

## **Welcome**

- P: Welcome to Trinity Lutheran Church of Pittsburg Ohio. I'm Pastor Mel Musser and I'm so happy you joined us to Worship today. We are gathered via video on this sixth Sunday of Easter and we worship in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, amen.
- P: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Today I have a couple of announcements that are important for all of us to keep in mind. I know there is a built up pressure to start opening our Church Building for gatherings. We're all longing to get together because we are a very loving congregation and it's hard for people who love each other to be apart. Our Council will be meeting this week and we will make decisions on when and how to reopen our building. I ask you to please be patient with us and know that your church council has your safety at the heart of all our decisions. When we do open for worship, there will be changes. We will still have to stay at least 6 feet apart. There will be no hugging, shaking of hands, fist bumping, elbow bumping or any other contact. However, if you would like to dance a jig, keeping your social distance you are free to do so. I believe one of our members has a training video on FaceBook if you would like to see what that might look like... Seriously, we cannot afford to place any of our members in harms way. So, if you are over the age of 65 and have other conditions that compromise your health like diabetes, or COPD, please stay home. If you know you're sick, please stay home. I know this goes against your normal faith instincts, but I promise you that I will continue to provide worship on video each week until it's safe for everyone to return to worship together. That's all I have to say right now about returning to worshipping together, but stay tuned for more information after our Council meeting next week. If you would like to make your opinion known about reopening, please contact any council member or myself. My contact information will be displayed at the end of this video. So, let's continue our worship with the Thanksgiving for Baptism...

## **THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM**

- P: As we remember and give thanks for the gift of Baptism, let's also remember this is where we receive the promised gift of God's own Holy Spirit.

**P:** We are joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are raised with him to new life. Let us give thanks for the gift of baptism... We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and you created us in your image and planted us in a well-watered garden. In the desert you promised pools of water for the parched, and you gave us water from the rock. When we did not know the way, you sent the Good Shepherd to lead us to still waters. At the cross, you watered us from Jesus' wounded side, and on this day, you shower us again with the water of life.

**P:** We praise you for your salvation through water, for the waters that fill the oceans, the rivers, streams, and lakes, and for all water everywhere. Bathe us in your forgiveness, grace, and love. Satisfy the thirsty, and give us the life only you can give. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

### **Prayer of the Day**

**P:** Let's pray... Almighty and ever-living God, you hold together all things in heaven and on earth. In your great mercy receive the prayers of all your children, and give to all the world the Spirit of your truth and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**C: Amen.**

Our Scripture readings for today are read for us by Jennifer Arling. Thank you Jennifer...

And now we hear the Word of God for this day...

**First Reading: The first reading for today is Acts 17:22-31**

<sup>22</sup>Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. <sup>23</sup>For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. <sup>24</sup>The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, <sup>25</sup>nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. <sup>26</sup>From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, <sup>27</sup>so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. <sup>28</sup>For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said,

‘For we too are his offspring.’

<sup>29</sup>Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. <sup>30</sup>While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, <sup>31</sup>because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

**The Psalm for today is Psalm 66, verses 8-20**

<sup>8</sup>Bless our God, you peoples; let the sound of praise be heard.

<sup>9</sup>**Our God has kept us among the living and has not allowed our feet to slip.**

<sup>10</sup>For you, O God, have tested us; you have tried us just as silver is tried.

<sup>11</sup>**You brought us into the net; you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.**

<sup>12</sup>You let people ride over our heads; we went through fire and water, but you brought us out into a place of refreshment.

<sup>13</sup>**I will enter your house with burnt offerings and will pay you my vows—**

<sup>14</sup>those that I promised with my lips and spoke with my mouth when I was in trouble.

<sup>15</sup>**I will offer you burnt offerings of fatlings with the smoke of rams; I will give you oxen and goats.**

<sup>16</sup>Come and listen, all you who believe, and I will tell you what God has done for me.

<sup>17</sup>**I called out to God with my mouth, and praised the Lord with my tongue.**

<sup>18</sup>If I had cherished evil in my heart, the Lord would | not have heard me;

<sup>19</sup>**but in truth God has heard me and has attended to the sound of my prayer.**  
<sup>20</sup>Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer, nor withheld unfailing love from me.

**The Second Reading is from 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, chapter 3, verses 13-22**

<sup>13</sup>Who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? <sup>14</sup>But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, <sup>15</sup>but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; <sup>16</sup>yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. <sup>17</sup>For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. <sup>18</sup>For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup>in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. <sup>21</sup>And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Here ends the readings.

**The Holy Gospel according to Saint John, the 14<sup>th</sup> Chapter, verses 15-21.**

**Gospel: John 14:15-21**

[Jesus said to the disciples:] <sup>15</sup>“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

<sup>18</sup>“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. <sup>19</sup>In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup>On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. <sup>21</sup>They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

## **CHILDREN'S MESSAGE**

## SERMON

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who sends us another Advocate, Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

I love to watch Lawyer shows on TV. I especially like the shows where they follow the crime all the way through the investigation, arrest, and the court scenes. A couple of my favorites are Bull and Suits, but my all time fav was Boston Legal with William Shatner as Denny Craine. That show simultaneously handled Denny Craine slowly slipping into dementia while still trying to lead a large law firm as the named partner. along with cases that were relevant to current events in the news, the show features Denny mocking some of the arcane aspects of our legal system. Even though I've seen every episode when it first aired, I still like to login to Netflix and catch an old episode once in a while.

I've always thought of the Holy Spirit or as Jesus calls Him in today's Gospel "another Advocate" as sort of the defense lawyer for God's people in the heavenly court of God's Kingdom. All of us together, but also as each of us has our very own, God appointed, public defender. Our advocate is the one who speaks up for us and pleads our case when our final judgment day comes. The Holy Spirit is the one standing next to you when Satan, your accuser, lays out the case against you, reminding God of every sin you ever committed. Your Advocate reminds the court that even though you're guilty of every single one of the accusations against you, your debt has already been paid by the precious body and blood of God's only Son, Jesus Christ. How comforting it has always been from the to know that no matter what I've done or failed to do, God himself, in the form of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, is there to plead my case.

For years that image of the Holy Spirit was my complete understanding of the Holy Spirit. Here lately, as I've had a bit more time to ponder and cogitate on the meaning of things, I began to expand my thoughts about this Advocate. What got me thinking about this was all these Gospel readings we've had lately coming from the Gospel of John. It wasn't too long ago, March 8<sup>th</sup>, in fact, when we read the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16 as part of our Gospel. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. I began asking myself, if God loved the world so much, then why do we need an Advocate to speak up for us in the court of God's Kingdom? All of a sudden, my whole image of the job of the Holy Spirit began to unravel. If God loves you so much to send Jesus to save you, why do you still need a defense attorney to stand by you and rebut the charges brought against you? In fact, why are there any charges at all?

Usually, when I think something isn't quite right, it's because I'm about to stumble into something new. Today, I'm excited to unveil my new ideas about the Advocate that Jesus has sent from God to be with us and in us forever. These ideas are almost 100 percent not new to the world, but they are new to me... Let's start with the Greek. The Greek term we have translated as Advocate is the word *paracletos*, which literally means one who comes along side you. Other places in the Bible, *paracletos* gets translated as comforter, helper, counselor, and encourager. Perhaps its most literal translation is simply "advocate," the one who pleads your case, who takes your side, who intercedes for you, and who stands up for you. Maybe you can begin to understand why I've always thought the Holy Spirit or Advocate was kind of like my personal defense lawyer. However, if we look at the Holy Spirit in this way, doesn't it imply God needs to be persuaded to love us? If God needs to be persuaded to love us then John 3:16 can't really mean what it says... So, here's a couple of alternatives...

Maybe it's actually the other way around. Maybe it's the Spirit who intercedes on God's behalf before us. Instead of pleading our case to God, what if the Spirit's job was to plead God's case to us! The Spirit is the one who comes to remind us of our identity as children of God, as sheep who recognize the voice of our shepherd, those for whom the good shepherd lays down his life. Because, Lord knows, that can be a hard identity to hold onto, a hard identity to believe is really ours, especially when we are stressed or frightened, unsure about our future and it feels like everything is turned upside down. For me, that changes everything! It means God isn't angry at me nor do I require an attorney to defend me before God. God doesn't need someone to argue your merit or mine. God really does love us so much to send his only son. He loves us even more than that because he also sends someone to walk along side of us to remind us every minute of every day we are his children and He is our God, no matter what we've done or failed to do. It's that same Spirit who comes along side us and advocates for us in the face of all the challenges of the world, reminding us of Jesus' promise to be with us and for us in the face of all the things that conspire to make us doubt our worth in God's eyes, let alone in the eyes of the world.

Since the Spirit is advocating for us to believe in God's promises and trust we are worthy of God's attention and love, we won't just survive the challenges of this day, but we can also flourish amid them. Even more, the Spirit's work of advocacy creates the possibility we can do that same work for others. I mean, just as the Spirit is the second advocate – Jesus' being the first – so also the Spirit invites us into similar work that same mission. When we're Church together we become a legion of advocates helping, comforting, encouraging, counseling, and lifting up others. This is why, in the Gospel for today, Jesus moves immediately

from commanding his disciples to keep his commandments to the promise of the Holy Spirit. Do you remember the one and only new commandment Jesus gave the disciples in John's Gospel? If you said we're to love one another, then you've been paying attention... Here's the real truth. No one can ever hope to love others as Jesus did apart from the advocacy, help, comfort, consolation, counsel, and encouragement of the Spirit. Part of the evidence of the Spirit's ongoing presence and power among us is seen in the kinds of things are already happening. Yes, we live during a frightening time, with loss of income, loss of our direct physical connection with each other, and tragically, the great loss of life. We cannot underestimate how devastating this corona virus truly is, nor the cost it has already extracted in terms of human suffering and grief, But let's not fail to notice we also live at a time of profound sacrifice, generosity, encouragement, and more.

The doors of our Church building might still be closed for a little while, but the Church has never been closed. Just this week by allowing the Community Blood drive to happen, Trinity helped to save up to 60 lives. Facemasks continue to be sewn, and the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the love of God continues to be shared. The evidence is all around us when we look with eyes opened by the Spirit. The second advocate, God's Holy Spirit is alive and thriving inside each one of you! I invite you to listen to the voice of you very own advocate. When the accuser says you're not good enough or how worthless you are, listen instead to the Spirit dwelling inside, telling you that you alone are the apple of God's eye and how much God loves you. Allow the Spirit's encouragement to give you confidence and boldness to approach God in prayer, knowing you are God's beloved child. Listen to your advocate reminding you of the promises of Jesus, to never leave you nor forsake you.

In this world we will encounter times of trouble, times of joy, times when we need the support and encouragement of others, and times when we have the opportunity to support and encourage someone else. In all this I know one thing for certain, we do none of it alone. Jesus promised us nothing less than the *paraclete*, the very Spirit of truth, who reminds us of God's love and the abiding presence of God's Son who is alive forever.

Maybe I don't have to give up my sort of Sunday School image of the Holy Spirit as my defense lawyer completely. Maybe the Advocate can do both jobs at the same time. Even while the Spirit is defending me in the courts of heaven, and Lord knows I've done enough to need the best attorney on earth and in heaven, but at the same time that same spirit also serves as a constant reminder to me that my worth, your worth isn't riding on the outcome of that judge's decision. The Spirit was sent as God's gift to you so you will never forget you are God's beloved.



Now go in bold confidence and share that Good news with everyone you know !  
Amen.

## NICENE CREED

**P:** We respond to God's Word by confessing our faith using the words of the Nicene Creed. Please pray these words along with me:

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

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven; by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.**

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

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Uplifted by the promised hope of healing and resurrection, we join the people of God in all times and places in praying for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

*A brief silence.*

Abiding God, you have revealed yourself to us in the form of your Son, Jesus Christ. Embolden your church, as your followers, to reveal your love to everyone in our speaking and in our living. Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

You are the creator of heaven and earth. All things on land, in the sea and in the air are under your care and providence. We praise you for the diversity and beauty of nature. Help us to be good stewards of all that you have made. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

All people of the world your children. Teach us to show mercy to the oppressed, speak truth to those in power, and open our hearts to be even more generous to the poor. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

You come near to us when we are lost, and you hear our distress. Give our leaders wisdom as we begin to plan to reopen both our economy and our Church. Ease our anxiety and give us confidence to move into the new normal of living under threat of pandemic. We ask your blessings on those who are sick and their caregivers. We lift before your throne of mercy all those we name before you either aloud or in the silence of our hearts... Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Your commands are good and merciful. Give us courage to take hold of our baptismal promises to work for justice and advocate for those who have no voice in our society. Help us to love the unlovable and to pray for our enemies. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

You remain with us always, O God, and your kingdom has no end. We remember the saints who have gone before us. Unite us forever in your final victory over death. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

With bold confidence in your love, almighty God, we place all for whom we pray into your eternal care; through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## **SHARING OF THE PEACE**

P: During our time of social distancing, we share the peace with one another in a slightly different way. As I share the peace of Christ with you, I once again ask you to pick at least one person each day this week to personally share the peace of the Lord. Please remember to keep your socially acceptable distance... One person each day isn't a lot to ask, but it will keep us united while were apart. So, I'll start us off...

P: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER**

P: The living Lord Jesus Christ is our tie that binds us together, let us pray as He taught his disciples.....

**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.**

### **BLESSING**

May the One who brought forth Jesus from the dead raise you to new life, fill you with hope, and turn your mourning into dancing. Almighty God, Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever.

**Amen.**

### **DISMISSAL**

P: In everything you do, go in Christ's Love.

**C: Seeking, welcoming, and serving all. Amen!**