

**GAYLORD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
**318 4<sup>th</sup> STREET, BOX 385, GAYLORD, MN, 55334**  
**20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost**  
**October 25, 2020**



**MEDITATION**

*Catherine of Siena, 14th century*

"Be who God meant you to be and you will set the world on fire."

**PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP**

**THE CALL**

PSALM 1

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but their delight is in the law of God, and on God's law they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for God watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

**PRELUDE**

SANDY WENTZLOFF

**WELCOME AND NEWS OF THE CHURCH**

**NO MATTER WHO I AM, NO MATTER WHERE I AM ON LIFE'S JOURNEY, I AM WELCOME HERE.**

**NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE ON LIFE'S JOURNEY, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!**

**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

ONE: WHO ARE YOU?

**ALL: I AM A BELOVED CHILD OF GOD!**

ONE: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

**ALL: I AM A PERSON OF WORTH TO BE VALUED!**

ONE: THEN WHAT WILL YOU DO?

**ALL: I WILL LIVE A LIFE OF LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE OF MYSELF  
AND ALL GOD'S PEOPLE!**

**THE ADVENT DEVOTIONAL "BOOK OF HOPE" NEEDS YOU! PLEASE CONSIDER WRITING A BRIEF  
DEVOTION ON WHERE YOU FIND HOPE IN THESE DAYS. THEY NEED TO BE TURNED IN BY NOVEMBER 15<sup>TH</sup>.**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: You, O God, know our hearts.

**People: Guide our hearts, O God.**

One: You, O God, see our ways.

**People: Shape our ways, O God.**

One: You, O God, call our spirits.

**People: Call us now, O God, as we call on you.**

**GATHERING HYMN**

*"A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD"*

**GATHERING PRAYER**

Happy are we, O God, when our hearts are full, our ways are yours,  
our spirits enlivened by your call.

Happy are we, O God, when our lives are guided by delight.

We gather here today for just that, holy God.

We gather to draw on all you would give us  
to be more fully yours. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

## CONFESSION

One: Happy are those who turn away from the counsel of the wicked.  
But oh, that counsel can be so seductive – it draws us in, holds us fast,  
distracts our priorities, obstructs our capacity to love.

But we seek no obstructions, we reject wicked counsel.  
We embrace God's embrace.

For whatever ways we don't, we confess.  
In whichever ways we sin, we repent.

Hear our prayers, O God, as, before you, we seek wholeness.

*Silence*

**People: God of mercy, grace, reconciliation and goodness:  
We are sorry for so much – for words we cannot bear to say  
for memories we cannot bear to relive  
for thoughts we cannot bear to admit.**

**But you know our hearts. Relieve us of our burdens,  
Bind our hearts not to the unbearable but rather, to you  
So that, in all ways, we may live in the joy of your salvation  
And the delight of your loving embrace.**

*Silence*

## ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Happy are we, holy people, when we walk in the ways of our God.  
Happy are we, beloved ones, as we receive God's forgiveness.

**People: Happy are we, God's own,  
Because we are made whole, through Jesus Christ. Amen.**

## SCRIPTURE

Romans 3:19-28

Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For 'no human being will be justified in his sight' by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin. But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law.

## SERMON

*"FREE INDEED!"*

Hear again these words from our Romans reading for today: *Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by God's grace as a gift...*

Today we recall an event that started 503 years ago. On October 31, 1517, the Holy Spirit started a spiritual wildfire that is still burning in the world today. And this wildfire was started by the word of God and a regular human being. Particularly the Holy Spirit chose Martin Luther who at the time was an ordinary Augustinian monk who had been assigned to teach in a new backwater University in the

Saxony town of Wittenberg. On October 31, 1517, Luther publicly posted 95 theses about God in hopes of starting a conversation about forgiveness and repentance and how we are made right with God. Now some say he posted his 95 theses on the door of the castle church at Wittenberg. Some say he mailed those theses to his superior in the Augustinian order and some say he did both. However, whether he posted the document or mailed it...Luther nailed it. This is most certainly true! And because of a recent invention of the day called a printing press, Luther's 95 theses were published and read all across Europe. What started out as a small brush fire over the church of the day's practice of selling indulgences- this is literally the selling forgiveness of sins, became a raging wildfire and we call this wildfire the Protestant Reformation. And it grew to be not just about selling forgiveness, which of course was wrong, but about reforming the entire church. In addition, this spark that Luther started is still burning in protestant Christians today!

As I said, the flint and the steel that ignited the Reformation are what God always uses. The Word of God on the one hand and the life of an ordinary every day human being on the other hand. The Word of God was the steel and the everyday human being was Luther- a backwoods Augustinian monk. But of course in addition to the flint and the steel to start a fire you need some kindling- a few dry sticks eager to be burned. And the kindling was the spiritual sickness that hung over the western church in Europe at the time of Luther. And this spiritual malaise was also inside Luther. On one hand Luther knew that we are to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and in order to do that Luther became a monk so he could spend his entire life to love God with his heart, soul, mind and strength. And Luther tried very hard. He tried punishing himself to feel that he was worthy of God's love. He wore a shirt of hair. He slept on flagstones with no blankets in the cold of winter; he whipped himself to try to purge himself of his sins. He would go to confession for hours. Then after receiving absolution, he would return in five minutes and say, "Forgive me father, I forgot something." But in spite of all Luther did, he came to realize that HE could not love God perfectly. And so Luther would go through cycles of depression wondering if he was going to be condemned to hell because he could not love the Creator the way he ought to do. Luther knew that he should, but he could not!

But then one day in 1514, while Luther was reading the Word of God in preparation for a class lecture, he read passages like our reading today from Romans where it says, "*Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are now justified by faith as a free gift.*" As Luther read these words of scripture, something began to burn in Luther's heart. And this heartwarming was the realization that Luther didn't have to achieve perfect love of God because in Christ, God the Creator had already perfectly loved him. Luther was transformed by his study of Romans. He said that he felt as if he had been born again and had entered into paradise itself through open gates. Born again! When was the last time that someone told you they felt they'd been born again? That is the work of the Gospel!

Luther was born again as he realized that it's God who starts the grace relationship that we have with God. It's God who starts the personal relationship that we all need to have with our Creator. Who makes the first move? Reading Romans, Luther realized it's not us! We do not initiate that relationship. It is God. Luther first felt that a right relationship with God was a standard that we had to be equal to. It was something we had to have within us- which we had to be righteous- that we had to pick up the phone and initiate the relationship with God and keep it going. And Luther realized, as we all do, that we can't do it on our own. But then reading the Word of God and especially that portion from today's lesson from Romans, Luther realized that the righteousness of God is actually a free gift. God starts the relationship. God picks up the phone and makes the first call. God comes to us- chooses us- each one of us and says, "I choose you. In my love and mercy, I choose you! It's not about you just trying harder to be good enough. But, God says, it's about my love. I love you. I forgive you. I save you. It's God who starts the grace relationship with each and every one of us. And grace is not just what God gives us, it is also the way God loves us and saves us. It is the way God gives God's self to us so that we might be transformed!

I will always remember a story that a pastor shared while I was growing up. It seems that there was a man (we'll call him Sam) who died and he went to the pearly gates to face the judgment. There was St. Peter. And Peter said, "Here's how it works, Sam, tell me about your life. To get you saved you need 1,000 points. And so, tell me about your life and I'll reward you points." And Sam said, "Well, I've been a really dedicated church person. I've given my life in faith to the triune God and I volunteer. I was head usher for many years and I took 2 turns on the church council and I was chair of the call committee for a new pastor. I was a mentor in the confirmation program with the kids." St. Peter said, "Wow, that's really impressive. You get 1 point!"

Well Sam thought, "I must be barking up the wrong tree, so let me try this, "I was active in my community. I was someone who really tried to live a good life in the community. I served on the school board, I ran my business ethically, honestly, and always treated people fairly and a lot of time I just provided for people because I could. I was there with civic groups to help and when we had a flood I worked together to provide food relief. Citizenship was really important to me."

St. Peter said, "We don't get many like you. Let me tell you what, that's 2 points!" Now Sam started to sweat a little bit and he says, "I was a good family man. My wife and I were married for 57 years before she died. We were always faithful to each other and we had 4 kids and raised them. We had them baptized and confirmed and we were always there when they went through hard times. And I really tried to be a good nephew and cousin to my relatives."

And Peter said, "This...this...we just don't get many people like you. That's 3 points! And Sam was all upset and said, "By the grace of God how am I supposed to get all those points? And Peter said, "That's it! That's it! The grace of God....the grace of God....1,000 points!"

Beloved people of God, May the grace of God that God freely gives to you and initiates with you, inspire you and live in you. And may we continue to proclaim to the world that we have peace with God- all are made right with God- not by our own strength or by our own works. But our salvation-our righteousness comes from outside of us and becomes our very own through the grace and mercy of God.

Let us pray: *Thank you; thank you, God, for the grace that YOU have given us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**HYMN**

*"SWEET, SWEET SPIRIT"*

**PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER**

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

**PIANO**

*"THREE-FOLD AMEN"*

**INVITATION TO OFFERING**

Anyone who has ever loved knows that to love is to give – to give from the place we feel it most. This giving may be sacrificial, but the sacrifice is compromised if it cannot be done joyfully. May we join together in the delight of giving?

**DEDICATION**

**People: With what you see before us, God, we demonstrate our deepest love. Receive our gifts – our very best – as sweet offerings before you. May they be the blessing to others that they have been for us. Amen.**

**SENDING HYMN**

“SPIRIT SONG”

**BENEDICTION**

One: Almighty God bless and keep us

People: **Merciful God, make your face to shine upon us.**

One: The blessed and Holy Trinity

People: **Be with us now and forever. Amen.**

**Postlude**

Sandy Wentzloff



**Thank You**

I want to thank you, the congregation, for the gift of appreciation for my ministry. Your support comes to me in so many ways during the year. Using the Month of the Ministry to share an additional appreciation was a real blessing. I have hung the banner at the entry to the sanctuary for all to share.

May God bless our ministries together!

Pastor Dennis

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**GUCC ADVENT DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET**

**On November 29<sup>th</sup> we enter the church year season of Advent.**

**Advent is a "Season of Hope."**

If there ever is a time when we need hope, it is this year! Will you help nourish your fellow congregational members in hope? I need 27 people to write a devotion centered on *hope* of about two paragraphs in length. You might want to write about a scripture or what is renewing your hope at this time or what is the basis of your hope, or whatever you feel would be of benefit to members of the congregation. Please email me at [dmckee545@gmail.com](mailto:dmckee545@gmail.com) soon and share that you are willing to share a devotion. I will need to receive your devotion via email or at the church office by November 15 so that the booklet can be compiled before the beginning of Advent. *Thank you for being a part of this project of Hope!*

**Remember in Prayer:** Pastor Dennis, Greg Armstrong (Howard’s brother), Dick Carlson, Ewald Keller, Bill Cowell, Eunice Gasow, and Aggie Schue. We pray for others who have been ill or are home bound and others at Oak Terrace and Golden Hearts. We pray for health and healing for all people everywhere. Pray for the ministries of our church. Pray for those serving in the military and for our local and national leaders.

**If you have a prayer request or would like to receive a call from Pastor Dennis call his office at 237-2595 (leave a private voice mail) or his cell 763-258-3371**

Pastor Dennis is usually in the office each Tuesday and Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. He can be reached at the office, 237-2595 (private voice mail) or his cell: 763-258-3371. E-mail: [dmckee545@gmail.com](mailto:dmckee545@gmail.com) • Website at [listen2god.org](http://listen2god.org)

### Giving our Gifts to God:

Tithes and Offerings can be sent to Gaylord United Church of Christ  
P.O. Box 385 Gaylord, MN 55334. *You can also donate on our website  
or drop off at the church office on Wednesday between 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.*  
Thank you for your continued support for the ministries of this church.

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- ❖ Our From the Heart Offering in **October** goes to *Neighbors in Need*. Deposit your donation in the Heart Basket near the Sanctuary doors.
- ❖ Men's Fellowship meets every Wednesday at 2:00 p.m. in church in the Fireside Room.
- ❖ Gaylord UCC is delivering Meals on Wheels during October.  
Volunteers are as follows:  
Oct. 26-30 Don Swenson
- ❖ Women's Fellowship meeting after church Sunday, October 25 to discuss Christmas and Hanging of the Greens.

*For all have sinned  
and fall short of the glory of God,  
and all are justified freely by his grace  
through the redemption that came by  
Christ Jesus.*

*Romans 3:23-24*

