled that role, One who chose to give us mercy instead of revenge... Jesus claimed to be ushering in God’s Reign of love, and He committed the sin of forgiving others as though He were God Himself. So the religious leaders, the guardians of moral justice, nailed Him— and it was just and right, because He didn’t know His place! “Forgive sins as though He were God? Over His dead body!” Do you see how ironic the cross is— for it’s **there** that the One crucified for not knowing His place is recognized as truly God, and the prophecy of the religious leaders comes true: it’s over Christ’s dead body that our Lord forgives our sins infinitely, that God declares to each one of us, “Your sins are **forgiven!**”

And in our Baptism, united with Christ in His death and His resurrection, we’re reborn by that forgiveness— reborn as children of God, people who stand in the place of God to bring forgiveness and grace and healing and reconciliation to a broken world, even to our own broken relationships. As Paul put it to the Corinthians, “If anyone is in Christ, there’s a new creation... God reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation... We’re therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us” [2 Cor 5:17-18, 20]. Reborn in our Baptism through Christ’s forgiveness, choosing the strength of forgiveness over the adrenaline of revenge, **we stand in the place of God!**

“Am I in the place of God?” Living in God’s grace, living out God’s grace toward others, you bet we are— through Jesus Christ our Lord! AMEN.

• Dave Heckler

