

## **Sunday, June 25, 2023 – Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**

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### **Introduction**

God does not promise that the path of the disciple will be easy. Jeremiah feels the pain of rejection from those who do not want to hear what he has to say. Jesus declares that his words may bring stark division. Even so, we need not be afraid for God accounts for each hair on our heads. Though we may experience rejection, frustration, division, and death, God's grace and love make us a new creation each day. Marked with the cross and filled with holy food, we are sent from worship to witness to Christ in the world.

### **Prayer of the Day**

Teach us, good Lord God, to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask for reward, except that of knowing that we do your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

### **First Reading: Genesis 21:8-21**

*Sarah demands that Abraham send Hagar and her son, Ishmael, away. Abraham is distressed because he is Ishmael's father. Sarah wants to ensure that her son, Isaac, will be the one to inherit God's blessing. God, however, hears Hagar's cry and promises to also make of Ishmael a great nation.*

<sup>8</sup>The child [Isaac] grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. <sup>9</sup>But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. <sup>10</sup>So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." <sup>11</sup>The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. <sup>12</sup>But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. <sup>13</sup>As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." <sup>14</sup>So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

<sup>15</sup>When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. <sup>16</sup>Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. <sup>17</sup>And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. <sup>18</sup>Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." <sup>19</sup>Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

<sup>20</sup>God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. <sup>21</sup>He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

### **Psalm 86:1-10, 16-17**

<sup>1</sup>Bow down your ear, O LORD, and | answer me,  
for I am poor | and in misery.

<sup>2</sup>**Keep watch over my life, for | I am faithful;  
save your servant who | trusts in you.**

<sup>3</sup>Be merciful to me, O Lord, for you | are my God;  
I call upon you all | the day long.

<sup>4</sup>**Gladden the soul | of your servant,  
for to you, O Lord, I lift | up my soul.**

<sup>5</sup>For you, O Lord, are good | and forgiving,  
and abundant in mercy toward all who | call upon you.

<sup>6</sup>**Give ear, O LORD, | to my prayer,  
and attend to the voice of my | supplications.**

<sup>7</sup>In the time of my trouble I will | call upon you,  
for you will | answer me.

<sup>8</sup>**Among the gods there is none like | you, O Lord,  
nor anything | like your works.**

<sup>9</sup>All the nations you have made will come and worship | you, O Lord,  
and glori- | fy your name.

<sup>10</sup>**For you are great; you do | wondrous things;  
and you a- | lone are God.**

<sup>16</sup>Turn to me and have mer- | cy on me;  
give your strength to your servant, and save the child | of your handmaid.

<sup>17</sup>**Show 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 com- | forted me.**

### **Second Reading: Romans 6:1b-11**

*In baptism we were incorporated into the reality of Christ's death and resurrection. We have been made new in Christ through his death and resurrection to live freed from sin.*

<sup>1b</sup>Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup>By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father,

so we too might walk in newness of life.

<sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup>We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. <sup>7</sup>For whoever has died is freed from sin. <sup>8</sup>But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup>We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. <sup>10</sup>The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. <sup>11</sup>So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

### **Gospel: Matthew 10:24-39**

*Jesus warns his disciples that their ministry in his name will meet with opposition. However, he assures them that they need not fear for the truth will come to light. Life is found in Christ.*

[Jesus said to the twelve:] <sup>24</sup>“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; <sup>25</sup>it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

<sup>26</sup>“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. <sup>27</sup>What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. <sup>28</sup>Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup>Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup>And even the hairs of your head are all counted. <sup>31</sup>So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

<sup>32</sup>“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; <sup>33</sup>but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

<sup>34</sup>“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

<sup>35</sup>For I have come to set a man against his father,  
and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

<sup>36</sup>and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.

<sup>37</sup>Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup>and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup>Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

## Prayers of Intercession

Trusting in God's abundant mercy, let us offer our prayers for a world in need, saying "God, in your mercy," and responding, "hear our prayer."

*A brief silence.*

You entice your church to speak truth that challenges false notions of peace. Prevail upon us with the good news of Christ's death and resurrection, that we are compelled to share the gospel with all the world. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Under your watch not even a sparrow goes unnoticed. Safeguard plant and animal habitats threatened by melting glaciers, rising oceans, and receding coastlines. Amplify the voices of those calling for responsible stewardship of the earth's resources. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Our world is enduring violence and destruction. Rescue your people in nations experiencing conflict or crisis (*especially*). Thwart the efforts of those who sow chaos and terror, and guide those working to bring about peace and reconciliation. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You have counted even the hairs of our heads. Reassure anyone experiencing poverty, homelessness, unemployment, or exploitation that every life has value. Look favourably upon all who struggle (*especially*). Answer us, for your steadfast love is good. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Even when we experience rejection your love invites us to new life. Lift up anyone who feels shunned or excluded on account of their gender, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, or any other human distinction. Make your people one. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All who have died with Christ also live with him. We give thanks for (*Philipp Melancthon and*) all the saints whose faithful confession inspired our own discipleship, and raise us, with them, to eternal life. God, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Receive our prayers and answer us, O God, in the name of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

***A reflection for this Fourth Sunday after Pentecost...***

God Comes First

God is, the theologians say, transcendent—beyond us, always exceeding our easy grasp. Recognizing God’s awesome transcendence brings a reevaluation of other values. The God of vertigo-inspiring infinitude is also the God who know the hairs of our head. Trusting this God, fear is defanged and faith becomes a sort of courage. We live in faithful relationship to the hair-counting God as we joyfully “acknowledge” the one who acknowledges us. And as we do so, reveling in the intimacy of God’s loving regard for us, other relationships, even familial ones, take on a different cast. God comes first, we realize, not only in priority, but ontologically, “in the beginning.” Before the God who is at once gracious and transcendent, we “lose” our lives and discover the true life in following the way of Jesus the crucified Son.

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