

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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

PH# (979) 732-2423 Fax (979) 733-0489

E-mail: admin@splctx.org www.splctx.com **Pastor:** pastor.akethan@gmail.com

September 10, 2023 Contemporary 11:05 AM

Fifteenth Sunday of Pentecost

Senior Pastor	Alan Kethan	<u>Home:</u> (979)-942-9060	<u>Cell:</u> (830)-708-1200
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 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

Conflict is a part of relationships and life in community. Jesus' words in today's gospel are often used in situations having to do with church discipline. The prophet Ezekiel tells of warning the wicked to turn from their ways, and Paul reminds us that love is the fulfilling of the law. We gather in the name of Christ, assured that he is present among us with gifts of peace and reconciliation.

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.)

RECOGNITION OF GRANDPARENTS

* **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: GOODNESS OF GOD

I love you, Lord, for Your mercy never fails me.
All my days, I've been held in Your hands.
From the moment that I wake up, until I lay my head,
Oh, I will sing of the goodness of God.

CHORUS

*And all my life, You have been faithful. And all my life, You have been so, so good!
With every breath that I am able, oh, I will sing of the goodness of God.*

GOSPEL: Matthew 18:15-20

Jesus offers practical advice to his disciples on how individuals — and the church as a whole — should go about restoring relationships when one member has sinned against another.

A The holy gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 18, verses 15-20.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹⁵"If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one

be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

GOSPEL SONG: GOODNESS OF GOD

I love Your voice! You have led me through the fire.
In the darkest night, You are close like no other.
I've known You as a Father, I've known You as a friend,
And I have lived in the goodness of God.

CHORUS

*And all my life, You have been faithful. And all my life, You have been so, so good!
With every breath that I am able, oh, I will sing of the goodness of God.*

BRIDGE (x2)

'Cause Your goodness is running after. . . it's running after me!
Your goodness is running after. . . it's running after me!
With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now. I give You everything!
'Cause Your goodness is running after. . . it's running after me!

LAST CHORUS

'Cause all my life, You have been faithful. And all my life, You have been so, so good!
With every breath that I am able, oh, I will sing of the goodness of God.
Oh, I'm gonna sing of the goodness of God.

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CHILDREN'S SERMON

SERMON

*** SERMON SONG: FORGIVENESS**

It's the hardest thing to give away, and the last thing on your mind today.
It always goes to those who don't deserve.
It's the opposite of how you feel, when the pain they caused is just too real.
It takes everything you have to say the word. Forgiveness... forgiveness.

It flies in the face of all your pride, it moves away the mad inside.
It's always anger's own worst enemy.
Even when the jury and the judge, say you've got a right to hold a grudge,
It's the whisper in your ear sayin', "set it free!"
Forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness...

~CHORUS~

**Show me how... to love the unlovable. Show me how... to reach the unreachable.
Help me now ... to do the impossible. Forgiveness, forgiveness!
Help me now... to do the impossible, forgiveness!**

It'll clear the bitterness away, it can even set a pris'ner free.
There is no end to what its power can do.
So let it go and be amazed by what you see through eyes of grace.
The pris'ner that it really frees is you!
Forgiveness, forgiveness, oh forgiveness, forgiveness...

~CHORUS~

**Show me how... to love the unlovable. Show me how... to reach the unreachable.
Help me now ... to do the impossible. Forgiveness!
I want finally to set it free. Show me how... to see what your mercy sees.
Help me now... to give what you gave to me, forgiveness.
Oh, forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness, forgiveness.**

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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 Remembering the caring and generous works of God, we pray for the church, creation, and the needs of our neighbors.

A brief silence.

- A Hold us accountable, O God. Show your church where repentance is needed and lead us in paths of intentional compassion and listening. Help us extend hands of reconciliation and care, especially in relationships with other Christians and people of other faiths.

A brief silence.

A Inspire us to lead with honor, O God. Guide judges and legislators, police, and government officials to create and uphold just laws. Move us to treat all people with dignity and guide our conversations with one another.

A brief silence.

A Awaken us, O God. Challenge and encourage your people to value the vocation to which each is called. We pray for all discerning new possibilities or changing employment. In all our diverse callings, teach us to love our neighbor above all else.

A brief silence.

A We pray for farmers and ranchers, O God, as they continue to work hard to bring us food in this time of drought. Bless them as they sow crops and care for livestock. Send us rain to heal the earth and water to quench Your thirsty land. Let faith be born from our doubts, hope from our despair, and compassion from our troubles.

A brief silence.

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

A brief silence.

A We pray for all those in need of healing, O God, and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:
; 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, O God, that they may know comfort and strength.
(Pause for those we are praying for.)
Tom Russell, Jr.; Melda Coleman; Al Gene Canik; Larry Bookout; Mike Wostarek; Elizabeth Frisby; Virginia Fritsch; Kristina Acevedo; George Krenek; Anne Dimas; Carl Geisler; Laura Walla; Dorothy Wicke; Randy Wendt; Heather Deviney; Michelle Thraen; Lydia Rojas; Paul Casinger; Dr. Tom Hancher; Leonard Kahlden; and Bob Loy.

A We pray for all expectant mothers, O God, and especially for:
Olivia Leyendecker; Cassidy Zajicek Parks; Courtney Busselman; Nancy Gorman; Camille Stancik; Kyndall Beettner; and Jamee Albert 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, O God, that they receive your caring and compassion. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*
Joey Denby; Edwin Oevermann; Paul Minar, Sr.; Adrian Fritsch; Coy Dell Schindler; Madeline Menke; Doris Horndt; Helen Perrard; Jane Booker; Pat Brasher; Dolores Hoelscher; Jesse Grabow; Ronnie Rogers; Joyce Dehmer; Donna Dehmer; Cherie Moore; and Lauren Lamb.

A We pray, O God, 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; Abbigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; 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.; Kyle Burriss; Dylan Walcik; Travis Neuendorff; Nathan Bookout; Brenda Henkes; Jan Willette; and Terri Neunendorff, as well as those active duty military members including Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss; Kameron Page; Dalton Kapel; and Kevin Gonzalez.

A We pray, O God, 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 their Pastor Armando Capcha and Iglesia Cristiana Camino de Santidad and their leaders Pastors Gumer and Naomi Anton 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 Remember us according to your steadfast love as we offer these and the prayers of our heart, trusting in your compassion made known through Jesus Christ.

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 power, God of plenty, all things belong to you. We bring your gifts to the table, that all might be fed. Form us into the body of your Beloved, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

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 Jesus invites you to this table. Come, eat and live.

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 Blessed be your name, O God, for we have feasted on your Word, Christ Jesus, the joy and delight of our hearts. Strengthened by this food, send us to gather the world to your banquet, where none are left out and all are satisfied. In Jesus' name we pray.

C **Amen.**

* **BLESSING**

P The God of glory, ☩ Jesus Christ, name above all names, and the Spirit who lives in you, bless you now and forever.

C **Amen.**

* **CLOSING SONG: GOOD MORNING MERCY**

**While I was sleeping, Lord, you were working
On a mess I made like only I can do.
When I start thinking I'm so far from you,
I wake up to hear You whisper, "That's not true."**

CHORUS

**Good mornin', mercy! You call me worthy.
Feels like the sun shinin' on my face.
Livin's good this side of grace.
I feel it workin'. Goodbye to the hurtin'.
You woke me up, put me on my way.
Hallelujah! It's a brand new day! Good mornin', mercy!**
[2nd TIME TO BRIDGE]

**Yeah, I'm still learning to trust and follow.
I won't worry what tomorrow's gonna bring,
Cause You hold it all there in Your hands.
I'm lifting mine up now, cause it makes me sing! CHORUS**

BRIDGE

**Glory hallelujah! It's a brand new day.
Starts all over when daylight breaks.
You've given me a joy, it makes me sing,
"Good mornin'! Good mornin'!"
Glory hallelujah! It's a brand new day.
Starts all over when daylight breaks.
You've given me a joy, it makes me sing,
"Good mornin'!" Yeah. . .**

LAST CHORUS ~

**Good mornin', mercy! You call me worthy.
Feels like the sun shinin' on my face.
Livin's good this side of grace.
I feel it workin'. Goodbye to the hurtin'.
You woke me up, put me on my way.
Hallelujah, hallelujah! Good mornin', mercy!
Good mornin', mercy! Good mornin', mercy!**

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* **DISMISSAL**

P Go in peace. God is at work in you. **C Thanks be to God, and we will.**

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USHERS: Aaron & Amanda Oppermann; Loraine Gast; Adam Torres

LAY READER: Mia Post

STREAMING: Chase Brasher

SOUND: Sydney Eaton & Todd Jacobs

ACOLYTE: Hattie Post

POWER POINT: Peggy Geisler

ALTAR GUILD: Ilene Schindler

WELCOME: Welcome to worship, Christian education and fellowship — a chance to be fed and nourished by God's Word before being sent again to serve the world in the week ahead.

ALTAR WALL FLOWERS are placed by Fay & Marv Ulbricht in thanks for God's many blessings and in celebration of their 37th wedding anniversary.

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

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! ☺

 **PRAYER LISTS:** As you know from recent church and bulletin announcements as well as the August newsletter, we asked for your help to update our prayer lists. As of August 15, our lists have been cut down considerably. If you would like to have someone added back to the lists, please contact the church office. You can stop by in person, call at 979-732-2423 or send an email to admin@splctx.org. Thank you!

+ The **Noon Bible Study group** that meets on Tuesdays in the church library will be taking a brief break and **will not be meeting in September**. They will resume class *Tuesday, October 3, 2023* and will be studying I & II Thessalonians and Jude. Everyone is invited to attend! +



Colorado County Fair Concessions!! The St. Paul Lutheran Youth and St. Paul Christian Learning Academy once again have been given the opportunity to take on the concession stand this year at the Colorado County Fair. This is such a beneficial fundraiser and a lot of fun working with everyone! We are excited to again be a part of this community event, however, it is a big task, and we will need your help. The carnival and rodeo will be **September 14, 15, & 16, 2023**, and we will cover all three days from **3:00 PM to 10:00 PM**. A shift and cooker schedule is posted in the narthex (foyer) as well as other ways you can volunteer to help with this fundraiser. If you are a good cook, cashier, organizer, supply runner or just have a heart for serving, we need you! All proceeds will go to support the St. Paul Lutheran youth programs and the St. Paul Christian Learning Academy. If you would like to know more or be a part of the planning team, please contact Stephanie Polasek at 979-732-1858.

♥♥ Our next **Marriage Course** will be every Sunday, **September 17-October 29, 2023**. On these Sunday nights from **6:00-8:00 PM** in the Lighthouse this seven-week course will take place. We realize that strong marriages make strong families, and strong families make strong communities. The Marriage Course is relevant for any couple wanting to invest in their relationship and make it stronger. Whether you have been married four months, 40 years or cohabitating and not married; you feel your marriage is fine, good, great, struggling or stuck; this course is for you. The course is more like a date night. There will be dinner and dessert mixed in with video presentations and discussion questions for you and your partner. You will not be asked to share anything about your relationship with anyone but your partner. **Cost is \$150** – this includes meals, workbooks and video materials. If you need childcare, the cost is an additional \$35 for the seven weeks. This course is limited to 11 couples. Sign up in the office or call Elena Monday-Friday during business hours to get your name on the list. When you sign up, please indicate if you will need childcare.

► **Volunteers Wanted!** If you are interested in helping with the Marriage Course (technical team; set-up/take down; server; etc.) please see the sign-up sheet in the narthex. Various opportunities are listed. If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Alan.

Peru Team Meeting: Our next Peru Team meeting will be **Thursday, September 28, 2023 at 5:00 PM** in the church library. Join us to get an update on Pastor Alan's trip to Peru in July and discuss how we can best serve our South American neighbors. If you have any question, please contact Terri Brasher at 979-732-1127.



Pictures Needed!! I am in the process of changing all song backgrounds to royalty-free pictures for Power Point. Please send me any pictures of backgrounds (trees, rivers, oceans, mountains, etc.) you may have taken on your vacation. You can email them to peggeisler@gmail.com. Thanks! – *Peggy Geisler*

♥ **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., Sept. 11 – 9:30 AM – Staff Meeting
Tues., Sept. 12 – 9:00 AM-12:00 PM – Quilters (Lighthouse)
10:30 AM – Pastor Alan to TLC
5:30 PM- Stewardship Team (library)
Wed., Sept. 13 – 8:30 AM-12:00 PM – Columbus Garden Club (Lighthouse)
9:00 AM – CLA Chapel
10:00 AM – Nursing Home Team to Columbus Oaks
2:00 PM – Nursing Home Team to The Oaks
5:00 PM – Meal
5:30 PM – BLAST, Confirmation and HS Youth
Thurs., Sept. 14 – 10:00-11:30 AM – Manna for Moms (Lighthouse)
5:00 PM – Worship Team (library)
Fri., Sept. 15 – 10:30 AM – Adult Bible Study (library)
Sat., Sept. 16 – 7:00 PM – Holy Communion Worship
Next Sun., Sept. 17 – 9:00 AM – Holy Communion Worship
10:00 AM – Adult Sunday School and Confirmation
11:05 AM – Holy Communion Contemporary Worship
6:00-8:00 PM – Marriage Course (Lighthouse)

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Wednesday, September 13, 2023 John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, died 407
John was a priest in Antioch and an outstanding preacher. His eloquence earned him the nickname "Chrysostom" ("golden mouth"). Appointed bishop of Constantinople, seat of the empire, he criticized corruption in the court. As a result, he was exiled by the empress.

Thursday, September 14, 2023 Holy Cross Day

Helena, mother of Constantine, made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and found what may be the actual site of Jesus' crucifixion. Her son built two churches there, and the dedication of one of them gave rise to this celebration of our Lord's victory on the cross.

Saturday, September 16, 2023 Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, martyr, died around 258

Cyprian served as a bishop during a time of great persecution of Christians. He insisted on receiving back those who had left the faith under duress. He also provided medical care during a severe epidemic.

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OTHER READINGS: Ezekiel 33:7-11

God appointed Ezekiel as a sentinel for the house of Israel. Ezekiel must faithfully convey God's warnings to the people. Remarkably, God—who is about to attack Jerusalem — gives a warning with the hope that repentance will make the attack unnecessary.

The reading begins:

⁷So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. ⁸If I say to the wicked, "O wicked ones, you shall surely die," and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. ⁹But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life. ¹⁰Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: "Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" ¹¹Say to them, As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

PSALM: Psalm 119:33-40

³³Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. ³⁴Give me understanding, and I shall keep your teaching; I shall keep it with all my heart. ³⁵Lead me in the path of your commandments, for that is my desire. ³⁶Incline my heart to your decrees and not to unjust gain. ³⁷Turn my eyes from beholding falsehood; give me life in your way. ³⁸Fulfill your promise to your servant, which is for those who fear you. ³⁹Turn away the reproach that I dread, because your judgments are good. ⁴⁰Behold, I long for your commandments; by your righteousness enliven me.

OTHER READINGS: Romans 13:8-14

The obligation of Christians is to love one another and so fulfill the heart and goal of the law. Clothes make the person as we "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and live today in light of the future God has in store for us.

⁸Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet"; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁰Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law. ¹¹Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; ¹²the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; ¹³let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

SERVICE OVERVIEW: THE CHALLENGE TO FORGIVE

Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." After Pentecost, we are repeatedly reminded that God has not abandoned us and that Christ's resurrection and ascension are a beginning for us, not an end. The readings this week focus on the practical work of the gathered Christian community: turning from sin to repentance, from conflict to reconciliation. The question is as relevant today as it was for the disciples and the first Christians: how do we live and work together as the body of Christ? We have been saved by grace, liberated by God's love to love one another. What does it mean for us and for our community to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and to clothe ourselves in love?

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

Today's gospel gives advice about how Christians are to deal with controversies within the believing community. Jesus' instructions to the disciples about confronting those who cause harm are often interpreted as just steps for conflict resolution. The good news in the reading is the last line: *that Christ is among us always*. Welcome to worship! Receive Christ's gift of himself in word, sacrament, and community.

The way Jesus teaches was and continues to be profoundly counter-cultural. This in itself can present as barriers to those who are resistant to change and universal acceptance as "the way it's always been" transforms. The church is not a social club. It exists in order to bring about the challenging work of reconciliation and forgiveness. God calls us into community knowing that being in community is hard. In scripture we can find practical guidance for gathering through good and hard times. The Holy Spirit is always at work in, through, and among us to gather and regather us again. In community we meet and become Christ's body in ways that are impossible for us as individuals; all the commandments are fulfilled in this call to love of neighbor.

The diversity of Christians and the way we interact with each other encompass something that can be described as a holy space. The idea that when two people come together and commit to seeing each other, in that mutual act of recognition they make something new: a new entity that is their relationship. The concept of the "third space" sounds very similar to Jesus' reminder that he would be present when two or more are gathered in his name. What newness might we discover when we take the time to see one another and commit to bridging the conflicts that cause divisions in our world?

Let go of resentment and allow yourself to express compassion and grace. Acknowledge your humanity as well as the humanity of those you forgive. Hear Jesus' instruction as an invitation for compassion and a way for you to be free from the shame, resentment, and judgment that binds you.

KID STUDY:

Living together in community, we don't always agree. Most of you have experienced conflict with classmates, siblings, and other family members. In today's gospel reading Jesus teaches that working through these disagreements is a process that sometimes involves the whole community. Jesus teaches about making peace face to face with another person, and if that

doesn't work, in the company of someone who can help make peace. Connect this peacemaking to when we share the peace with one another during worship - even with those who have wronged us. How and where can you share the peace of God you freely receive outside the church's walls?

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

"Give me a lever and a fulcrum," said the man of science, "and I'll shift the world." Archimedes wasn't talking to God, so his request wasn't granted; and in any case he was only thinking of the material world. But the saints really have enjoyed the privilege he asked for; the fulcrum God told them to use was nothing less than God's self, and the lever was prayer. Only it must be the kind of prayer that sets the heart all on fire with love; that's how the saints shift the world in our own day, and that how they'll do it to the end of time. - Thérèse of Lisieux [Thérèse of Lisieux, Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, trans. Ronald Knox (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1958), 310-311.]

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Next Week's Theme (Sept. 16 & 17): The challenge to forgive

Next Week's Scriptures (Sept. 16 & 17):

First Reading: Genesis 50:15-21

"Joseph reconciles with his brothers."

Psalm: Psalm 103:[1-7] 8-13

"LORD, you are full of compassion and mercy." (Ps. 103:8)

Second Reading: Romans 14:1-12

"Accepting diversity in the community of faith."

Gospel: Matthew 18:21-35

"A parable of forgiveness in the community of faith."