

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, October 11, 2026
9:30 a.m. Worship



"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!

P - Presiding Minister

A - Assisting minister

C - Congregation

* - Please Stand

Please silence electronic devices.

PRELUDE: ***“His Eye Is On the Sparrow” (arr. Hamlin)***

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. 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.**

***SHARING OF GOD’S PEACE:**

P The peace of the Lord be with you always.

C **And also with you.**

***GATHERING HYMN: “*The King of Love My Shepherd Is*” (LBW 456)**

***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:**



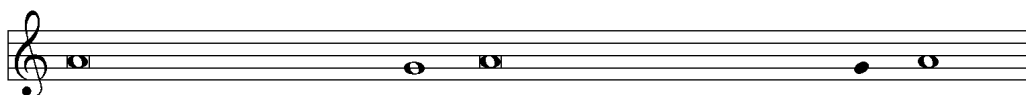
A In peace, let us pray to the Lord. **C** Lord, have mer - cy.



A For the peace from a - bove, and for our sal - vation, let us pray to the Lord.



C Lord, have mer - cy.



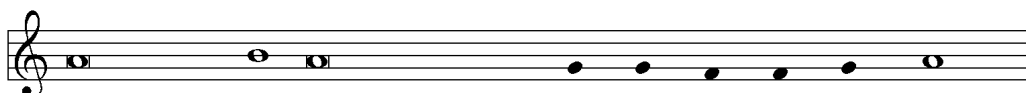
A For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the Church of God,



and for the u - ni - ty of all, let us pray to the Lord.



C Lord, have mer - cy.



A For this holy house, and for all who offer here their wor - ship and praise,



let us pray to the Lord. **C** Lord, have mer - cy.



A Help, save, comfort, and de - fend us, gra - cious Lord. **C** A - men

***HYMN OF PRAISE: “Glory to God” (LBW pg. 79-80)**



A Glo-ry to God in the high- est, and peace to his peo- ple on earth.



B Lord God, heav- en- ly king, al- might- y God and Fa - ther:



We wor- ship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glo- ry.



Lord Je- sus Christ, on- ly Son of the Fa- ther, Lord God, Lamb of God:



You take a- way the sin of the world; have mer - cy on us.



You are seat- ed at the right hand of the Fa- ther; re- ceive our prayer.



For you a- lone are the Ho- ly One, you a- lone are the Lord,



you a- lone are the Most High, Je- sus Christ, with the Ho- ly Spir- it,



in the glo - ry of God the Fa-ther. A - men

*PRAYER OF THE DAY:



P The Lord be with you.

C And al - so with you.

P Let us pray: Almighty God, source of every blessing, your generous goodness comes to us anew every day. By the work of your Spirit lead us to acknowledge your goodness, give thanks for your benefits, and serve you in willing obedience;

C **through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 25:6-9

A A reading from Isaiah.

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸He will swallow up death forever; and the LORD God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. ⁹It will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

A The Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM: 23

A ¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.

C ²**He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.**

A ³He revives my soul and guides me along right pathways for his name's sake.

C ⁴**Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

- A ⁵You spread a table before me in the presence of those who trouble me;
you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup is running over.
- C ⁶**Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of
my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

SECOND LESSON: Philippians 4:1-13

A A reading from Philippians.

¹Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. ²I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are the book of life. ⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me — practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. ¹⁰I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹²I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

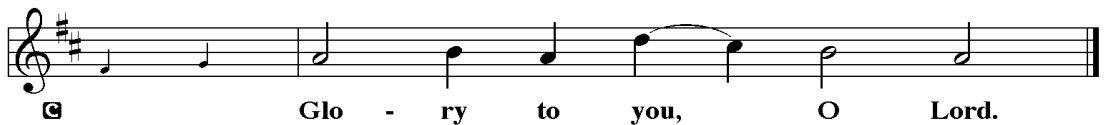
- A The Word of the Lord.
- C **Thanks be to God.**

***VERSE:**



***HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 22:1-14**

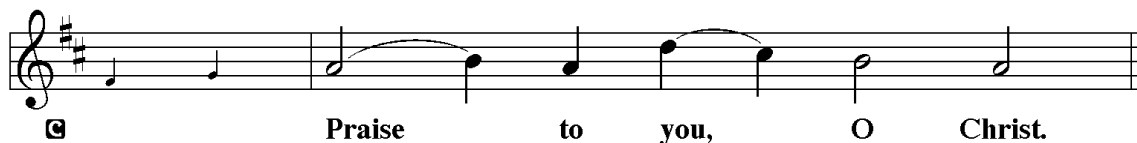
P The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the twenty-second chapter.



¹Again Jesus spoke to {the chief priests and the Pharisees} in parables, saying,
²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.”’ ⁵But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ ¹⁰And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So, the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹²And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king

said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

P The Gospel of the Lord.



CHILDREN’S MESSAGE

SERMON: Pastor Dwight Hanson – In the Lord

***HYMN OF THE DAY:** *“Blessing and Honor” (LBW 525)*

***APOSTLES’ CREED:**

C I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again. He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again 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.

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH:

A Let us pray: Heavenly Father, continue to guide the Church by the Holy Spirit. Throughout our walk on earth, teach us to trust in your goodness and strength. Cast out fear, and usher in the peace that surpasses

understanding, as our hearts and minds rest in Jesus. Make us truly Christ-centered. Clothe us with joy as we honor the Son, whose arms are extended to all the humble. Inspire us to follow the Good Shepherd over mountains and through valleys, until we arrive at our eternal Home. Lord, in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

A As we pray for the needs of the world, we thank you for the blessing of the harvest. Watch over farmers and laborers during the long hours of work. Bless them, their families, and the land. We also pray for a spiritual harvest throughout our country and the world. Help us to see Kingdom opportunities among all who have come to recognize their need. Renew our nation, beginning with each one of us. We lift up all who struggle in the face of natural disasters. We lift up our civic leaders. Inspire them with wisdom from above, for the blessing of all. Watch over all who serve with honor in harm's way for the sake of others. Protect them and their families. Lord, in your mercy,

C Hear our prayer.

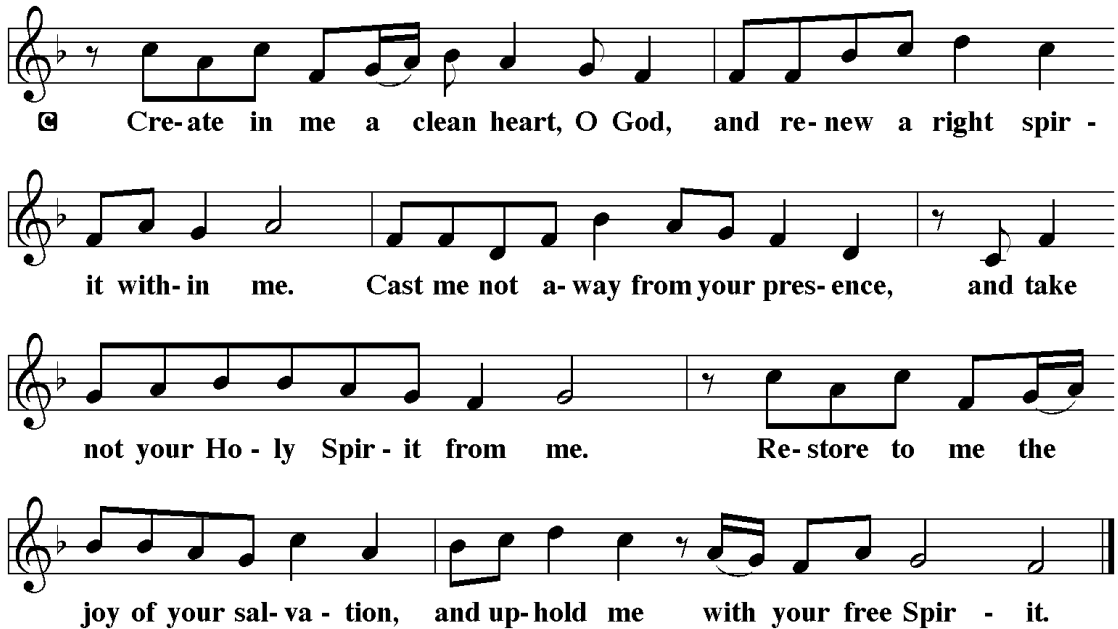
A We pray for all who are in need of healing in any way: **Praise & Thanksgiving:** Michael Good **In their Grief:** The family of Carmen Hasdorff. **For Healing Prayer:** *Kelly Coffman, Josh & Jaime Cummins & family, Jim Courtney, Elizabeth & Emily McDade, Tiffany Daugherty, Katie Morrison, Amy & Bryan Jackson, Linda Lambert, Richard Lehman, Allan Ludwick, Mary Nossaman, Barbara Perry, Tom Schamel, Dean Shetter, John Woesner*, and others whom we name in our hearts at this time (pause for silent prayer). 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: *"You Are Welcome Here" (Choir)*

***OFFERTORY RESPONSE:**



Cre-ate in me a clean heart, O God, and re-new a right spir -
it with-in me. Cast me not a-way from your pres-ence, and take
not your Ho - ly Spir - it from me. Re-store to me the
joy of your sal-va - tion, and up-hold me with your free Spir - it.

***OFFERTORY PRAYER:**

P Let us pray.

P Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things.

**C Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts.
With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our
lives to the care and redemption of all that you have made, for
the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

***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.**

***BENEDICTION:**

P The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord look upon you with favor and + give you peace.
C **Amen.**

***SENDING HYMN: “Lord, Dismiss Us With Your Blessing”(LBW 259)**

***DISMISSAL:**

A Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
C **Thanks be to God.**

POSTLUDE

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ANNOUNCEMENTS



**The flowers on the altar this morning are given to the
Glory of God:**

by the ***Crowell, Franklin & Childers families*** in Honor &
Celebration of **Glenn & Beverly Childers’ 69th Wedding
Anniversary!**

The additional arrangement is given in Honor and Appreciation to God for
Pastor Dwight Hanson on this **Pastor Appreciation Day!**

INQUIRY CLASSES:

Led by: Pastor Hanson

When: **After worship on October 11th and 18th.**

Where: Meeting in the church library across from the secretarial office.

Grace Lutheran Sunday School Fall Schedule

Friends or drop ins welcome!

Regular Classes and Special Events for kids:

October 18: Pumpkin Patch Festival

November 8: Thankful Breakfast/Pageant Practice

November 29: No Sunday School (Thanksgiving weekend)

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR FELLOWSHIP & EDUCATION

Following Worship- Refreshments for all in the Fellowship Hall.

- **Youth Sunday School classes** meet after worship in the music (Education wing). Bring a friend! Parents/grand-parents are always welcome.
- **Adult Education** – After refreshments in the Fellowship Hall.
- **Sunday S'mores @ 6:00 p.m.** Every other week – Middle School & High School-aged Youth. Friends are welcome. Tina Ebright is the moderator, and she can be reached @ 937-472-5663

Adult Bible Studies (during the week)

- **2nd Monday of each month – 6:30 p.m.** – Phoebe Women's Bible Study. **Discerning the Voice of God**. Contact Kelly Mt. Castle (937-336-1223 or Kelly.mtcastle@gmail.com).
- **The 2nd Tues. of each month – 5:30 p.m.** Moms Group. Contact: Veronica Forney 1-910-581-8646.
- **The Wednesday Morning Prayer & Bible Study** – 9:00 a.m.
- **The 3rd Thursday of each month** – 2:00-4:00 p.m. – “**Graceful Fiber Guild**” 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 all. Bring a friend.

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 October 11, 2026— 20th Sunday after Pentecost

9:30 a.m. Worship

10:30 a.m. Fellowship, Adult Education & Youth Sunday school.

10:30 a.m. Inquiry Class (Library)

Monday October 12

Pastor's Day Off

9:45 a.m. Choose to Lose

6:30 p.m. Phoebe Women's Bible Study

Tuesday October 13

5:30 p.m. Mom's Bible Study

Wednesday October 14

9:00 a.m. Bible Study

5:30 p.m. Confirmation Class

6:30 p.m. Choir

Thursday October 15 – Grace Herald Deadline

2:00 p.m. Graceful Fiber Guild

7:00 p.m. AA Meeting

Friday October 16

12:30 p.m. Bulletin Production

Saturday October 17

UPCOMING WEEK SPECIAL EVENTS

Sun 10/18—Worship w/Holy Communion, Fellowship & Sun. School for all ages, Inquiry Class

Mon. 10/19—Pastor Off, Choose to Lose ---

Tues. 10/20—VBS Planning Mtg.

Wed. 10/21 Bible Study, Confirmation, Choir ---

Thurs. 10/22—AA Meeting

Fri. 10/23 - Bulletin Production ---

Sat. 10/24

WORSHIP ASSISTANTS

Altar Guild for October: Debbie McKinney & Lisa Kiracofe
Offering Counter for October: Wanda Winter

Sunday, October 11—Pentecost 20

9:30 a.m.

Greeter: Nancy Childs
Usher: Darryl Leyes
Lector: Jane Coggin
Acolyte: Sophia Steiner

Sunday, October 18—Pentecost 21

9:30 a.m.

Greeter: Allen & Kelly Coffman
Usher: Allen Coffman
Lector: Kelly Coffman
Communion: John Kiracofe, Debbie McKinney
Acolyte: Bechor Bischoff

Sunday, October 25—Reformation Sunday

9:30 a.m.

Greeter: Dean & Mary Shetter
Usher: Clayton Kiracofe
Lector: Tina Ebright
Communion: Wanda Winter, Tina Ebright
Acolyte: Bechor Bischoff, Sophia Steiner

Sunday, November 1—All Saints' Sunday

9:30 a.m.

Greeter: Becky Lenk & Tiffany Ingram
Usher: Gary Pemberton
Lector: Nancy Childs
Communion: Elaine Fudge, Patty Barnes
Acolyte: Jessa Barnes, Sophia Steiner

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

10/04/2026 89 \$7,788.50

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.

Please help us by giving an update on the back of the “Attendance & Communion Registration” form. Names will appear for 4 weeks unless we are notified otherwise.

URGENT PRAYER LIST:

- **GRIEVING:** *Rob & Suzie Dell at the passing of Rob’s sister, Carmen Hasdorff, who was called to the Church Triumphant on 10/6/2026.*
- **PRAISE & THANKSGIVING: *Michael Good:*** His CT and PET scans came back clean, and the oncology team has declared him cancer free!
- **HEALING: (In Alphabetical Order)**
 - ***Kelly Coffman:*** (Undergoing more heart tests with an adjustment to heart medications)
 - ***Josh & Jaime Cummins & family:*** (Friends of Karen Schaeff – They ask for prayers of strength & comfort)
 - ***Jim Courtney:*** (A young father battling Stage 4 melanoma)
 - ***Elizabeth & Emily McDade:*** (Terry & Evelyn Good’s daughter & granddaughter – prayers as they deal with many issues including grief)
 - ***Tiffany Daugherty:*** (As she undergoes testing)
 - ***Katie Morrison:*** (Niece of Mary & Dean Shetter – prayers for God’s healing as she deals with very difficult health issues)
 - ***Amy & Bryan Jackson:*** (for comfort and healing)
 - ***Richard Lehman:*** (Rehabbing at Vancrest)
 - ***Allan Ludwick:*** (From Darryl & Teresa Leyes)
 - ***Mary Nossaman:*** (Barb Myers’ sister – in the hospital with intestinal issues)
 - ***Barbara Perry:*** (Carol Perry’s step-daughter – as she prepares for a stem cell transplant to help treat multiple myeloma)
 - ***Tom Schamel:*** (As he deals with repeated falls)
 - ***Dean Shetter:*** (as he prepares for a heart monitor)
 - ***John Woesner:*** (Gary Woesner’s brother – health issues)

LONG-TERM PRAYER LIST: Linda Lambert, Becky Haws, 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, 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

Great Commission Outreach Partners:

World Mission Prayer League—Chris & Emily and family, Lutheran Military Veterans and Families, Abundant Grace, West Chester

20th Sunday after Pentecost; 10/11/2026; Grace Lutheran Church; Pastor Dwight Hanson
Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:1-13; Matthew 22:1-14

Children's message: If Jesus is the Shepherd of Psalm 23, then what does that make us? Sheep! Sheep love to linger in the tall grass and eat, or rest beside the calm waters. Sound pretty good, doesn't it? But are sheep ever in danger? Yes, wolves, lions, and so on. We need the Shepherd. It said that the sheep were comforted by the rod and staff. The rod was for beating away the enemies. But the staff, with its curved end, was for bringing back the lambs when they wander. Sometimes we can get in trouble all by ourselves. Jesus brings us back to him all the time. And then we can rest again, ready for the next part of the journey. Let's pray...

In the Lord

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

"In the Lord" ... such a small phrase. With all the words in the world, what difference could it really make to string three simple ones together and add them to a sentence? What if we add them to a life?

I'm going to go out on a limb and assume that most of you have faced at least one major challenge in your journey so far. By what strength does a person get through to the other side? Perhaps, if the challenge isn't all that big, self-sufficiency may claim all credit, with just the right combination of wit, grit, and technique. But what if the challenge really is big? What about the final walk through the valley of shadow? There comes a point where an honest soul, staggering perhaps, begins to feel for a deeper kind of strength. Jesus made sure that this search is not in vain. The everlasting arms are real.

The beating heart of Paul's letter to the Philippians is found in the little words that make the difference. Feel free to follow along in your bulletin as we turn to our 2nd lesson and let the Word lead the way.

***¹ Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown,
stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved*** (ESV).

First off, note the word “therefore,” which implies a culmination. Something built up to that point. Sure enough, in the previous chapter the apostle had just written that many people were living as *enemies of the cross of Christ* (3:18). With minds “*set on earthly things*,” they were speeding toward a brick wall: “*Their end is destruction...*” (3:19). Worse yet, they sought company! This world is not neutral in its fallen state. It seeks to use its considerable influence to draw all people—or drive them—into misery.

“*Therefore*,” the Church is called to “*stand firm*.” This can only happen by the power of the Holy Spirit, as we abide in Christ. Also, notice that standing firm is not the language of escape. There's a steadiness to it, come what may. As one old hymn says of the cross of Christ, it's “*tow'ring oe'r the wrecks of time*” (LBW #104, In the Cross of Christ I Glory). Storms of nature and culture come and go, but the accomplishment of Jesus stands forever.

To that point, notice that the apostle called the church in Philippi his “*joy and crown*.” We may assume a crown of gold, but in the third chapter of Philippians, Paul had just written about racing for the prize. He was speaking to people who lived north of Greece, where imaginations were filled with images of the Olympic games, which had been held for centuries. The winner of the race was presented with a wreath-crown. The word in Greek is *stephanos*, from *stepho*, to wreath or twine (Biblehub.com). Guess where else this word shows up.... Matthew 27:29, “*and twisting together a*

crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'"

Paul's joy and crown, the reason he ran the race of faith, had to do with the salvation of real people through the death and resurrection of Christ. And if the apostle had to wear a crown of suffering, as the Master had done, so be it. Stand firm. Realize what's really at stake in the years we've been given.

All of this must occur "*in the Lord.*" There are victories that cannot be won by flesh and blood. There's a steadiness of the soul that cannot be found by mere strategy, or in the attempt to control every detail. In fact, before we're done with the 2nd lesson, we'll be reminded of the peace that really is peace.

² I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

There it is again, "*in the Lord.*" In this case, however, it was about rediscovering a sense of God-given unity, agreement, where it was in jeopardy. If verse one represented a stance over-and-against the outside world pressing its demands, what we have in verse two represented an inner-congregational dispute. Ah, but perhaps these women felt that they were doing exactly what the apostle said in verse one, "*standing firm*"! Sometimes we bring on our own troubles.

It appears that in Philippi some non-essential sticking point had slithered its way to the center of their Christian fellowship. In this instance, a firm stand, a refusal to budge would add to the problem, not the solution. Who said it was easy to be the Church? But it is good.

We don't get many details about what divided these two women of faith, just glimpses. All we know is that both of them worked alongside Paul in the cause of the gospel of Jesus. And if they could both be faithful workers for Christ's Kingdom, then why should some less-than-necessary division stand in the way? Christ's Church has been called to discernment throughout the generations. Is truth on the line, something essential to the faith? If so, then "stand firm." If not, a little humility goes a long way. There are times for softening, calming down, perhaps even listening. Imagine that.

Verse 4: **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.**

Suddenly, the everlasting power of the phrase, "in the Lord," shifts from problem-solving mode to the wonder of finding joy in your life despite all challenges to the contrary. Joy is at the heart of re-joy-cing. In the Lord Jesus, seek and you will find the joy again, or perhaps for the first time in your life, the real thing. But "always"? "In Christ," yes. But only in him. What suffering or challenge has he not overcome? Resting in him, each today, hard though it may be, can be filled with "always." And Paul practiced what he preached. Verse 10: "*I rejoiced in the Lord greatly....*"

In all this, remember the context of the letter. Nothing was care-free. St. Paul was thanking the Philippian church for sending a care package to him in his need, imprisoned in Rome. And he was addressing a conflicted situation in that church, where two sisters in Christ had lost track of their joy. It can happen too easily. But there's a *re-* in front of *joyce*. Find it again. Come back to it. From scowl to smile is as close as a prayer for help from the source of all goodness—"let your requests be made known to God" (vs. 6b).

By the way, this encouragement to find joy in the Lord may be the key to unlocking that mysterious passage from the Gospel, where the fellow was tossed from the banquet. What happened there? Why just him? Wasn't the hall filled with people, "both bad and good"? Yes, but that highlights something else. Only one refused the celebratory garment (Mt. 22:10). Presumably, a garment was available, for everyone else had access, even though they, too, had been pulled from the street. As I understand it, it was common in that time for royalty to have large wardrobes for such occasions. It was a sign of honor to wear what was provided. This changes the question. Why, then, wouldn't the man celebrate with Jesus? Who would want to look out at a banquet and see the scowl of a skeptic, with arms crossed, or feel the condescension of a perpetual critic? On the contrary, there's joy in the Lord, light to be found even in dark places.

Verse 7: ***And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

It turns out that joy has a traveling companion called "peace." And there's a reliable source: "in Christ Jesus," which is the same formula as "in the Lord." It can be truly found nowhere else. Not that people haven't tried. Supposedly big thinkers have devised systems of order to impose some sort of "peace" on this world, all within the limits of human understanding. But it always turns into bloody tyranny before long, worldly peace through domination.

"In Christ Jesus" we have access to peace and joy in both heart and mind that "surpasses" anything this broken world can conjure. We gather by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we have our hearts and minds

“guarded” by the Good Shepherd, himself. The rod is for protection. The staff is for correction (Psalm 23).

But the “guarding” is not only external, but internal. The Lord addresses the mind. What occupies the high ground of your thoughts? Our protector would have us focused, thinking about matters that are “worthy of praise” (Php. 4:8). Anyone can rant and rave. Usually, the rant is met by an opposing rant. Bullhorn begets louder bullhorn. So it goes in the world. Surpassing peace, anyone?

One last example of the difference a few words can make.

¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

This could be translated: “in him who strengthens me” (vs. 13). The preposition is the same one we’ve been talking about. But context affects translation, and the word “through” makes clear both the source of the power and the sustaining nature of it, carrying us forward.

Now, is the Lord telling us that if we stick with him and lean on his strength, we’ll have access to something like a super-power? Does the verse say, merely, “I can do all things”? Of course not ... “through him who strengthens me.” It has to do with what lines up with the will of the Savior.

If Paul had been given some super-strength to change everything, he wouldn’t have had to “learn” how to “be content” (vs. 11). He wouldn’t have had to face hunger, or develop the ability to see through the false god of “plenty” (vs. 12). And if it was a super-power, why not just command release from his thorn in the flesh, instead of praying three times for it to happen? The strength belongs to God, and is granted, by grace, according to his will...in the Lord (2 Cor. 12:7-9).

What a difference three small words make! Enough time spent following our Shepherd through every kind of terrain, and we may even learn the secret of being content. It truly is good to *think about such things*. Thanks be to God. Amen.