



Celebrate

Sunday, July 23, 2023
8th Sunday after Pentecost

It is an age-old question: Why is there evil in the world? In the parable of the wheat and the weeds Jesus suggests that both grow together until the harvest. With Paul, we long for the day when all creation will be set free from bondage and suffering. Having both weeds and wheat within us, we humbly place our hope in the promises of God, and from the Lord's table we go forth to bear the fruit of justice and mercy.

Prayer of the Day

Faithful God, most merciful judge, you care for your children with firmness and compassion. By your Spirit nurture us who live in your kingdom, that we may be rooted in the way of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading

Isaiah 44:6-8

There are no other gods besides God: the word of the LORD does not fail to come to pass. We can trust in God, through whom Israel—and we—are redeemed.

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.
⁷Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth
before me.

Who has announced from of old the
things to come?
Let them tell us what is yet to be.
⁸Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and
declared it?
You are my witnesses!
Is there any god besides me?
There is no other rock; I know not
one.

or Wisdom 12:13, 16-19 [not printed]

God's deeds of forgiveness and gift of hope indicate that God's faithful people must also show kindness. No other god cares for all people.

Second Reading

Romans 8:12-25

For Paul, true spirituality means that we experience the reality of the Spirit, which enables us to pray as God's children, keeps us in solidarity with creation, and gives us unseen hope that God will liberate us and creation from bondage to death and decay.

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—¹³for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by

the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive

continued



Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth.

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk ¹ in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to re- ¹ vere your name.

**¹²I will thank you, O Lord my God, with ¹ all my heart,
and glorify your name for- ¹ evermore. R**

**¹³For great is your ¹ love toward me;
you have delivered me from the ¹ pit of death.**

**¹⁴The arrogant rise up against me, O God,
and a band of violent people ¹ seeks my life;
they have not set you be- ¹ fore their eyes.**

**¹⁵But you, O Lord, are gracious and full ¹ of compassion,
slow to anger, and full of kind- ¹ ness and truth.**

**¹⁶Turn to me and have mer- ¹ cy on me;
give your strength to your servant,
and save the child ¹ of your handmaid.**

**¹⁷Show me a sign of your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be ¹ put to shame;
because you, LORD, have helped me and com- ¹ forted me. R**

a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

¹⁸I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own

will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Gospel

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus tells a parable about the coexistence of good and evil in this world. God's judgment will remove all evildoers and causes of sin, but not until the end of human history.

[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' ²⁸He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' ²⁹But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'

³⁶Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴²and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!"

Prayers of Intercession

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

Confident that God receives our joys and concerns, let us offer our prayers for the church, those in need, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

O God, you call your church to announce the gospel of reconciliation and truth both near and far. Guide your church as it seeks your wisdom and shares it, trusting your Spirit bearing witness among us. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You brought forth all creation and called it good. Direct policymakers to protect lands and seas. Bring rain to sun-parched fields and protect areas impacted by natural disasters (*especially*). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You desire peace among nations and peoples. Guard our neighborhoods from hatred, watch over police officers and firefighters, and teach us to advocate for those who live in fear. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You are gracious and merciful, comforting those who suffer any affliction (*especially*). Sustain your people living with HIV/AIDS, provide shelter for all who are unhoused, and release any who are unjustly imprisoned. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

You name each of us as your children. Guide our hospitality ministry to welcome all, our education ministry to equip us for faithful living, and our social ministry to enact the gospel in our community. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

You send faithful people to proclaim freedom from bondage and to renew your church. Encourage us by the witness of the faithful departed (*including Birgitta of Sweden, whom the church commemorates today*), so that we live into that same hope. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, in the name of the one who reconciled all creation to himself, Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday Psalm 75. **Tuesday** (James, Apostle) Mark 10:35-45. **Wednesday** Daniel 12:1-13. **Thursday** Psalm 119:129-136. **Friday** (commemoration of Johann Sebastian Bach, died 1750; Heinrich Schütz, died 1672; George Frederick Handel, died 1759; musicians) Acts 7:44-53. **Saturday** (commemoration of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany; Olaf, King of Norway, martyr, died 1030) 1 Kings 2:1-4. **Ninth Sunday after Pentecost** 1 Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119:129-136; Romans 8:26-39; Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52.

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