

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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

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July 9, 2023 Contemporary 11:05 AM

Sixth 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			Tomas 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 worshipping 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

The mystery of God's ways is sometimes hidden from the wise and intelligent. Jesus associates with those often excluded from the religious community. Like Paul, we struggle with our own selfish desires and seek God's mercy and forgiveness. We gather to be refreshed by Christ's invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary." Gathered around word, water, and meal, we find rest for our souls.

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 We believe that the Bible contains instruction for us as followers of Jesus Christ to do what he asked of us. He taught the first disciples to help others to confess their sins and to proclaim to them the promise of forgiveness afterwards. So let us take a few brief moments in silence to open our hearts and minds to Jesus, to confess the things that weigh heavy on our hearts and the things we need help with so we might be more in line with what Jesus commands.

(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: MAKE YOUR HOME IN ME

**Ev'ry fox, a den; ev'ry bird a nest; but the Son of Man has no place to rest.
Ev'ry heart, a man; ev'ry king, a throne; but the Word made flesh no earthly home.**

CHORUS:

*Your burden's light and, Your yoke is easy.
Your name is love and, Your grace is free.
My heart was locked but, You had the key.
Make Your h-o-m-e in me.
Make Your h-o-m-e in me.*

GOSPEL: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Jesus chides people who find fault with both his ministry and that of John the Baptist. He thanks God that wisdom and intelligence are not needed to receive what God has to offer.

A The holy gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 11, verses 16-19 and 25-30.

[Jesus spoke to the crowd saying:] ¹⁶"To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ¹⁷'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.'¹⁸For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; ¹⁹the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a

glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.” ²⁵At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

GOSPEL SONG: MAKE YOUR HOME IN ME
Lord, You come to me in Your home-less-ness;
Burning in Your eyes, such a great distress.
Who will heal Your wounds? Who will make Your bed?
I will comfort You, I will share my bread, for...

CHORUS:
Your burden's light and, Your yoke is easy.
Your name is love and, Your grace is free.
My heart was locked but, You had the key.
Make Your h-o-m-e in me.
Make Your h-o-m-e in me.

BRIDGE:
Where there is love, there is no fear. So make Your home and residence here.
I'm so a-live when You are near, so make Your home in me.

CHORUS:
Your burden's light and, Your yoke is easy.
Your name is love and, Your grace is free.
My heart was locked but, You had the key.
Make Your h-o-m-e in me.
Make Your h-o-m-e in me.

END: . . . Make Your h-o-m-e in me.
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CHILDREN'S SERMON

SERMON

* **SERMON SONG: THE WAY (NEW HORIZON)**
Through every battle, through every heartbreak.
Through every circumstance, I believe
That You are my fortress. Oh, You are my portion.
You are my hiding place, oh, I believe You are
The Way . . . the Truth . . . the Life; I believe You are
The Way . . . the Truth . . . the Life; I believe.

Through every blessing, through every promise.
Through every breath I take, I believe
That You are provider, Oh, You are protector,
You are the One I love, I believe You are
The Way . . . the Truth . . . the Life; I believe You are
The Way . . . the Truth . . . the Life; I believe You are

It's a new horizon, and I'm set on You.
And You meet me here today with mercies that are new.
All my fears and doubts, they can all come, too,
Because they can't stay long when I'm here with You

It's a new horizon, and I'm set on You.
And You meet me here today with mercies that are new.
All my fears and doubts, they can all come, too,
Because they can't stay long when I believe You are
The Way . . . the Truth . . . the Life; I believe You are
The Way . . . the Truth . . . the Life; I believe You are

It's a new horizon, and I'm set on You.
And You meet me here today with mercies that are new.
All my fears and doubts, they can all come, too,
Because they can't stay long when I'm here with You are
The Way . . . the Truth . . . the Life; I believe You are
The Way . . . the Truth . . . the Life; I believe You are

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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 God of the covenant, you call ministers to proclaim your gospel of grace throughout the world. Inspire pastors, deacons, church musicians, and all ministers of your word as they carry out your work.

A brief silence.

A God of all creation, you reveal your goodness through all you have made: rivers and seas, plants and animals, and endangered species. Prosper the work of conservation organizations, botanical gardens, zoos, and wildlife sanctuaries.

A brief silence.

A God of the nations, you desire that all the peoples of the world live in peace. Guide government leaders at all levels — national, state/province, and local — to work for justice, mercy, and reconciliation, especially in Ukraine and Sudan.

A brief silence.

A Healing God, we pray for all those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:
Arlin Brune; Carl Geisler; Joyce Dehmer; Randy Wendt; Kaci Luedke; those on our Prayer Team's list; and those we name in our hearts before you.

A brief silence.

A God of strength, we pray for all those battling cancer that they may know comfort and strength. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*
Pam Parker; Debbie Herzik; Randy Wendt; Susan Chandler; Heather Deviney; Jaime Sawyer; Kim Moerbe Welneck; Misti Retzer; Zeldia 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; Monty Gillett; 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 God of life, we pray for all expectant mothers, and especially for:
Montana Appelt; 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 God of love, 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 God of courage, 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 God of mission, 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 God of all faithfulness, through the witness of the faithful departed you reveal love in action. Embolden us by their example to build up the beloved community in all the contexts we encounter.

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, 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, eat, drink and receive help for the journey.

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**

P 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: ONLY JESUS**

**Make it count, leave a mark, make a name for yourself. Dream your dreams,
Chase your heart, above all else. Make a name the world remembers.
But all an empty world can sell is empty dreams. I got lost in the light
When it was up to me, to make a name the world remembers.
But Jesus is the only name to remember. . .**

CHORUS:

***And I – I – I, I don't want to leave a legacy. I don't care if they remember me, only Jesus.
And I – I – I, I've only got one life to live. I'll let every second point to Him, only Jesus.***

(SECOND TIME TO BRIDGE)

**All the kingdoms built – all the trophies won – will crumble into dust
When it is said and done. 'Cuz all that really matters: Did I live the
Truth to the ones I love? Was my life the proof that there is only one
Whose name will last forever? **CHORUS****

BRIDGE:

Jesus is the only name. Jesus is the only name. Jesus is the only name to remember.
Oh, Jesus is the only name. Jesus is the only name. Jesus is the only name to remember.

LAST CHORUS:

And I – I – I, I don't want to leave a legacy. I don't care if they remember me, only Jesus.
And I – I – I, I've only got one life to live. I'll let every second point to Him, only Jesus.
And I – I – I, I don't want to leave a legacy. I don't care if they remember me, only Jesus.

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* **DISMISSAL**

P Go in peace with rest for your souls.

C **Thanks be to God, and we will.**

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USHERS: Gary & Donna Schindler; Cindy Kahlden

LAY READER: Ashlyn Pugh

SOUND: Todd Jacobs

STREAMING: Chase Brasher

ACOLYTE: Beau Kuenstler

POWER POINT: Dinah Jacobs

ALTAR GUILD: Barbara Brisco

WELCOME: Welcome to worship in the name of God the Creator of this beautiful summer day, Jesus our Savior, and the Holy Spirit our Counselor each and every day. Amen.

ALTAR FLOWERS are placed by Sydney Eaton in loving memory of Robert Eaton for what would have been their 10th wedding anniversary on July 8.

To my first church family, **Thank you** for your thoughts, and especially prayers, during my recent illness. They brought me peace and strength, and continue now as I am home recovering. Please know that you were felt, and I will be forever grateful. – *Dwain Dungen*

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 1 & 2, 2023 – 187

Power of One: July 1 & 2, 2023 – \$58.00

Contributions: July 1 & 2 – \$8,247.16


Building Fund: July 1 & 2 – \$791.25

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! ☺

● **Notice:** The Adult Bible Study that meets on Fridays with Deacon Sandye is taking a brief summer break. Be sure to check upcoming weekly bulletins for when they will resume!

 **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.**

◆ **LANDSCAPING:** St. Paul is in the process of forming a landscaping team with the purpose of making our campus more attractive and welcoming by planting an assortment of trees and shrubs in various locations. If you have knowledge of what trees and shrubs to recommend that would survive in our environment, we would welcome your expertise. If interested, there is a sign-up sheet in the narthex (foyer). If you have any questions, please contact John Brasher at 979-253-1448.



Fresh Produce Distribution for the Columbus Community: St. Paul has an opportunity to serve our community by being the distribution site for boxes of fresh produce. This produce will be provided at no cost by The Common Market using grant money obtained by Methodist Healthcare Ministries. The Columbus Food Pantry will no longer provide any fresh produce, so, this may be the only chance for many families in our community to have access to some fresh, healthy foods. The boxes of produce will be delivered to us twice a month. **We would like to distribute the boxes of produce to families on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of each month from 8:00-10:00 AM at The Lighthouse. We are looking for volunteers to help with this distribution. If you would be interested in joining this**

community outreach team, please sign up in the narthex (foyer). If you have any questions, please contact Kay Wesson at 713-851-6282.

**** Colorado County Senior Connections ** –**

A place for Seniors, 65 years and older, to socialize with others.

The group meets at the Stafford Opera House – Columbus in the Buddy Rau Room from **10:00 AM-1:00 PM** the **1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month**. Lunch will be provided. Various activities will include: Card games/board games; Bingo; Movies; Educational Speakers; Field trips; and Social gathering time!

• **VBS FOOD DONATIONS:** To help defray the cost, we are asking for donations to help with the meals served each evening before Vacation Bible School. We served about 200 kids and volunteers *each night* of VBS last year. If you would like to help, you can either give a **monetary donation or donate specific food items**. For monetary donations, an envelope will be on the table in the narthex (foyer) that can be placed in the offering bowl. If you wish to donate specific food items, just pull a slip off the board and return it with the donation on the date specified to the St. Paul Lighthouse. If you have any questions, please contact Loraine Gast at 979-732-1296. Each donation is and will be greatly appreciated. Thank you!



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. Please RSVP to Stephanie by Monday, July 17, 2023 at 979-732-1858.

♣ **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!

♥ **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 10 – 9:30 AM – Staff Meeting
5:30 PM – VBS Meal (Lighthouse)
6:00-8:30 PM – Vacation Bible School (Lighthouse)

Tues., July 11 – 9:00 AM-12:00 PM – Quilters (Lighthouse)
10:30 AM – Pastor Alan to TLC
12:00 PM – Noon Bible Study (library)
5:30 PM – Stewardship Team (library)
5:30 PM – VBS Meal (Lighthouse)
6:00-8:30 PM – Vacation Bible School (Lighthouse)

Wed., July 12 – 9:00 AM – CLA Chapel
10:00 AM – Deacon Sandye to Columbus Oaks
2:00 PM – Deacon Sandye to The Oaks
5:30 PM – VBS Meal (Lighthouse)
6:00-8:30 PM – Vacation Bible School (Lighthouse)

Thurs., July 13 – 5:30 PM – VBS Meal (Lighthouse)
6:00-8:30 PM – Vacation Bible School (Lighthouse)

Fri., July 14 – 5:30 PM – VBS Meal (Lighthouse)
6:00-8:30 PM – Vacation Bible School (Lighthouse)

Sat., July 15 – 7:00 PM – Holy Communion Worship

Next Sun., July 16 – 9:00 AM – Holy Communion Worship
10:00 AM – Adult Sunday School
11:05 AM – Holy Communion Contemporary Worship

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Tuesday, July 11, 2023 Benedict of Nursia, Abbot of Monte Cassino, died around 540
Benedict is known as the father of the Western monastic movement. Educated in Rome, he went to live as a hermit, and eventually gathered a community of monks around him. He wrote a rule for living in monasteries that is used by Benedictines and adapted by others.

Wednesday, July 12, 2023 Nathan Söderblom, Bishop of Uppsala, died 1931
A winner of the Nobel Prize for peace for his efforts to unite peoples after the First World War, Söderblom also called attention to the revival of early church worship principles, and helped to lay the groundwork for the World Council of Churches.

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OTHER READINGS: Zechariah 9:9-12

The coming messianic king will inaugurate an era of disarmament and prosperity. Because of God's covenant with Israel, the people are designated as "prisoners of hope."

The reading begins:

⁹Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a

donkey. ¹⁰He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war-horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall command peace to the nations; his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. ¹¹As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. ¹²Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.

PSALM: Psalm 145:8-14

⁸The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. ⁹LORD, you are good to all, and your compassion is over all your works. ¹⁰All your works shall praise you, O LORD, and your faithful ones shall bless you. ¹¹They shall tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your power, ¹²that all people may know of your power and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. ¹³Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; your dominion endures throughout all ages. You, LORD, are faithful in all your words, and loving in all your works. ¹⁴The Lord upholds all those who fall and lifts up those who are bowed down.

OTHER READINGS: Romans 7:15-25a

Life captive to sin is a catch-22 existence in which we know good but do not do it and do things we know to be wrong. Through Jesus Christ, God has set us free from such a futile existence.

The reading begins:

¹⁵I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. ²¹So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. ²²For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, ²³but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ^{25a}Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

SERVICE OVERVIEW: WHEN A YOKE MEANS FREEDOM

Today's gospel reading contains iconic words from Jesus, offering a yoke to tired listeners and tells them that a yoke will give them rest. The yoke as a means to rest was a strange idea for the disciples, and ought to sound just as strange to us. The early hearers of this biblical passage would have known a yoke to be a means of engaging the energy of oxen as heavy lifters in the enterprise of farming. Yokes are still employed in our world and they are still a burden and a way of harnessing animal's hard work, especially in places where people don't have access to the internal combustion engine. The first ancient readers or hearers of Matthew also viewed a yoke as a symbol of obedience to God's law and wisdom. Generally, our instinct is to resist both yokes *and* laws, or at least not immediately connect them with the idea of freedom. Through the image of the yoke, however, Jesus invites us to think of God's law and wisdom as a means to surrender, give way, and accept something graceful and positive: rest, ease, lightness.

Jesus reframes the idea of a yoke by telling us that a yoke will help us grow as disciples. The gospel links humility to freedom.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

Today Jesus speaks comfortingly about God's gracious will, saying that, paradoxically, the burden of faith is light. The term "yoke" he uses in his comparison is the wooden neck brace that helps two oxen pull their load together. Welcome to worship! Find out about the yoke we are fitted into at our baptism, not meant to be a burden but just the opposite. At the table, be strengthened to join with Christ to carry your heavy burdens.

Jesus speaks of the profound relationship between the Father and the Son, calling to mind the interconnection of the Trinity. We are connected in human community and in human connection to God, but also of the entire cosmos! Consider the intimate connections and communications that take place within forest communities. Cells inside fir needles communicate with leaf fungus and with helpful insects. Bacteria and fungus that surround the root tips of trees communicate and behave in a mutually supportive relationship. While we tend to think of the natural world as collections of individual species, we have to consider the fundamental nature of life as relational, or connected.

The physical, heavy burdens described as the wearing of a "yoke" serve as a metaphor of the heavy burdens that many of us carry every moment of the day. Rest in Jesus means letting go of those burdens, but even more important, letting go of control. When Jesus prays that the Father has revealed wisdom to infants, think of it in terms of a posture of dependency rather than self-sufficiency. There is no self-sufficiency when it comes to our standing before God. In fact, we need a vulnerability that can admit that our moral agency is deeply flawed and can only be rescued by the grace of God poured out on us in Christ.

The yoke ties together two beasts of burden. According to this image, Christians do not walk alone, but are tied to Christ and to one another.

KID STUDY:

Have you ever been in a sack race? Two people each place one leg into a single sack, and then as if they have three legs, they run to the finish line without falling down on top of each other. It is not easy to do this! It takes concentration, effort, and most of all cooperation to figure out the best way to make it to the finish line. In our baptism, we are connected to Christ and to one another, just like when our legs are connected to each other in a sack race. The best thing, though, is that Christ is always running alongside each of us.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

Come to me, all you that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you, where there is wondrous gifts, and joy without compare, rest unchanging, happiness without end, unceasing melody, perpetual glory, unwearied giving of thanks, loving absorption in divine things, infinite riches, a kingdom without end, through all ages and ages, deeps of compassion, an ocean of mercy and kindness—which the human tongue cannot describe but makes known only through figures.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and you shall find rest for your souls, where the hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge shall be revealed. Come to me, all you that hunger and thirst after justice, and I will fill you with all that you desire. Come to me, for whoever comes to me I shall not cast forth. - Ephraem [Ephraem, in The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, III, 310-311.]

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Next Week's Theme (July 15 & 16): Sower went out to sow

Next Week's Scriptures (July 15 & 16):

First Reading: Isaiah 55:10-13

"The growth of the word to accomplish God's purpose."

Psalm: Psalm 65:[1-8] 9-13

"Your paths overflow with plenty." (Ps. 65:11)

Second Reading: Romans 8:1-11

"Live according to the Spirit."

Gospel: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

"The parable of the sower and the seed."