

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

P. O. Box 267, 201 Veterans Dr., Columbus, TX 78934

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July 23, 2023 Contemporary 11:05 AM

Eighth Sunday of Pentecost

Senior Pastor	Alan Kethan	<u>Home:</u> (979)-942-9060	<u>Cell:</u> (830)-708-1200
Deacon of Word and Service			Sandye Fletcher
Youth & Family Specialist			Stephanie Polasek
Congregational Chair			Donna Maas
St. Paul Christian Learning Academy Director			Briana Bedford
Secretary			Elena Holub
Custodian			Tomasa Rosales
Parish Nurse Program Coordinator			DyAnn Lauzon

MISSION STATEMENT: Love God, Love Neighbor (*Luke 10:27*)

VISION STATEMENT: We will work to strengthen and grow closer in relationship to God and to one another.

- *As we enter into a sacred time and space, a friendly reminder to please set your cell phone to vibrate.*
- ***We want to welcome all of our guests today and thank you for worshiping with us. If you have any questions or would like more information regarding our services, programs, day care, or preschool programs at St. Paul, please visit our Welcome Center in the narthex immediately following our service, and an attendant will be more than happy to assist you. If this is your first time at St. Paul, we hope you will take a gift along with you. We also have a gift bag for children.***
- Hearing Assist devices are available for those who need assistance in hearing worship service better. Please see a person in the Sound Room (Usher Room) to request the use of a device during worship.

* This symbol indicates that the congregation is invited to stand physically or in spirit.

INTRODUCTION

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 that 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.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SIGNING OF ATTENDANCE PADS

(Ushers will be handing out Attendance Pads during the announcements. Please be sure to sign your name and contact information.)

60 SECONDS OF STEWARDSHIP – Fellowship Team

* **CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

P As we come before the Lord on this day to worship and praise him, we begin with confession so that our worship and praise may be filled with joy and thanks. God knows we have tried to determine who are weeds and wheat in our lives. We have damaged what God has planted by our judgements, prejudices and pride. We open our hearts to confess privately those things we are sorry for and need help with.

(Silence for private confession.)

P If you are truly sorry and asking God for help, here is the promise he commanded the leaders in his church to proclaim, “You are forgiven.” May this forgiveness free you and help you to live; to live in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

GOSPEL SONG: THERE WAS JESUS

**Every time I tried to make it on my own,
Every time I tried to stand and start to fall.
All those lonely roads that I have traveled on. . . there was Jesus.
When the life I built came crashing to the ground,
When the friends I had were nowhere to be found.
I couldn't see it then, but I can see it now. . . there was Jesus.**

CHORUS:

***In the waiting, in the searching, in the healing and the hurting;
Like a blessing buried in the broken pieces.
Every minute, every moment of where I've been or where I'm going;
Even when I didn't know it, or couldn't see it. . . there was Jesus.***

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.

A The holy gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 13, verses 24-30 and 36-43.

²⁴[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!"

GOSPEL SONG: THERE WAS JESUS

For this man who needs amazing kind of grace,
for forgiveness at a price I couldn't pay.
I'm not perfect, so I thank God every day. . . there was Jesus.

CHORUS:

*In the waiting, in the searching, in the healing and the hurting;
Like a blessing buried in the broken pieces.
Every minute, every moment of where I've been or where I'm going;
Even when I didn't know it, or couldn't see it. . . there was Jesus.*

BRIDGE:

On the mountain, in the valleys. . . (there was Jesus)
In the shadows of the alleys. . . (there was Jesus)
In the fire, in the flood. . . (there was Jesus)
Always is and always was, oh. . .
No, I never walk a-lone. You're always there.

LAST CHORUS ~

*In the waiting, in the searching, in the healing and the hurting;
Like a blessing buried in the broken pieces.
Every minute, every moment of where I've been or where I'm going;
Even when I didn't know it, or couldn't see it. . . there was Jesus. . .
There was Jesus. . . There was Jesus.*

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CHILDREN'S SERMON

SERMON

*** SERMON SONG: NO MATTER WHAT**

**A lot of us grew up believing; at any moment we could lose it all,
And at the drop of a hat, God might turn His back and move on.
A lot of us feel like we blew it; thinkin' that we're just too far gone,
But I want you to know, there's still a hope for you now.**

CHORUS 1:

***No matter what you've done, you can't erase His love.
Nothing can change it, you're not separated, no matter what.***

**There's never been a better time to get honest.
There's never been a better time to get clean.
So come as you are; run to the cross and be free (oh, be free).**

CHORUS 2:

***No matter what you've done, you can't erase His love.
Nothing can change it, you're not separated.
No matter where you run, He's always holding on.
You're still a daughter, you're still a son, no matter what.***

BRIDGE:

**Don't know what you've been taught, don't know what you've been told.
All I know is my God will never let go of you, no.
I don't know what you've seen, don't know what you've been through,
All I know is my God will never let go of you,
He'll never let go – o – o He'll never never never let you go...**

REPEAT CHORUS 2

END:

You're still a daughter, you're still a son... no matter what.

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* **APOSTLES' CREED**

A With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

C 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.**

(The congregation may be seated during the prayers.)

PRAYERS

A 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.

A We pray for peace in all the world, especially in war-torn areas of Ukraine and Sudan. Bring an end to wars and the destruction of lives and your creation.

A brief silence.

A We pray for the family and friends of Allen "Cotton" Kahlden who passed away this past week. Be with them and comfort them during this difficult time.

A brief silence.

A We pray for all those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:
Kathy Hageman; Michelle Thraen; Kaci Luedke; James Brod; Jesse Grabow; Elizabeth Frisby; Ronnie Huebel; George King; Arlin Brune; those on our Prayer Team's list; and those we name in our hearts before you.

A brief silence.

A We pray for all those battling cancer that they may know comfort and strength. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*
John Gibson; Dorothy Wicke; Pam Parker; Debbie Herzik; Randy Wendt; Susan Chandler; Heather Deviney; Jaime Sawyer; Kim Moerbe Welack; Misti Retzer; Zelda Lanford; Michelle Thraen; Pauline Gosnell; Nina Naumann; GayLynn Willms Burk; Carl Norton; Laura Harris; Todd Foster; Cindy Tanner; Joe Reck; Melinda Rodiek; Melda Coleman; Donna Culton; Nancy Hartmann; Lydia Rojas; Larry Stolar; Vivian Fortenberry; Rick Davis; Darryl Stancik; Jerry Ordner; Michael Yancey; Al Gene Canik; Jane Venghaus Taylor; George Wright; Sandy Mosley; Charlene Tesch; Karen Bailiff; Julian Divin; Nancy Biers; Pam Potter; Charlie Hammock; Brad Bryson; Lynette Frnka; Riana Jamison; Jenna Escamilla; Margaret

Ortiz; Keith Korth; Jodi Sebesta; Cathy Siglow; Paul Casinger; DeQuincy Lister; Lily Presswood; Denise Lange; Doug Mason; Dr. Tom Hancher; Joe Berry; Gracie Brune; Margaret Rogers; Leonard Kahlden; Curtis Wallin; Megan Burch; Lisa Grazier; Phyllis Behrend; Jessica Mauchlen; Donna Tiner; Libby Divin; Diane Brooks; Bob Loy; Stanley King; Dawn Foster; Edward Halcolm; Amber Smith Kutach; Louis Camacho; Melvin Schobel; Janet Greene; Sabrina Galindo; Debbie Grimes; Horst Traub; Margie Fisk; Preston Carter; Penny Miller; Carl Hahn; Megan Cain; Amanda Fuchs; Cyndi Wallace; Karen Broussard; Donna Young; Sharon Heimann; and Brenda Baker.

A We pray for all expectant mothers, and especially for:
Dina Anton de Espinoza; Olivia Leyendecker; Daya Latiolais; Cassidy Zajicek Parks; Courtney Busselman; Nancy Gorman; Camille Stancik; and Kyndall Beettner that they have healthy terms and deliveries, and if not, may they find comfort and peace.

A brief silence.

A We pray for all those who reside in care facilities and the homebound that they receive your caring and compassion. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*
Dr. Cecil Marburger; Joey Denby; Edwin Oevermann; Paul Minar, Sr.; Adrian Fritsch; Doug Hill; Robert Saunders; Coy Dell Schindler; Barbara McMath; Madeline Menke; Doris Horndt; Helen Perrard; Jane Booker; Pat Brasher; Dolores Hoelscher; Jesse Grabow; Ronnie Rogers; Joyce Dehmer; Donna Dehmer; Rita Noska; and Cherie Moore.

A We pray for all law enforcement officers, fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers, 9-1-1 dispatchers, and active duty military personnel that they are protected and kept safe. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*
Law enforcement officers: Charles Jobb; Joseph Smith; Todd Jacobs; Troy Neisner; Jacob Gorman; Nancy Gorman; Johnny Kovar; Abigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; Bruno Flores; Zane Weido; Josh Jones; as well as Donnie Templeton and Jason Templeton who are also fire fighters. For all fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers and 9-1-1 dispatchers, especially Brent Gorman, Sr.; Brent Gorman, Jr.; Reid Brasher; Dusty Dittmar; John Maertz; Ron Luedke; Pastor Alan Kethan; Kristi Weyand; Eric Weyand; Bradley Berger; Jon Berger; James Chollett; Edward Thraen, Jr.; Garrett Flores; Kyle Burris; Dylan Walcik; Randy Wendt; Travis Neuendorff; Brenda Henkes; Jan Willette and Terri Neuendorff, as well as those active duty military members including Brian Anderson; Michael Graham; Bryan Kubena; Brad Bergfeld; Cody Jowers; Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss; Kameron Page; Ryan Neisner; Anthony D'Angelo; Dalton Kapel; Kindra Dawson; William Phillips; Kevin Gonzalez; and Cody Goolsby.

A We pray for the church throughout the world. May we all proclaim the good news of your love effectively. We ask, especially, that you would bless the ministry of our sister congregations Cristo Rey and Iglesia Cristiana Camino de Santidad in Peru, all Missionaries, especially St. Paul's supported missionary, Dina Anton de Espinoza, and our companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic.

A brief silence.

A 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.

C Amen.

* **PEACE**

P As Jesus shared peace, let us also share His peace with one another. (*Share the "Peace of the Lord" with your neighbors.*)

(We will be collecting offerings before and after worship each week. This includes Power of One dollars.)

OFFERING and POWER OF ONE

"Power of One" is a ministry sponsored by your Stewardship Team. We are asking each and every one of our members to give \$1.00 above what your normal giving would be. We are asking each member to place this \$1.00 bill or change in the offering plate each week. The team is also inviting all children to participate to develop the habit of giving as part of their worship experience. Parents, a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, or dollar bill, any of these will do to help your children develop a habit of giving. These "Power of One" dollars will be used to support local ministries and ministries abroad. The purpose of this ministry is to demonstrate that something as small as one dollar can be used to make a difference in the lives of others.

* **OFFERING PRAYER**

P God of field and forest, sea and sky, you are the giver of all good things. Sustain us with these gifts of your creation, and multiply your graciousness in us with what we give back to your work, that the world may be fed with your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

* **REMEMBERING JESUS' WORDS, PROMISES, AND COMMANDS**

* **LORD'S PRAYER**

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.**

* **INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

P All people are called to Christ's table. Come and receive.

C Amen.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION (Continuous with Individual Cups)

*{Distribution will be continuous. **All are welcome for communion.** Please come down the center aisle starting from the front. Follow directions of the ushers, coming up one side at a time. Pastor will hand you the bread. If you wish to have a gluten-free wafer, please tell Pastor "Gluten-free, please." Afterward, you will choose either wine or white grape juice from the individual cups in the tray – white grape juice in the center with wine surrounding. Place the empty cups in the baskets located off to the side. Although communion is continuous, you are welcome to kneel at the rail in prayer after receiving communion. Please return to your seat by the side aisles.}*

* **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

A We thank you, generous God, for the refreshment we have received at your banquet table. Send us now to spread your generosity into all the world, through the one who is our dearest treasure, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

* **BLESSING**

P The God who calls across the cosmos and speaks in the smallest seed ☩ bless, keep, and sustain you now and to the end of the age.

C Amen.

* **CLOSING SONG: THRIVE**

**Here in this worn and weary land, where many a dream has died,
Like a tree planted by the water, we never will run dry.
So living water flowing through, God, we thirst for more of You.
Fill our hearts - and flood our souls - with one desire:**

CHORUS:

***Just to know You and to make You known, we lift Your name on high!
Shine like the sun, make darkness run and hide.
We know we were made for so much more than ordinary lives.
It's time for us to more than just survive... we were made to THRIVE!***

**Into Your Word we're diggin' deep to know our Father's heart.
Into the world we're reachin' out, to show them who You are.
So living water flowing through, God, we thirst for more of You.
Fill our hearts - and flood our souls - with one desire **CHORUS****

BRIDGE: [x4]

**Joy unspeakable... faith unsinkable...
Love unstoppable... anything is possible!**

CHORUS

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* **DISMISSAL**

P Go in peace. Live in peace.

C Thanks be to God, and we will.

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USHERS: Aaron & Amanda Oppermann
LAY READER: Debbie Kethan
STREAMING: Mike Maas
SOUND: Todd Jacobs

ACOLYTE: Hattie Post
POWER POINT: Dinah Jacobs
ALTAR GUILD: Barbara Brisco

WELCOME: Welcome! The Holy Spirit calls us together as the church to worship and praise God, made known to us in Christ. Peace be with you all.

ALTAR WALL FLOWERS are placed by Cindy & Leonard Kahlden in celebration of their uncle Oscar Roth's 93rd birthday.

We extend our Christian sympathy to Elsie Kahlden and family for the loss of her brother-in-law Allen "Cotton" Kahlden who passed away this past week. May God comfort them during their time of loss.

COLLECTION OF OFFERING: Offering for the worship services is collected before and after worship. Offering bowls are placed in the back entrance and inside the side sanctuary door for you to place your offering in. This includes "Power of One" dollars.

Amount needed for average weekly budgeted expenses: \$8,405.00

Attendance: July 15 & 16, 2023 – 187
Power of One: July 15 & 16, 2023 – \$47.00
Contributions: July 15 & 16 – \$7,408.01
Building Fund: July 15 & 16 – \$308.23

Thank you to those who contributed to last week's offerings. Loving God/Loving Neighbor.

ATTENTION: Names on the prayer list in the bulletin will be printed for 2 weeks. After 2 weeks, the names will be removed from the bulletin unless the church office has been notified to keep them.

► **Children's Activity Bags** are available for use by our young members and guests! You can find them on the coat hooks in the coat area of the narthex. After worship, **please place the used activity bags and their contents in the receptacle in the narthex.**

Thank you! ☺



Attention Graduating Seniors and Current College Students: This is a reminder that if you are planning to or are currently pursuing a degree in education *or* nursing, you are encouraged to apply for the Frank & Ann Derr Scholarship here at St. Paul. For an application, please see Ms. Stephanie or stop by the church office. Complete your application and return it to the church office **as soon as possible.**



Newman's Castle for 2nd & 3rd Graders! St. Paul students entering 2nd and 3rd grade this fall are invited to experience Newman's Castle in Bellville, Texas. On **Tuesday, July 25, 2023 we will leave** the church parking lot **at 9:30 AM and return by 2:30 PM.** After exploring the castle and catapult, students will be served lunch and hear the story of Queen Esther.

**** God's Gals:** God's Gals are going on a field trip!! On **Sunday, July 30, 2023** we will go to **Joe's Place in Fayetteville** for lunch, fellowship and fun! We will **leave the church parking lot at 12:30 PM** for those that need a ride. Please sign up in the narthex (foyer) by Sunday, July 30, 2023 so I can get a head count for the van and for Joe's! Questions? Contact Terri Brasher at 979-732-1127. ******

♣ **Day Camp at Lutherhill!** Youth completing K-5th grade are invited to experience a week at camp without the over-night stay during the week of **July 30-August 4, 2023.** Camp starts each day at 8:00 AM and will end at 5:15 PM. Stephanie Polasek will shuttle youth each day to and from camp. We will leave the church at 7:20 AM and will return at 5:50 PM. **Cost is \$195 for the week.** Register online at lutherhill.org and then contact Stephanie at 979-732-1858 for transportation. It's always a great time for the kiddos!

Men In Mission: Men In Mission is a group of men of all ages who meet at **7:00 AM** on the first Saturday of each month in The Lighthouse. Breakfast is served, which typically includes conversations pertaining to sports, the arts, entertainment, and occasionally politics. We then have a short devotion, discussion, then close with the Lord's Prayer around 8:00 AM. If you are seeking a closer connection to the men of St. Paul, this is an excellent way to do so. You will make friends for life. Come join us on **Saturday, August 5!**



ST. PAUL SENIOR EXPLORERS ARE GOING TO THE ASTROS! The Astros will be playing the Boston Red Sox on **Thursday, August 24, 2023.** Game time is 1:10 PM. We will **depart St. Paul at 10:00 AM,** stop and eat brunch at Cracker Barrel, and arrive comfortably at Minute Maid Park before game time. The grey area is that we think we can get pretty good tickets for \$30-\$50, depending on how many are going and the Astros' performance. We will call everyone before buying tickets if they are going to cost more than that. Please sign up in the narthex (foyer) by Sunday, August 13, 2023. Call Kevin Page with any questions at 979-732-0845.



CONNECTED TO CHRIST: It's the beginning of a new school year, and **we need names and addresses for all of our 2023 high school graduates and all others that are still in college!** Connected to Christ is a ministry of St. Paul that keeps our new graduates and college students connected to St. Paul with fun, Christian-based mailings four times a year. So students and/or family members, please send the name and address of your student to either Terri Brasher at (979)-732-1127, Stephanie Polasek at (979)-732-1858 or the church office. Thank you!

♥ **Grief Support Group:** Are you experiencing grief from the loss of a loved one, loss of a job, loss of friend who has moved? The Grief Support Group is a place to share and discuss these issues with other individuals. The group meets the **third Thursday of each month from 5:30-6:30 PM in the church library.** For questions or more information, contact Peggy Geisler at 979-732-0350.

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

Mon., July 24 – 9:30 AM – Staff Meeting
Tues., July 25 – 9:00 AM-12:00 PM – Quilters (Lighthouse)
 9:30AM-2:30 PM – 2nd & 3rd grade to Newman's Castle, Bellville
 12:00 PM – Noon Bible Study (library)
 6:00 PM – CLA Board
Wed., July 26 – 9:00 AM – CLA Chapel
 10:00 AM – Deacon Sandye to Columbus Oaks
 2:00 PM – Deacon Sandye to The Oaks
Thurs., July 27 – 1st Grade Fun Day! (church grounds)
Fri., July 28 – 10:30 AM – Adult Bible Study (library)
Sat., July 29 – 7:00 PM – Holy Communion Worship
Next Sun., July 30 – 9:00 AM – Holy Communion Worship
 10:00 AM – Adult Sunday School
 11:05 AM – Holy Communion Contemporary Worship
 12:30 PM – God's Gals to Joe's Place, Fayetteville

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Sunday, July 23, 2023 Birgitta of Sweden, renewer of the church, died 1373
 Birgitta married at age thirteen and had four daughters. Widowed at age thirty-eight, she gave all that she owned to the poor, and founded a community of monks and nuns led by a woman. Her work is continued today by the Society of St. Birgitta.

Tuesday, July 25, 2023 James, Apostle
 James and his brother John were the sons of Zebedee, fishermen by trade before their call from Jesus. He was the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred, and his death is the only one recorded in scripture (Acts 12:1-2).

Friday, July 28, 2023 Johann Sebastian Bach, died 1750; Heinrich Schütz, died 1672; George Frederick Handel, died 1759; musicians

These three German-born musicians have done much to enrich the life of the church. Schütz was an early master who focused on settings of biblical texts. Bach wrote over 300 cantatas along with works for organ and instrumental pieces, and has been called the "fifth evangelist" for the way he proclaimed the gospel in music. Handel's great work, Messiah, is a setting of scriptural texts.

Saturday, July 29, 2023 Mary, Martha, and Lazarus of Bethany
 Friends of Jesus, Mary and Martha are remembered for the hospitality of their home that they offered him — Martha focused on serving their guest, and Mary on listening to him. Their brother Lazarus was raised from the dead as a sign of the greater resurrection to come.

Saturday, July 29, 2023 Olaf, King of Norway, martyr, died 1030
 Considered the patron saint of Norway, Olaf went from a life of piracy to becoming Christian and declaring himself king of Norway. He revised the laws and tried to administer them fairly. Driven from Norway in a rebellion, he was killed in battle trying to regain his kingdom.
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OTHER READINGS: 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.

The reading begins:
⁶Thus 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.

PSALM: Psalm 86:11-17
¹¹Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name. ¹²I will thank you, O Lord my God, with all my heart, and glorify your name forevermore. ¹³For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the pit of death. ¹⁴The arrogant rise up against me, O God, and a band of violent people seeks my life; they have not set you before their eyes. ¹⁵But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth. ¹⁶Turn to me and have mercy on me; give your strength to your servant, and save the child of your handmaid. ¹⁷Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame; because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

OTHER READINGS: 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.

The reading begins:

¹²So 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 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.

SERVICE OVERVIEW: JUDGMENT AND MERCY

Matthew's gospel knows little compromise: sheep or goats, wheat or weeds, good or evil. Finding the good news of God's love for all people, for all creation, can be a challenge in this book. Today's gospel is no exception. Jesus interprets a parable for the disciples; he announces that all evildoers will be thrown into the furnace of fire, while the righteous will shine like the sun. The "Son of Man" will judge the world. The kingdom of believers has the same potential as those of the world to do good and to do evil. Jesus' allegorical interpretation encourages believers to strive for righteousness, and emphasizes God as judge.

St. Paul, however, in his letter to the church at Rome focuses on God as merciful judge. He proclaims that all creation will be freed from decay and receive redemption. Paul reminds us our hope lies with God, our parent through a spirit of adoption. This dichotomous picture of God as judge and giver of mercy began with last Sunday's texts and evidences itself in readings from Romans and Matthew across the next four Sundays. In some cases the God of mercy is highlighted in Paul's letter, at other times in the gospel. This good news, however, is always present!

The exercise of judgment and mercy reflects God's emphasis on justice over fairness. A fair God condemns those who do evil. A just God moves beyond fairness to justice, peace, and reconciliation. As evil doers, sinners, one and all, we are grateful for God's justice towards us and all people.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

Today we hear about a field in which both wheat and weeds are growing - a way to describe the church, the world, and even ourselves. The parable of the wheat and the weeds warns against our tendency to identify who is evil and who is good. Christ, the Son of Man, is the judge. Welcome to worship! Hear the word. Eat the supper of the Lord. Nourish your "wheat" and stifle your "weeds."

There are both weeds and wheat growing in the fields of our hearts. We might feel desperate to have God tear out the weeds of our lives as quickly as possible, but as Jesus' parable notes, sometimes both are left to grow together. Jesus implies that it will be a challenge for people to distinguish wheat from weeds; rather, it is God who has the wisdom to discern the difference. Does that ever stop us from declaring ourselves as wheat and pointing out what we perceive as weeds?

The intermingling of wheat and weeds in our world can be painful. It means that wrongness and suffering occur alongside joy and connection. The injustices we see in our world may seem senseless. Despite our inability to make sense of the evil we witness, we are called to honor our interdependence by living into the future together as a community based in love.

Righteousness is about orienting our hearts toward Christ. It is about things being in their right place, and our right place is to be where Jesus is. The act of embracing your unity with Christ allows you to become free to open yourself fearlessly to others in ways that are safe and healthy and truly loving - ways that draw others into fellowship with Christ too.

KID STUDY:

Do you do chores at home like taking out the garbage, emptying the dishwasher, or putting away your clean clothes? Have you ever had to help weed a garden? Whether flowers or vegetables, weeding is an endless chore that requires a lot of time and effort, especially if the garden is producing the food your family eats! Weeds are unsightly, and they can steal resources from the soil (water and nutrients) that might make the plants you are trying to grow less healthy. In today's gospel, there is a wheat field growing but there are many weeds among the wheat. The land owner (God) tells the servants *not* to weed the field, *not* to throw away things that seem bad. We are the wheat and the weeds in this story. *God protects everything that is growing, good or bad!* This is good news for us, since we are sometimes wheat, sometimes weeds.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

For if we are forbidden to uproot the tares, and if we are to wait in patience until the harvest time, how then are we to cast out certain persons from amongst us? Between the true wheat and the tares, while the latter is still green, and the stalk has not yet come into ear, there is a great similarity, and little or no difference between them, so as to tell one from the other. The Lord therefore warns us that in the beginning we are not to be too ready to deliver judgment, where anything is uncertain; but that we leave judgment to God, so that when the day of the Judge shall come, he shall exclude the wicked from the company of the blessed, not on the mere

suspicion of having committed an offence, but because of manifest guilt. - Jerome [Jerome, in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, I, 331.]

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Next Week's Theme (July 29 & 30): What the Kingdom of Heaven is like – Mustard seed, flour, Pearl, Net of fish of every kind

Next Week's Scriptures (July 29 & 30):

First Reading: 1 Kings 3:5-12

“Solomon's prayer for wisdom.”

Psalm: Psalm 119:129-136

“When your word is opened, it gives light and understanding.” (Ps. 119:130)

Second Reading: Romans 8:26-39

“Nothing can separate us from God's love.”

Gospel: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

“Parables of the reign of heaven.”