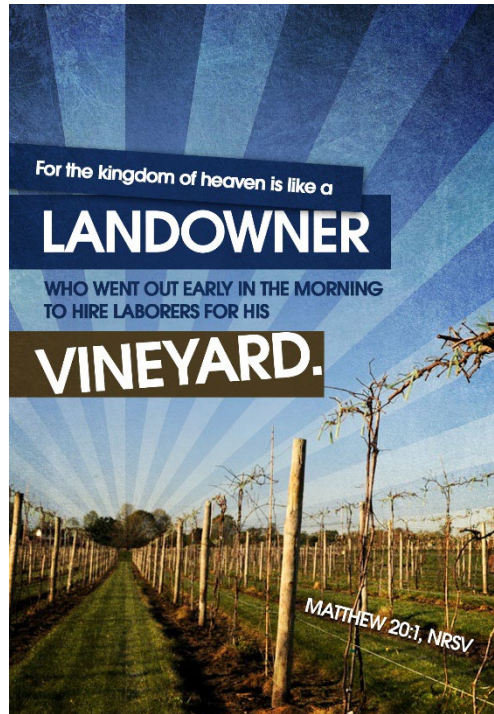


The Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, September 20, 2026
9:30 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion



"Be and Make Disciples of Jesus Christ"

Grace Lutheran Church

111 Lutheran Drive, P.O. Box 86, Eaton, Ohio 45320

937.456.6258

Email: GraceEaton111@gmail.com

Website: www.gracelutheranofeaton.com

Pastor Dwight Hanson

WELCOME TO WORSHIP!

Please take a moment to fill out the “Attendance & Communion” Registration Cards (located in the pew racks). Pass your card to the end of your pew.

P - Presiding Minister; A - Assisting minister; **C - Congregation;**

* - Please Stand

LBW - Green Hymnal

WOV - Blue Hymnal

Please silence electronic devices.

PRELUDE

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

***CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS:**

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

C Amen.

P Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid:

C Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

P If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

C But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Please kneel or sit as you are able.

P Most merciful God,

C we confess that we are in bondage to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen

P Almighty God, in his mercy, has given his Son to die for us and, for his sake, forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the Church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen

***PEACE:**

P The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C And also with you.

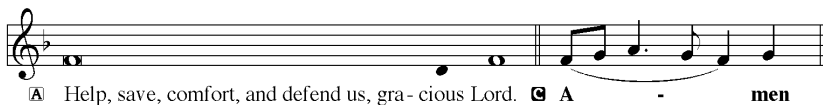
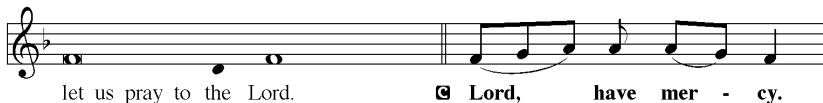
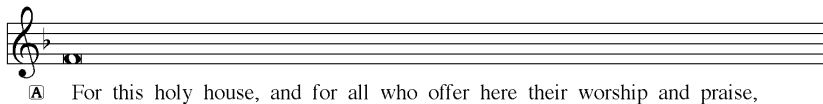
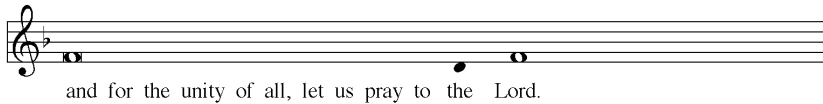
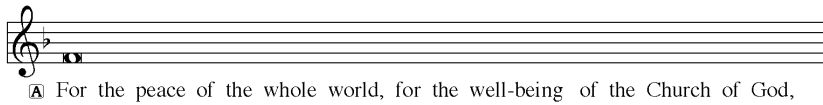
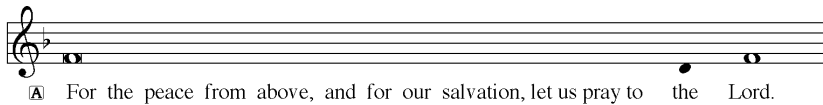
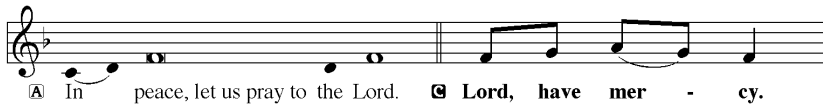
***GATHERING SONG: “Lord of All Hopefulness” (LBW 469)**

***GREETING:**

P The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

C And also with you.

***KYRIE:**



*HYMN OF PRAISE:



Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.



Lord God, heavenly king, almighty God and Father:



We worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.



Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God:



You take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.



You are seated at the right hand of the Father; receive our prayer.



For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord,

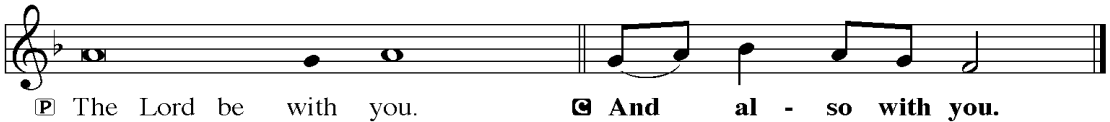


you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,



in the glory of God the Father. Amen

*PRAYER OF THE DAY:



- P Let us pray: Steadfast God, you are slow to anger and your mercy endures forever. We all stand in your presence as beggars, completely undeserving of your mercy and grace. Awaken in us such a sense of gratitude that our own lives may reflect your overflowing generosity;
- C **through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 55:6-9

A A reading from Isaiah:

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

A The Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM: 27:1-9

A ¹The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?

C **²When evildoers came upon me to eat up my flesh, it was they, my foes and my adversaries, who stumbled and fell.**

A ³Though an army should encamp against me, yet my heart shall not be afraid;

C **⁴And though war should rise up against me, yet will I put my trust in him.**

A ⁵One thing have I asked of the LORD; one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life;

C 6To behold the fair beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

A 7For in the day of trouble he shall keep me safe in his shelter; he shall hide me in the secrecy of his dwelling and set me high upon a rock.

C 8Even now he lifts up my head above my enemies round about me.

A 9Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation with sounds of great gladness; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

SECOND READING: Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30

A A reading from Philippians:

¹²I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, ¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

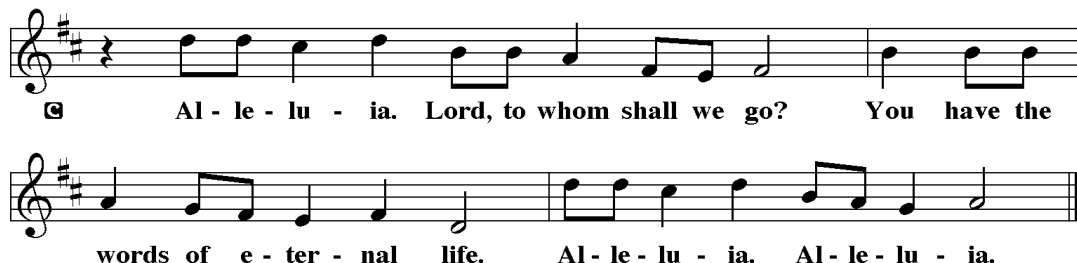
¹⁹... {F}or I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. ²⁷Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should

not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

A The Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

***VERSE:**



***HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 20:1-16**

P The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the twentieth chapter.



¹{Jesus said,} “For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ ⁵So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. ⁶And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ ⁷They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ ⁸And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ ⁹And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. ¹⁰Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but

P The Gospel of the Lord.



(Find Sermon on the last pages of the bulletin.)

***APOSTLES' CREED:**

8

THE PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH:

A Let us pray: Let us pray: Heavenly Father, inspire us to answer the call to work in your vineyard, as the Word bears fruit among the nations. By the power of the Holy Spirit, make us effective in these labors. Give us such joy at the harvest that we set aside all concerns about who worked the longest, focusing instead on the simple privilege of serving. And move our hearts to remember that you have provided for us by the labors of previous generations. Lord in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A Pour out the Holy Spirit on the whole Christian Church. Inspire us to be mission-driven. Bless our denomination, so that we may be a blessing to others. Continue to guide Bishop Selbo and staff, our Mission District, NALC Disaster Response, and our outreach partners: Military Veterans and Families Ministries; Abundant Grace of West Chester; Chris, Emily and family and the World Mission Prayer League; and other helpful organizations within our community and throughout the world. Lord, in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A We pray, O Lord, for the needs of the world. We begin by thanking you for the many blessings that are so easily taken for granted—our homes, families, churches, Sunday schools, communities and schools, and the abundant fruitfulness of nature. Strengthen us in all that is wholesome and good. Inspire neighborliness across the land as a way of life. Watch over civil servants at every level. Guide them according to your will. And protect all who serve with honor in harm's way, and their families. Lord, in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A We pray to you on behalf of all who need healing: **In their grief:** *The family of Suzie Dell at the death of her father, Claude Dixon. The*

Katherine & Sharon Tipton family at the passing of Sharon's aunt/Katherine's sister, Diane Wick.

In praise to God: *Chris-* After 5 years, he received a liver transplant!

For healing prayer: *Kelly Coffman, Jim Courtney, Tiffany Daugherty, Katie Morrison, Vert Hallahan, Becky Haws, Amy & Bryan Jackson, Linda Lambert, Richard Lehman, Allan Ludwick, Britt McKanna, Mary Nossaman, Iva-Laura Sherry, Jackie Steiner, Mike & Barb Studebaker, Wayne Williams,* as well as those whom we name in our hearts (pause for additional names). Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray,

C Trusting in your mercy, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING

ANTHEM: *“This One Thing I Ask of the Lord” (Choir)*

***OFFERTORY RESPONSE:**



Let the vine - yards be fruit - ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our
cup of bless - ing. Gath - er a har - vest from the
seeds that were sown, that we may be fed with the bread of life.
Gath - er the hopes and the dreams of all; u - nite them with the
prayers we of - fer now. Grace our ta - ble with your
pres - ence, and give us a fore - taste of the feast to come.

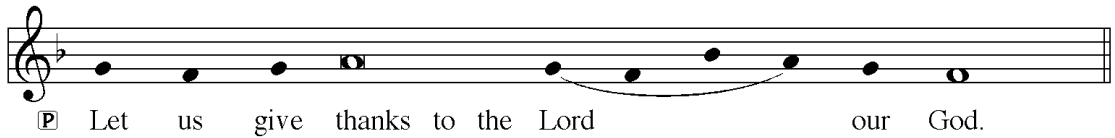
***OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

P Let us pray. Merciful Father,

C we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us—our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

GREAT THANKSGIVING:

***PREFACE:**



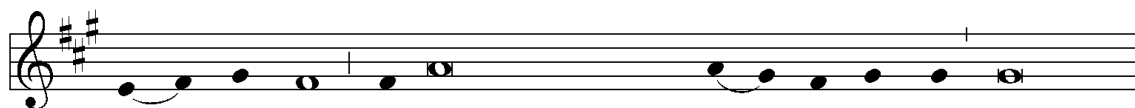
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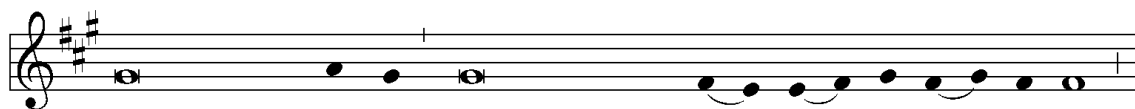
It is indeed right and sal - u - tar - y that we should at all times and in all



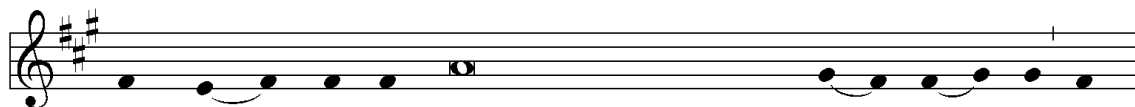
places offer thanks and praise to you, O Lord, ho - ly Fa - ther, through



Christ our Lord; who on this day overcame death and the grave, and by his



glorious resur - rec - tion opened to us the way of ev - er - last - ing life.

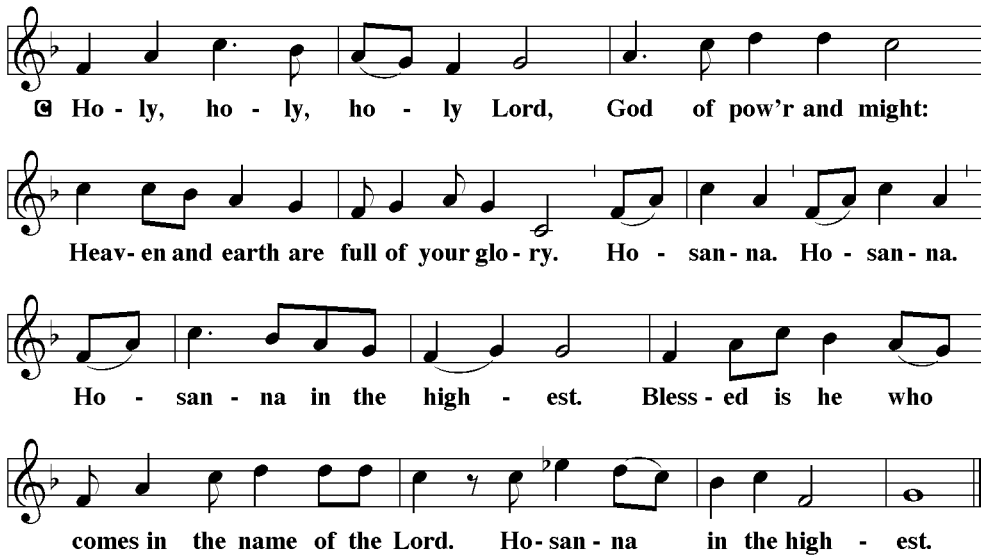


And so, with the Church on earth and the hosts of heav - en, we



praise your name and join their un - end - ing hymn:

***HOLY, HOLY, HOLY:**



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow'r and might:
Heav- en 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 who
comes in the name of the Lord. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

***WORDS OF INSTITUTION:**

P In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks; broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

***LORD'S PRAYER:**

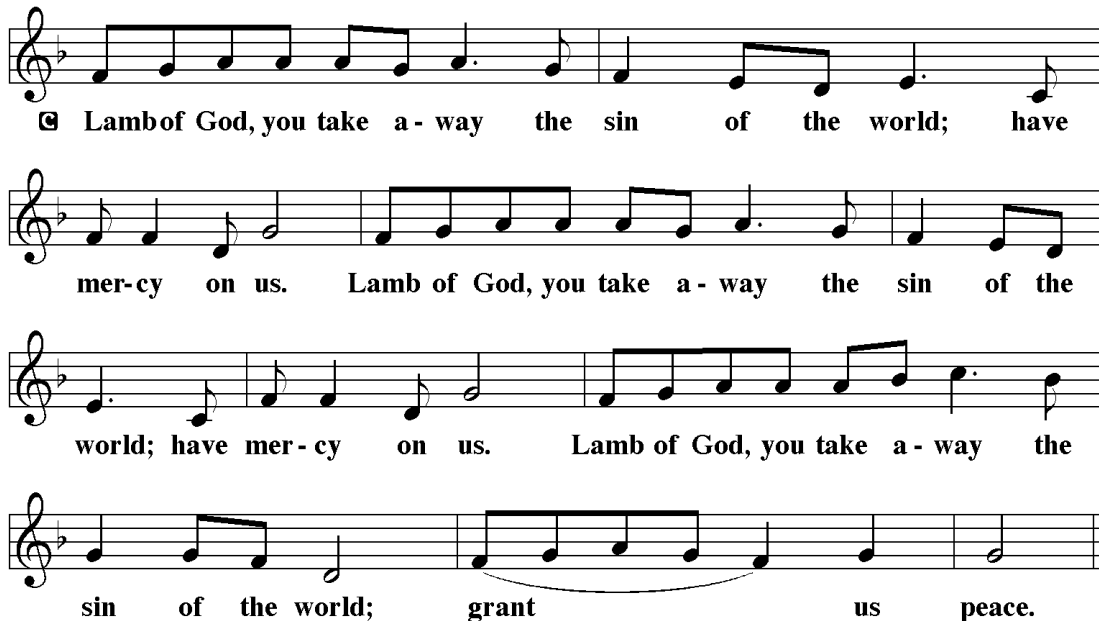
C **Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION & BLESSING OF CHILDREN

In Holy Communion our Lord Jesus graciously invites those who have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to repent of all that separates us from God, and to receive his sacred and real presence for the forgiveness of sins. In addition to wine, grape juice is also offered. Children who do not yet receive Communion may receive a blessing.

Holy Communion will be received at the communion rail.

COMMUNION HYMNS: *“Lamb of God”*



“We Give Thee but Thine Own” (LBW 410)

“O Jesus, I have Promised” (LBW 503)

“In Thee Is Gladness” (LBW 552)

*POST-COMMUNION PRAYER:

P The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.

C Amen.

***POST-COMMUNION CANTICLE:**



C Thank the Lord and sing his praise; tell ev-'ry-one what he has done.



Let all who seek the Lord re - joice and proud-ly bear his name.



He re - calls his prom - is - es and leads his peo - ple forth in joy with



shouts of thanks - giv - ing. Al - le - lu - ia. Al - le - lu - ia.

***PRAYER:**

P Let us pray. Pour out upon us the spirit of your love, O Lord, and unite the wills of those whom you have fed with one heavenly food;

C through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

***BLESSING:**



P Almighty God, Father, ✠ Son,
and Holy Spirit, bless you now . . . and for - ever.

C A - men

***SENDING HYMN: “All Creatures of Our God and King” vs. 1,2, 5,7
(LBW 527)**

***DISMISSAL:**

P Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

GRACE AT A GLANCE

Grace Lutheran Church

111 Lutheran Dr., P.O. Box 86 - Eaton, OH 45320
Phone: 937-456-6258 Email: GraceEaton111@gmail.com
www.gracelutheranofeaton.com ~~ Like us on Facebook

OFFICE HOURS:

Monday -Friday: 10—1, 2—5

TODAY September 20, 2026—17th Sunday after Pentecost

9:30 a.m. Worship with Holy Communion (Choir Sings)
10:30 a.m. Fellowship & Adult Education — Lessons of the Day
10:30 a.m. Youth Sunday School Resumes

Monday September 21

 Pastor's Day Off
9:45 a.m. Choose to Lose

Tuesday September 22

Wednesday September 23

9:00 a.m. Bible Study
5:30 p.m. Confirmation Overview Meeting (FH)
6:30 p.m. Choir Rehearsal

Thursday September 24

7:00 p.m. AA Meeting

Friday September 25

12:30 p.m. Bulletin Production

Saturday September 26

UPCOMING WEEK SPECIAL EVENTS

Sun 9/27—Worship, Fellowship, Adult Education, Youth Sunday School, Sunday S'mores
Mon. 9/28—Pastor Off, Choose to Lose
Tues. 9/29—
Wed. 9/30—Bible Study
Thurs. 10/1—AA Meeting
Fri. 10/2— Bulletin Production; Sat. 10/3- Men of Grace @ Bob Evans

WORSHIP ASSISTANTS

Altar Guild for September: Elaine Fudge

Altar Guild for October: Debbie McKinney, Lisa Kiracofe

Offering Counter for September: Patty Barnes

Offering Counter for October: Wanda Winter

Sunday, September 20 – Pentecost 17

9:30 a.m.

Greeter: Jeff & Lisa Kiracofe

Usher: Jeff Kiracofe

Lector: Tiffany Ingram

Communion: Nancy Childs, Carol Perry

Acolyte: Jessa Barnes

Sunday, September 27—Pentecost 18

9:30 a.m.

Greeter: John & Janice Barnes

Usher: John & Janice Barnes

Lector: Mary Shetter

Acolyte: Sophia Steiner

Sunday, October 4 – Pentecost 19

9:30 a.m.

Greeter: Daren & Karen Marshall

Usher: John Kiracofe

Lector: Debbie McKinney

Communion: Mike Schamel, Wanda Winter

Acolyte: Jessa Barnes

Attendance & Stewardship (\$4,187 needed wkly.)

9/13/2026

72

\$ 3,930.48

Great Commission Outreach Partners: World mission Prayer League – Chris & Emily & family, Lutheran Military Veterans and Families, Abundant Grace, West Chester

Grace Lutheran Mission Endowment Fund: The purpose of this fund is to extend the ministry of Grace Lutheran Church, apart from the general operation of the congregation. To learn more about our Mission Endowment Fund, please contact the church office and we'll give your question to the appropriate person.



Sunday S'mores for Middle & High Schoolers

September 27th at 6:00 p.m.

We'll meet at the fire ring. Bring a friend!

Kindling wood is needed to help start the fire.

COMING IN SEPTEMBER

Grace Lutheran Sunday School Fall Schedule

Mark your calendars now! Friends or drop-ins' welcome!

Fall Sunday School Special Events for kids:

September 20: ** Regular classes begin

October 18: Pumpkin Patch Festival

November 8: Thankful Breakfast/Pageant Practice

November 29: No Sunday School (Thanksgiving weekend)

Worship Service at 9:30 a.m.

Youth Sunday School every Sunday (10:30-11:15 a.m.)

Questions? Call the church office (937) 456-6258.

**Regular Sunday School begins on 9/20. Classes are after worship, starting around 10:30 a.m., and are held in the Education wing. We begin with live music and go to an adjacent classroom for our lesson after that. Parents or grandparents are always welcome to sit in on classes. Friends or drop-ins are welcome too!



The flowers on the altar this morning are given to the Glory of God by Martha Good-Ernst and the Stoffregen family in Memory of Paul Stoffregen.

IN OUR PRAYERS

After 4 weeks we will remove names from this list. If you would like to keep someone on the list, please note their name on the back of the "Attendance & Communion Registration" form.

URGENT PRAYER LIST:

GRIEVING: *The family of Suzie Dell at the death of her father, Claude Dixon. The Katherine & Sharon Tipton family at the passing of Sharon's aunt/Katherine's sister, Diane Wick.*

HEALING: (In Alphabetical Order)

Chris (friend of the Mt. Castle's – After 5 years, he received a kidney transplant! Praise God!)

Kelly Coffman: (Undergoing more heart tests with an adjustment to heart medications)

Jim Courtney: (A young father battling Stage 4 melanoma)

Tiffany Daugherty: (As she undergoes testing)

Katie Morrison: (Neice of Mary & Dean Shetter – prayers for God's healing as she deals with very difficult health issues)

Vert Hallahan: (Father of friend of Shetter's – in need of healing prayer)

Becky Haws: (Friend of Janet Burkett—Prayers for healing)

Amy & Bryan Jackson: (for comfort and healing)

Linda Lambert: (She fell and hurt her back)

Richard Lehman: (Rehabbing at RIO (Rehabilitation Institute of Ohio) in Dayton)

Allan Ludwick: (From Darryl & Teresa Leyes)

Britt McKanna: (Karen & Dan Schultz's brother-in-law – he has been moved from hospital to home and is under hospice care - asking for God's perfect peace)

Mary Nossaman: (Barb Myers' sister – in the hospital with intestinal issues)

Iva-Laura Sherry: (She has a vitreous detachment – referring to the eye - Doctor's are watching closely)

Jackie Steiner: (Healing from a fall)

Mike & Barb Studebaker: (Mike: dealing with health issues; Barb: recovering from surgery for leg fracture).

Wayne Williams: (Nephew of Karen Schaeff & cousin of Adam – he is beginning radiation therapy for cancer)

LONG-TERM PRAYER LIST: Charlie, Tracy, Jim Carlisle, Dave O'Shea, George & Barb Suggs, Mark & Jary Tannehill, Jackie Steiner, Connie Martin, Maggie Risko, Rhonda Paige Atkinson, Amy & Bryan Jackson, Andy Proeschel, Judy Newkirk, Mike & Judy Schamel, Suzan Pauley, Carmen Hasdorff, Tom Schamel, Amanda & Shayla Dell, Fran Kester, Teddi & Mike Watkins, Jenifer Combs, Doug Davis, Pastor Dean & Sandy Haferman, Dave Brumbaugh, Scot Emig, Barbara Worley, Carolyn MacFadyen, Judy Jay, Will Suggs, Earl House, Barbara Lakes, Becky Hoskins, Kayli Johnson, Joe McHenry, Tom Barnes: and those serving in the military: Maj. Love Hartman; Brad Newkirk; Lt. Col. Kyle Hundley, Travis Deck & family

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY:

Fellowship & Education

Following Worship—Refreshments for all are served in the Fellowship Hall immediately following worship on Sundays.

- **Youth Sunday School classes** meet @ **10:30 a.m.** — Sunday School resumes this morning in the music room (Education wing) and starts with songs and prayer, then they move to the adjacent classroom for the lesson. Bring a friend! Parents are always welcome.
- **Adult Education**— Following 9:30 a.m. worship, the adults meet to discuss the lessons of the day unless there is a theme. Coffee and snacks provided.
- **Every other Sunday— Sunday S'mores @ 6:00 p.m.**—A Middle School & High School-aged Youth Sunday Evening Ministry. Friends are welcome. Tina Ebright is the moderator, and she can be reached at 937-472-5663.

Adult Bible Studies (during the week)

- **The 2nd Monday of each Month — 6:30 p.m.—The Phoebe Women's Bible Study.** They have resumed the study — **Discerning the Voice of God** by Priscilla Shirer. Contact Kelly Mt. Castle (937-336-1223 or kelly.mtcastle@gmail.com).
- **The 2nd Tues. of each month — 5:30 p.m. FOR MOMS . . .** They are doing a study called **Boundaries** .
- **The Wednesday Morning Prayer & Bible Study — 9:00 a.m.** — meets in the Meeting Room adjacent to the Fellowship Hall. They are studying the **New Testament Gospel of Matthew**.
- **The 3rd Thursday of each month — 2:00-4:00 p.m. — “Graceful Fiber Guild”** — **meets** in the Fellowship Hall or the adjacent meeting room. Bring a craft you've been working on or just come to learn a new craft. Everyone is welcome to join us! Our next meeting is ***Thurs., October 15th*** .

These studies are open to any member and our friends. No prior Bible study background is needed. Please bring your Bible.

17th Sunday after Pentecost; 9/20/2026; Grace Lutheran Church; Pastor Dwight Hanson

Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 27:1-13; Philippians 1:12-14, 19-30; Matthew 20:1-16

Children's message: Have you noticed that mornings are staying darker longer? That's how the seasons work. But last I checked, kids like the light of day. Better for playing. Well, children of God also love the Light. Where do we find it? "The Lord is my Light" (Psalm 27:1). You know the song, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." God is the one who gave you that Light. Shine for Him. Let's pray...

Which One Thing?

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

From Psalm 27, "*One thing have I asked of the Lord; one thing I seek*" (vs. 5a; LBW version). The words are attributed to King David, probably late in his life. What must he have gone through in order to have his desires and longings sifted and shaped into a single request? And what a request it was: To live in the presence of God all the days of his life. *From* that presence every blessing would flow, measured out and granted according to wisdom far beyond the thoughts of man.

The Psalm calls for reflection. If we had to narrow matters down, how could we put it any better than today's verse? All things would fall into perspective, led by a simple request of the heart, to be with God in person *and* in purpose.

Also from the Psalm, notice that David was *asking* and *seeking*. These are humble words. They stand out as we hear them centuries later in an age of impatience and frustration. Can you imagine if someone tried to translate this Psalm passage according to today's spirit-of-the-times?

One thing have I demanded of the Lord; one thing I fully expect; that I get exactly what I want, when I want it. We'd better stick with the original.

The one real thing involves a desire to “*dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,*” trusting that God knows best. After all, by the undeserved love and transforming grace of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we've been welcomed as children of the Heavenly Father.

So far, so good. But remember, it doesn't take long in this fallen world for something really clear to slip, almost imperceptibly by degrees. Look at the harvest workers from today's Gospel reading. They were doing well, working fruitfully in the master's vineyard. But something happened in their minds by the end of the day that perhaps wasn't there at the start, a cooling shift in their attitude. Perhaps *their* translation had become: *One thing I seek—justice!* And there was a grain of truth to it.

Some of them had labored all day. When they saw that the *late-comers* were getting the amount that had been promised to each of *them*, it didn't take much for their minds to start calculating compound interest. But is that what they had been told? No. It was just a growing assumption, that hardened into an expectation. “*Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled...*” (Mt. 20:10-11a).

There's an important little phrase in that verse—“*they thought.*” What was the “one thing” on their mind? This world's rules of fairness, the letter of the law. Here we need to remember that the parable Jesus told spoke of “*the kingdom of heaven*” (Mt. 20:1a). Would you really want the Almighty to examine the ledger of your whole life and give you only what you've got coming? Perhaps mercy is beginning to sound better.

Live long enough, and read Scripture thoroughly enough, and you'll be grateful for the godly wisdom of our first lesson: "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts*" (Isaiah 55:9). Why wouldn't we trust the One who knows everything better than ourselves? Could it be that when we peel away all the outer layers of sin, at its core is a rebellious desire to be God? Against this very tendency, the master of the house in the Gospel parable stated matters quite plainly: "*Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me*" (Mt. 20:15a)? Who's really in charge?

Still, those Johnny-come-lately workers got the full wage, as if they'd done an equal amount of work! Something about it remains outrageously unsatisfying. I'm guessing that this is precisely why Jesus told it. It sticks with us, getting under the skin. Somewhere, buried deep, is a sense of entitlement. Only the sharp edge of the Word of God can dig out such entrenched roots. And when God's work on you is done, you'll be able to join in the longing of the Psalm, "*This one thing.*"

Every generation of Christians needs to feel the tension of this parable, the troubling math at the end of the day. Perhaps we remember the simple rules of elementary school. No budging in line. And when running laps, there should be no cutting of the corners. A sense of fairness shows up early and often in our human experience, and it doesn't really go away. In fact, it's a key component of a proper sense of justice. But can it be misapplied?

Was there an actual injustice done in the parable? The master of the house cheated no one. Then why the lingering bad taste? It must have been because the master was generous: "*do you begrudge my generosity?*"

So the last will be first, and the first last” (Mt. 20:15b-16). He wronged no one. But try telling that to the ones with the sore muscles and backs.

The heavenly fact is that God will treat everyone well who enters into the vineyard’s labor, whether early or late. There’s no problem in any of that for God, only in very human minds. But that brings us back to that question of whether we really want God to deal with us only according to justice. The flood in the days of Noah was based on solid justice. It was mercy that stopped it in favor of a different way to handle the sinful rebellion that had crept into the hearts of human beings.

What a difference it makes to look at things through the understanding that our very existence is part of God’s mercy, a gift. What if those early workers had been delighted simply to contribute to the work of the master’s vineyard? What if they had lined the way for the newcomers, pleased by their surprise as recipients of generosity?

There’s joy in working side-by-side with each other. Participation in the redemptive mission of God’s Son is a reward unto itself. It’s ultimately meaningful. When God’s people pull together, treat each other well, worship and serve and give God the glory, there’s a different kind of harvest, the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The point today strikes at the sneaky heart of a powerful idolatry. Yes, in *this* life, the rules need to be monitored. But remember, there are two kingdoms that need to be distinguished. Be careful about applying the rules here below to the blessed realm above. As we’ve already concluded, if God operated purely by merit to welcome people into the everlasting Kingdom, the only one walking through those gates would be the Son.

When we handle this matter properly, God's grace shines above all else. Gratitude begins to crowd out pettiness.

Furthermore, when it comes to the Kingdom, how could it be cut into larger and smaller payments? We all get the full blessing of the presence of God, with all its benefits. No luxury boxes in the new creation!

Now, just in case there's still any lingering sense of injustice over this whole parable, let me share a final conviction: *We are the latecomers to the vineyard!* Look at it historically. Have we not had it easier in our land of religious freedom than most Christians throughout time? Did they not bear the heat of the day under blistering pressure and persecution?

Look at St. Paul from our second lesson, with all that he went through. It was so hard that he was ready to go home to God. But he also knew the purpose of his labors, that it was on behalf of others. See how the desire was being shaped: *"I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith"* (Philippians 1:25). The blessed fruit of that vineyard labor has come down to us. We are the recipients of faithfulness lived out generations ago, and handed down by faithfulness all along the way.

We are the receivers. Now, listen again, as the words take on a different tone: *"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me"* (Mt. 20:15a)? God chooses to bless you, freely. We've received far beyond anything we've ever deserved. Slowly, but surely, the Holy Spirit is sifting our thoughts and prayers to something that stands the test of time. *"One thing have I asked of the Lord; one thing I seek; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life"* (Psalm 27:5; LBW version). Thanks be to God. Amen.

