

**TELL US  A STORY**  
JESUS' POWERFUL PARABLES

**A STORY OF PERPLEXING GENEROSITY**

The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

# **BETHEL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH** | York, Nebraska

*September 24, 2023*

## **SERIES THEME: TELL US A STORY**

Much of what Jesus has to say to you and me is contained within his parables. Parables are simple little stories that contain profound truths about life and eternity. For the believer, a parable takes a challenging spiritual fact and makes it clear. However, since the parable conveys spiritual truth, for someone without faith, the story remains only that—a story. Therefore, our prayer for this worship series is that Christ would send us his Holy Spirit, so that we might receive the peace and power Jesus offers us in his parables. Tell us a story, Jesus!

## **THEME OF THE DAY: A STORY OF PERPLEXING GENEROSITY**

Give a single bag of M&Ms to two four-year-olds and tell them to share. You will witness counting done with accountantlike precision. Each child will get an equal amount of candy because that is fair. Human beings have an incredibly strong sense of fairness. That is why it can be so perplexing when we see how God dispenses blessing and grace. We see people who mock God who are more prosperous than believers. We see people who convert on their deathbed, and Scripture tells us they obtain the same salvation as someone who has been Christian all his life. How is that fair? Through a simple story, Jesus teaches us a profound truth. We need to stop expecting God to be fair. God is not fair. He does not give us what we deserve, and that's called mercy. In fact, he gives us what we don't deserve, and that's called grace. No, God is not fair. He is breathtakingly generous.

**Worship Leader**  
**Organist/Pianist**

Pastor Justin Wilkens  
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## **Acknowledgments**

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## **The Service, Setting One (page 154 in Christian Worship 21)**

### **Hymn: 577 Magnificent, Marvelous, Matchless Love**

*Stand*

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

### **Confession**

*CW 155*

Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

**Blessed are they whose sin the Lord does not count against them.**

Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

**Almighty and merciful Father,**

**we have strayed from your ways like lost sheep.**

**We have followed what we have devised and desired in our hearts.**

**We have offended you and sinned against your holy law.**

**We have done those things that we should not have done,**

**and we have not done those things that we should have done.**

**Have mercy on us, Lord!**

**Spare us, forgive us, and restore us,**

**according to your promises in Christ Jesus.**

*Silence for meditation and reflection*

Our gracious Father in heaven has been merciful to us. He sent his only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit.

**Amen.**

### **Lord, Have Mercy**

*CW 213*

Hear my voice when I call, O Lord; be merciful and answer me.

**Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

# Glory Be to God on High

CW 157



Glory be to God on high, and on earth peace, good will toward men.



We praise you, we bless you, we wor - ship you, we glorify you,



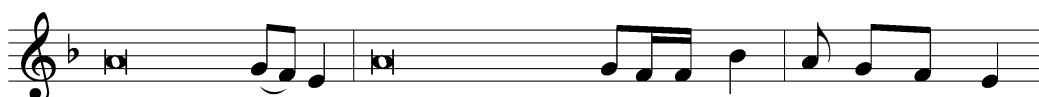
we give thanks to you, for your great glory, O Lord God, heav'n-ly King,



God the Fa-ther Al - mighty. O Lord, the only-begotten Son, Je-sus Christ;



O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sin of the world;



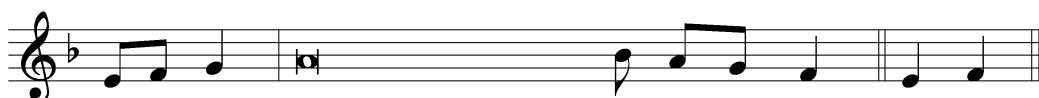
have mercy on us. You take away the sin of the world; re-ceive our prayer.



You sit at the right hand of God the Father; have mercy on us.



For you on-ly are holy; you on-ly are the Lord. You only, O Christ, with the



Ho - ly Spirit, are most high in the glory of God the Father. A - men.

## THE WORD

The Lord be with you.  
**And also with you.**

### Prayer of the Day

Let us pray.

Lord God, you call us to work in your kingdom and promise to reward us according to your grace. Help us to rid our minds of worldly expectations and rejoice that you freely pour out the blessings of salvation to all people; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

*Be seated*

### First Reading

*Jonah 3:10—4:11*

*Jonah is perplexed by the generous forgiveness God showed to the people of Ninevah.*

### Jonah's Anger at the LORD's Compassion

<sup>10</sup>When God saw their actions, that they had turned from their evil way, God relented from the disaster which he said he would bring on them, and he did not carry it out. <sup>1</sup>But to Jonah all this seemed very bad, and he became very angry. <sup>2</sup>He prayed to the Lord, "Lord, wasn't this exactly what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I previously fled to Tarshish, because I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abounding in mercy, and you relent from sending disaster. <sup>3</sup>So now, Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live."

<sup>4</sup>But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

<sup>5</sup>Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city. He made a shelter for himself there and sat in the shade under it, waiting to see what would happen in the city.

<sup>6</sup>Then the Lord God provided a plant and made it grow up over Jonah to provide shade over his head, to relieve him from his discomfort. So Jonah was very happy about the plant. <sup>7</sup>But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, and it attacked the plant so that it withered. <sup>8</sup>When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind. The sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, so he said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

<sup>9</sup>But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

Jonah said, "I do have a right to be angry—angry enough to die!"

<sup>10</sup> So the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant. You did not work for it or make it grow. It grew up in one night and perished after one night. <sup>11</sup> So should I not be concerned for Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left—and also many animals?"

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

## **Second Reading**

*Romans 9:6–16*

*God is perplexingly generous. He shows mercy and grace to those he chooses, regardless of any merit or worth.*

### **God's Choice is Based on His Mercy**

<sup>6</sup> This does not mean that God's word has failed, because not all who are descended from Israel are really Israel, <sup>7</sup> and not all who are descended from Abraham are really his children. On the contrary, "Your line of descent will be traced through Isaac." <sup>8</sup> This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are counted as his descendants. <sup>9</sup> For this is what the promise said: "I will arrive at this set time, and Sarah will have a son." <sup>10</sup> Not only that, but Rebekah also had children by one man, our forefather, Isaac. <sup>11</sup> Even before the twins were born or did anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might continue— <sup>12</sup> not by works but because of him who calls us—it was said to her, "The older will serve the younger." <sup>13</sup> Just as it is written: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

<sup>14</sup> What will we say then? Does this mean that God is unjust? Absolutely not! <sup>15</sup> For God says to Moses:

I will show mercy to whom I show mercy,  
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

<sup>16</sup> So then, it does not depend on human desire or effort, but on God's mercy.

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

*Stand*

## Gospel Acclamation

*Ephesians 2:8*



### Refrain

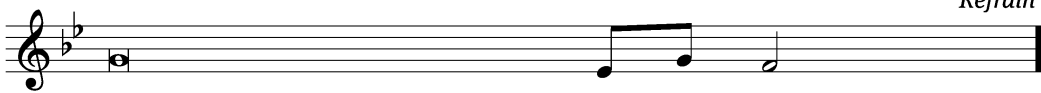


Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

### Tone



For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—



and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.

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## Gospel

*Matthew 20:1–16*

*Jesus tells us a story of God's perplexing generosity.*

### The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

<sup>1</sup> "Indeed the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing to pay the workers a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> He also went out about the third hour and saw others standing unemployed in the marketplace. <sup>4</sup> To these he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will give you whatever is right.' So they went. <sup>5</sup> Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour and did the same thing. <sup>6</sup> When he went out about the eleventh hour, he found others standing unemployed. He said to them, 'Why have you stood here all day unemployed?'

<sup>7</sup> "They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.'

"He told them, 'You also go into the vineyard.'<sup>8</sup> When it was evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the workers and pay them their wages, starting with the last group and ending with the first.'

<sup>9</sup> "When those who were hired around the eleventh hour came, they each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> When those who were hired first came, they thought they would receive more. But they each received a denarius too. <sup>11</sup> After they received it, they began to grumble against the

landowner: <sup>12</sup> 'Those who were last worked one hour, and you made them equal to us who have endured the burden of the day and the scorching heat!'

<sup>13</sup> "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not make an agreement with me for a denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take what is yours and go. I want to give to the last one hired the same as I also gave to you. <sup>15</sup> Can't I do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?' <sup>16</sup> In the same way, the last will be first, and the first, last."

The Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise be to you, O Christ!**

*Be seated*

**Hymn of the Day: 572 Not What My Hands Have Done**

**Sermon**

*Stand*

**Nicene Creed**

**We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is,  
seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one being with the Father.**

**Through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven,  
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,  
and became truly human.**

**For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate.**

**He suffered death and was buried.**

**On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.**



**He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who in unity with the Father and the Son  
is worshiped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

*Be seated*

### **Prayer of the Church**

Almighty God and Father, we thank you for all your mercies, especially for the gift of your Son, through whom you have revealed your gracious will. We praise you for the Holy Spirit and his working through the means of grace.

**Plant your Word in our hearts, and cause it to produce fruit in our lives.**

Strengthen and defend your Church, that by your Word and sacraments faith may grow and love toward all may increase.

**Support all who spread the light of your truth throughout the world.**

Keep our children in the grace of their baptisms. Enable their parents to train them in lives of faith.

**Raise up Christians to serve you in the ministry of the Word and in all godly walks of life.**

Preserve our nation in justice and honor. Guide and bless all who make, administer, and judge our laws.

**Give them wisdom that they may promote justice and hinder evil.**

Let your blessing rest on planting and harvest, commerce and industry, medicine and science, the arts and culture. Protect all who travel, and care for those whose work is difficult or dangerous.

**Be with all who devote themselves to any useful task.**

Comfort all who are in sorrow or need, sickness or adversity, *[especially . . . here name the person and the cause of the petition]*. Remember those who suffer persecution for the faith. Have mercy on those for whom death draws near.

**Grant them your love, and take them into your tender care.**

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

*Silent prayer*

We remember with thanksgiving those who have loved and served you, who now rest from their labors, *[especially . . . here name the person]*. Console those who are mourning or living with sadness.

**Keep us in the true faith, and bring us at last to the joys of heaven.**

Grant us these things, Father, for the sake of Jesus, who died and rose again.

**Amen.**

## **Offering**

**Offering Hymn: 558 Salvation unto Us Has Come**

*sts. 1–2*

## **THE SACRAMENT**

*Stand*

### **Preface**

*CW 165*

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**It is right to give him thanks and praise.**

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who promised that wherever two or three come together in his name, there he is with them to shepherd his flock until he comes again in glory. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

### **Holy, Holy, Holy**

*CW 167*



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord God of heav - en - ly hosts:  
heav'n and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho-san - na, ho -  
san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est. Bless - ed is he,  
bless - ed is he, bless - ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Ho - san - na, ho - san - na, ho - san - na in the high - est.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

We give thanks to you, O God, through your dear Son, Jesus Christ, whom you sent to be our Savior, our Redeemer, and the messenger of your grace. Through him you made all things; in him you are well pleased. He is the incarnate Word, conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of

the Virgin Mary. To fulfill your promises, he stretched out his hands on the cross and released from eternal death all who believe in you.

As we remember Jesus' death and resurrection, we thank you that you have gathered us together to receive your Son's body and blood. Send us your Spirit, unite us as one, and strengthen our faith so that we may praise you in your Son, Jesus Christ. Through him, we glorify and honor you, O God our Father, with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **Lord's Prayer**

**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.**

### **Words of Institution**

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my + body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my + blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always.

**Amen.**

## O Christ, Lamb of God

CW 169

O Christ, Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world;  
have mer-cy on us. O Christ, Lamb of God,  
you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on us.  
O Christ, Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world;  
grant us your peace. A - men.

*Be seated*

### Distribution

**Close Communion** We ask that only those who have previously spoken to our pastor or are members in good standing of this or another WELS or ELS congregation come to Holy Communion today. Our practice of Close Communion (which has been the practice of the Christian Church throughout the ages) is in no way trying to judge anyone's faith. What we are trying to do is follow the Bible's clear teaching (1 Corinthians 11) to first study God's Word together. As we do so, we can share with/review with you what the Lord's Supper is all about. You, then, also have an opportunity to examine what we believe and teach before you come to the Lord's Supper and make a public profession that you agree with what we teach.

**Distribution Hymn: 670 I Come, O Savior, to Your Table**

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;  
**his mercy endures forever.**

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,  
**we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**

We give thanks, almighty God, that you have refreshed us with this saving gift. We pray that through it you will strengthen our faith in you and increase our love for one another. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **Blessing**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and + give you peace.

**Amen.**

**Hymn: 582 Not unto Us**

*sts. 1–2*



## **NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**Today:** 9:30 AM Bible Study and Sunday School, 10:30 AM Worship and Communion

**Sunday:** 9:30 AM Bible Study and Sunday School, 10:30 AM Worship

**CONNECTION CARDS:** Visitors or members with changes in contact information, please fill out a connection card online at [www.bethelyork.com](http://www.bethelyork.com) on the member connect tab or scan this code.



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Personal assisted listening devices are available.

**Given to the Lord:** Attendance: Worship 54, Offerings: Operating: Needed 2,920.37, Given \$2,115.25. **To God be the glory!**

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