

Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

07/27/2025

Greg Fetzer, Pastor

J.V. Trautwein, Pastor Emeritus

P In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen**

P Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C **Amen**

P If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Silence for reflection and self-examination.

P Most merciful God,

C **we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen**

P Almighty God, in his mercy, has given his Son to die for us and, for his sake, forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen**

GATHERING HYMN: [ELW#719 "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life" vv. 1-3](#)

P From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace and peace be with you all.

C **And also with you.**

P Let us pray. Gracious God, you are the strength of the weak, defender of the needy, and rescuer of the poor. Deliver us from the power of wickedness, that we may rejoice in your justice now and forever; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C **Amen**

Please be seated.

PSALM 82

L ¹God stands to charge the divine council assembled,
giving judgment in the midst of the gods:

C ²**"How long will you judge unjustly, and show favor to the wicked?**

L ³Save the weak and the orphan; defend the humble and needy;

C ⁴**rescue the weak and the poor; deliver them from the power of the wicked.**

L ⁵They do not know, neither do they understand; they wander about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

C ⁶**Now I say to you, 'You are gods, and all of you children of the Most High;**

L ⁷nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.'"

C ⁸**Arise, O God, and rule the earth, for you shall take all nations for your own.**

GALATIANS 5:1, 13-25

L A reading from Galatians: ¹For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

¹³For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become enslaved to one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.

¹⁶Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

L The word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

HYMN OF THE DAY [ELW#712 "Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service"](#)

DEVOTIONAL MESSAGE: "To Serve as Jesus Served"

As we come to the final mark in our journey through the *Seven Marks of Discipleship*, we arrive at a call both humble and profound: **to serve**.

From the beginning of this series, we've reflected on how a disciple lives a life that is prayerful, grounded in Scripture, devoted to worship, ready to invite others, eager to encourage, and generous in giving. These practices shape us - but they also *send* us. The sixth mark, "Give," opens our hands. The seventh, "**Serve**," moves our feet.

1. Called to Serve

The prophet Micah captures the heart of service in a single line:

"What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

Justice. Mercy. Humility. These aren't abstract ideals - they're deeply practical, often messy, and always relational. When Jesus was asked what commandment was greatest, he pointed to love: love of God and love of neighbor. And as we know, love is more than a feeling. Love takes action. Love *serves*.

Jesus modeled this love with his hands and feet. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, washed his disciples' feet, and touched the untouchable. His ministry was not only one of teaching, but of presence - embodied care in response to real human need.

As his followers, we're called to that same posture. Not only because the world is watching, but because **this is how we make Christ's presence real**: by stepping into places of need and showing up with compassion, courage, and grace.

2. Serving in Freedom

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul offers a beautiful paradox of the Christian life:

"For freedom Christ has set us free... do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another."

(Galatians 5:1, 13)

We are set free in Christ - not just from sin and fear, but from the burden of trying to prove ourselves worthy. Yet that freedom is not license to live for ourselves. Instead, it becomes a doorway into a new kind of life: a life of **freely chosen service**, rooted in love.

Paul continues in Galatians 5 by describing what this Spirit-shaped life looks like:

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control..." (Gal. 5:22–23)

This fruit grows not in isolation, but in relationship. It blossoms when we walk alongside others - especially when we serve those who cannot repay us. That's the Spirit at work.

3. Luther's Paradox of Freedom

Martin Luther, writing in *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), articulates this paradox in a way that has resonated through centuries:

"A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.

A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all."

Luther's insight is that Christian freedom and service are not opposites - they are two sides of the same coin. Because we are free - because nothing can separate us from the love of God - we are liberated from fear, pride, and self-justification. And with that freedom, we are empowered to serve.

In other words, we don't serve to earn God's love. We serve *because* we already have it.

4. Vocation and the World's Deep Hunger

This leads naturally to a word that has become deeply meaningful in Christian life: **vocation**. Vocation is more than a job. It is a *calling* - from the Latin *vocare*, "to call" - and it's not limited to pastors or missionaries. Every Christian has a vocation. Every life has a purpose in God's kingdom.

Author Frederick Buechner captures this beautifully:

"Vocation: It comes from the Latin *vocare*, to call, and means the work a person is called to by God.

There are all different kinds of voices calling you to all different kinds of work, and the problem is to find out which is the voice of God rather than of Society, say, or the Super-ego, or Self-Interest.

By and large a good rule for finding out is this: The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done.

If you really get a kick out of your work, you've presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing TV deodorant commercials, the chances are you've missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you're bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed (a) but probably aren't helping your patients much either.

Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."

Listen to that again: **"The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."** This is the joy and challenge of Christian service: to discern that intersection, to listen for God's voice among the noise, and to step forward into work that matters.

5. Everyday Service

Serving as Jesus served doesn't always mean going far. Sometimes it means showing up for the neighbor across the street, the colleague who's hurting, the child who needs encouragement, the person who feels forgotten. Service can be grand or quiet, planned or spontaneous, noticed or unseen.

Sometimes, it looks like advocacy and justice. Other times, it looks like casseroles and carpools. All of it matters.

Service is the outward fruit of an inward grace. It is how the disciple lives out the Gospel - not just in word, but in flesh and blood.

6. Final Word: What It Means to Be a Disciple

To be a disciple is to walk in the way of Jesus - and that path is shaped by service. Not out of guilt or duty, but out of love. We serve because we are free. We serve because we are called. We serve because we've seen the face of Christ in others - and long to show it in ourselves. So whether you find yourself at a soup kitchen or in a boardroom, whether you are raising children or tending the sick, whether you are planting gardens or writing letters - ask this: *Does this meet a deep need in the world? Does this bring me deep joy?* If so, you may be standing on holy ground. You may be standing right where God has called you.

Please stand, as you are able.

- P** Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith:
C I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again 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

OFFERING*: ([On-Line giving Link](#))

The Offering is received and is presented at the altar.



Cre-ate in me a clean heart, O God, and re-new a right spir -
it with-in me. Cast me not a-way from your pres-ence, and take



- L** In solidarity with all creation, we join our voice to the voice of the whole church and pray for the needs of the world.

A brief silence.

- L** Loving God, create in your church a desire for union with you in prayer. Raise up leaders to teach Christ's devotion to prayer and model Christ's way of prayer, until all people experience prayerful intimacy with you. God of grace,
- C** **hear our prayer.**
- L** Reveal to humanity the sacredness of all creation. With the breath of your Spirit, realign the balances of nature. Grant persistence in prayer and action for the sake of the earth, our common home. God of grace,
- C** **hear our prayer.**
- L** Teach rulers of the earth to sing of your ways, caring for the lowly and having no preference for the powerful. Direct the heart of every person to seek your will on earth as in heaven. God of grace,
- C** **hear our prayer.**
- L** To all whose prayers are cries for help, give your good gifts, and satisfy their deepest needs. We pray for Heidi Brackbill, Rebecca Brennan, the Elshafei family, Jeff Fultz, Mark Hughes, Charlotte Leer, Wendy Neumann, Rick Newman, Peter Olsen, Claudia Schober, D. J. Singer, the Spiegler family, Esther Trautwein, and Pastor Jack. Gather

them to your constant, loving presence, that they may rest in the confidence of life with you. God of grace,

C hear our prayer.

L Center the ministries of this assembly on prayer and service. Guide our relationships in the wider community, being ready to assist those who seek help. Strengthen feeding, clothing, and housing ministries and community partnerships. God of grace,

C hear our prayer.

L For what or whom else shall we pray?

L We give thanks for all who have gone before us. May we trust your steadfast love and continue in hope until we are united with all your saints. God of grace,

C hear our prayer.

L Trusting in your lovingkindness, we place our prayer and hope in you, in the name of Jesus Christ.

C Amen

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

**C 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

P The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace.

C Amen

SENDING HYMN: [ELW#719 "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life" vv. 4-6](#)

P Go in peace. Love and serve God and neighbor.
C **Thanks be to God.**

*Offering to be sent to
Robert Brackbill
10274 Raleigh Tavern Lane
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Epiphany Lutheran Church
9122 Sybert Drive
Columbia Hills
Ellicott City, MD 21043
<https://www.epiphanylutherancolumbia.org>

Please note that you now have the opportunity of online giving with the link found after the offering designation or here: https://tithe.ly/give_new/www/#/tithely/give-one-time/2627291

ANNOUNCEMENTS and Upcoming Events

- Sunday, August 10 at 9:30 am: Outdoor Worship
- Sunday, September 21, Fall Picnic following the service

Upcoming Worship

| Date | Theme of the Day | Preaching Texts | Worship Leader |
|-------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| July 27 | TBD | TBD | TBD |
| August 3 | Serve | TBD | Heidi and Bob |
| August 10 | TBD | TBD | Julie and Dave |
| August 17 | TBD | TBD | Ron |
| August 24 | TBD | TBD | Monica |
| August 31 | TBD | TBD | Pastor Greg |
| September 7 | Creation | Genesis 1:1-2:4a | Heidi and Bob |

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