

LECTIONARY READINGS & SERMON FOR THE 16TH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST (B), PROPER 20, 24IX2006
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF SAINT JAMES THE APOSTLE / BROQUE, PENNSYLVANIA
10:00, ANTE-COMMUNION LITURGY, LBW SETTING 2
Jeremiah 11:18-20, Psalm 54, James 3:13 - 4:3, 7-8a, Mark 9:30-37

J. J. !

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, our Teacher and Guide, You Who draw us to Yourself and welcome us as Your beloved children, help us to lay aside all envy and selfish ambition, that we may walk in Your ways of wisdom and understanding as servants of Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, whom with You and the Holy Spirit we worship and praise, one God, now and forever.
AMEN.

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Jeremiah 11:18-20

11:18 It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew; then you showed me their evil deeds.

11:19 But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!"

11:20 But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously, who try the heart and the mind, let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

¹⁸ *It was our God, Yahweh, who showed me what was going on. God opened my eyes to what the people were doing to me. ¹⁹ I was being treated like a pet lamb led trustingly to the butcher's slaughter house. I had no idea that they were plotting against me and saying these things about me:*

"Let's chop down this tree while the sap is still in it."

They were also saying about me:

"Let's cut him off from the land of the living."

And that meant:

"Let's kill him!"

And also they were saying to one another:

"Then his name will be totally erased and forgotten forever."

²⁰ *So I prayed this prayer: "O God of the heavenly armies, most righteous Judge, You Who look into people's thoughts and feelings, I am placing my cause in Your hands; I turn to You for justice."*

And God said:

"I'll take care of it."

Psalm 54

54:1 Save me, O God, by your name, and vindicate me by your might.

54:2 Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth.

54:3 For the insolent have risen against me, the ruthless seek my life; they do not set God before them. Selah

54:4 But surely, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life.

54:5 He will repay my enemies for their evil. In your faithfulness, put an end to them.

54:6 With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good.

54:7 For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies.

¹ Save me, O God, by the power of Your **hó**ly name;*
by Your awesome might **defénd** my cause.

² Hear my **práyer**, O God;*
Listen to what **Í** am saying!

³ Thinking that they are better than I am,
there are people trying **hárd** to hurt me;*
cruel people tormenting me to death,
people who do not have fearsome **respéct** for God.

⁴ But God comes to **bé** my Helper;*
Yahweh is **mÿ** defender.

⁵ Their wickedness will **dó** them in;*
faithful Yahweh **will** destroy them.

⁶ I will gladly offer You my **wórship**, O God;*
I will praise You, because You **áre** so good.

⁷ Yes, God rescues me from **áll** my troubles;*
God shows me the defeat **óf** my enemies.

James 3:13 - 4:3, 7-8a

3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom.

3:14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.

3:15 Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish.

3:16 For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.

3:17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.

3:18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

4:1 Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you?

4:2 You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask.

4:3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

4:7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

4:8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

¹³ If you are indeed wise and full of understanding, then you will show it by always doing the right thing. **And you will live a life of gentleness coupled with good common sense.** ¹⁴ But don't let me hear you talking about your "wisdom" and "goodness", if your heart is full of bitterness and self-seeking ambition. **That would be living a lie.** ¹⁵ That's not God's kind of heavenly wisdom. Rather, attitudes of jealousy and bitter rivalry – **that's earthly and animal-like and demonic.**

¹⁶ Where there is envy and bitter rivalry and self-seeking ambition, there will also be disharmony and evil behavior of every kind. ¹⁷ But the wise maturity that comes from God will first of all demonstrate genuineness. **Then it will be peace-loving and considerate.** Wise maturity shows an openness for discussion, and it is always full of compassion, as it produces a harvest of good deeds. **Also with wise maturity there is no insincerity and no prejudice.** ¹⁸ And those who strive for peace go on quietly planting the seeds of harmony, **reaping a full harvest of good deeds and good feelings.**

^{4:1} Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? They come from unhealthy cravings doing battle inside each one of you. ² When you want something that you don't have, – you even think of murder to get it. (**Who, me?**) When you want something that someone else has, and you cannot obtain it yourself, that's when you start fighting to get it away from the person who has it. (**Are you talking about me?**)

Now, do you want to know why you don't have certain things? (**Yeah, why?**) Because you don't pray to God for them! That's why! (**Wait a minute, I ask God for things!**) ³ But when you do ask God for things, and you don't get them, it's because you ask for the wrong reason – just to satisfy your own unhealthy cravings. (**I have unhealthy cravings?**)

⁴ You are like unfaithful spouses who cheat on their partners. Aren't you aware that being a friend of sinful pleasures is being an enemy of God, – that you are thus cheating on God? ⁵ Do you doubt the Bible when it says: "**Like a jealous spouse, God yearns for the spirit that God has implanted in each one of us.**" ⁶ And at the same time God continues to give us more and more of the strength of God's grace. That's why Scripture says: "**God despises the arrogant** (those who think they don't need the strength of God's grace); **but to those who are humble** (the folks who know they need the strength of God's grace) **God provides that grace most abundantly.**"

Mark 9:30-37

9:30 They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it;

9:31 for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again."

9:32 But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

9:33 Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?"

9:34 But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

9:35 He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all."

9:36 Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them,

9:37 "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

³⁰ *Jesus went on with his disciples from the area of the Mount of Trans-figuration and passed through Galilee, but he did not want others to know where he was, ³¹ **because he wanted to spend time teaching his disciples.***

*Jesus told his disciples: "**The Son of Humanity will soon be betrayed into human hands, and He will be killed.**" Then Jesus said: "**Then three days later, He will rise again from the dead.**" ³² *But the disciples did not understand what Jesus was trying to teach them, and they were afraid to ask him; **but they argued about it among themselves.****

³³ *When they arrived at Capernaum and were in the house there, Jesus asked his disciples: "**What were you arguing about along the way?**" ³⁴ *But they just hung their heads and didn't answer, because one of the things they were arguing about was who among them was the most important. ³⁵ So Jesus sat down and called the disciples to himself, along with others who were in the house. Then Jesus began to do some more teaching. He said: "**If anyone wants to be 'number 1' in this group, then that person must become a servant to all the others.**" ³⁶ Then Jesus reached out to bring a small child into the setting. He picked up the child and held it his arms. ³⁷ Then Jesus said to all his listeners: "**Whoever is accepting of a small child like this, out of regard for me, that person is accepting me.**" Jesus then continued: "**And whoever accepts me, is really accepting God, the One who sent me.**"**

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come. ☩ Amen.

Then he took a little child and put it among
them, and taking it in his arms, he said to
them:

Whoever welcomes one such child in my name
welcomes me. And whoever welcomes me
welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

--Mark 9:36,37

The true Church of Jesus Christ, one, holy catholic
and apostolic in her teaching, in her preaching and in her
life, has always distinguished herself by welcoming *all*
people and by welcoming *especially* those whom others
might dismiss, ignore or simply overlook. In the ancient
world, long, long before Madison Avenue and its discovery
of the child as among the most important of consumers in
a society based on consumption, children, along with

women, slaves, the sick and the physically or mentally crippled, were considered as the least of the least important, *unless*, of course, they stood in succession to the throne of a powerful realm.

The irony of today's Gospel from Mark, when seen against the backdrop of the Holy Infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke and the cosmic statement about Who Jesus truly is in John, is that Our Lord was just one such unimportant child, seemingly born to unimportant parents, the dust of the earth. And yet, it is as a Child that Almighty God begins to take back the throne of glory that belongs to Him and Him alone in the hearts of us sinners. The Early Church welcomed children, and the true Church of Christ welcomes them today, not as consumers of religious goods, not even, as is so often said, as 'the future

of the Church,' but rather as the image of the Living God among us *now!*

The Evangelical Lutheran Church, meaning, the Church based on the Good News of our peace with God through Jesus Christ, the Church purified through the crucible of the Catholic Reformation led by Martin Luther and guided by that movement's spirit and confession of faith, this Evangelical Lutheran Church has for half a thousand years and in every place welcomed children. She has welcomed children as she welcomes Christ, for she sees Him in them, and rightly so.

She welcomes them by thanking God for the gift of children and by standing by parents in whatever their circumstances may be. The Lutheran Church welcomes children as fellow members of the Body of Christ at the font of Holy Baptism, not through some preliminary

right of dedication to be ratified later one but through an unrepeatable act of the Triune God whereby the action of the Holy Spirit joining the new Christian to the life of the Congregation and of the entire Mystical Body of Christ's Church is accomplished in obedience to Our Lord's command, by water and the Word of God. The Church welcomes children as their spiritual Mother by nurturing them in the faith of their early years, by assisting parents and Godparents in this role through Christian education in the home and congregational setting and, above all, by welcoming them into the family fellowship of the Sacred Liturgy in which they may hear, see, smell and sing the drama of salvation as it is played out to all their senses. Children are never seen as a distraction or disturbance to this assembly, but as part of the vitality of this living and growing family of faith. They grow up soon enough and,

just as we experience around our own dinner tables, silence will settle forever where they once squawked in the glee of discovery at almost everything, or, later, could not wait to tell us about their day or their latest bright idea.

The Lutheran Church welcomes children. This congregation welcomes children. Our Sunday School stands ready to receive them. Thanks be to God, there is a small cadre of children and parents with whom our dedicated Sunday School teachers are able to work. I have been ready *for years* to welcome my next two-year class of Confirmands. Services of worship in which children take a special part are blessed times, but there are far too few of those times for us to remember.

Where are the children in whom Christ teaches us to welcome *Him* and the Heavenly Father Who sent Him? Do parents need to be reminded that they,

too, are called to be a living part of the Church, that they, too, are called to be living members of the Church and to do their part to enable their children to receive the welcome of the Church for Jesus' sake? Apparently they do, and I hope that our stewardship visitors will stress with parents and grandparents that this Church is a community in which those children we seldom see are welcome *always*, and most especially during the years of their spiritual formation.

The Episcopal Church has a newspaper ad campaign that uses wry humor and irony to chide Christian parents for abdicating their responsibility toward their children. The Easter ad in this series is my favorite. A photo shows an Easter basket filled with jelly beans and a stuffed Easter Bunny. The caption reads: "Does Easter mean beans to your kids?" Responsibility for following through

on the promises made at Holy Baptism lie squarely with the parents and Godparents who made those promises before God and the Church. I doubt that Our Lord will ask athletic coaches on the Last Day about their practice and game schedules—though that possibility is not to be excluded—but I have *no* doubt that that question will be posed to those to whom the lives of the young have been entrusted. That is something to think about before entrusting their entire Christian nurture to Frosty the Snowman and the Easter Bunny. ☩Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. ☩Amen.



S. D. G. !