

Pentecost 18 Leadership Letter, October 4, 2020

To our Zion Family,

During this past Sunday's "joyful chaos" following the service, we spent several minutes sharing our reverie about the breathtaking colors on display in our little part of heaven here in central New York. Several of our fellow congregants ventured out from their homes during the week, driving to favorite spots around the area to take in the spectacular fall foliage. Thankfully, even in the throes of all the discouraging events taking place around us, we can still (re)experience the splendor of God's creation. I'm hoping the fall colors will stay with us for a while—Lord knows we are due for some inspiration right around now!

Announcements and updates:

-As a reminder, we have scheduled our first Return to In-person worship for Oct. 25th for those ready to return to Zion's sanctuary for worship. The service will also be Zoomed for those who choose to continue worshipping from home. Rev. Jennifer DeWeerth will serve as our supply pastor. We ask that those planning to attend this in-person worship arrive between 9:30-9:45 in order for us to safely enter the building and get seated, following social distancing. Everyone is respectfully expected to wear their mask/face covering from time of arrival, during the service, and upon exiting at our conclusion. Assuming all goes well on Oct. 25th, we have also scheduled in-person worship services for Nov. 22nd and Dec. 20th, the Sundays just before Thanksgiving and Christmas.

-We are pleased to welcome the members of Herkimer's Trinity Lutheran Church to our Zoom service again this Sunday.

-Please join us for worship this Sunday at 10:00 AM. Our service on the Zoom platform continues for those with internet access via computer, tablet, smart phone, or through the livestream of YouTube. Those who choose to call in may listen from their phone. You can also continue participating in Zion's virtual Sunday 10:00 AM worship service by utilizing the Service of the Word template provided later in this newsletter. Feel free to use the Service of the Word at any time if you aren't able to join us in spirit at 10:00 AM on Sunday.

To join this Sunday's service on Zoom, same log-in info as last week:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84354840714?pwd=TDJGTkwvSTBER2INb1o1Qzd6WGxDdz09> Meeting ID: 843-5484 0714, Password: 022654. Or by PHONE, One tap mobile, +16465588656, 84354840714#, 1#, 022654# US (New York)

-If you would prefer to view the service via livestream on our YouTube channel, you can do so by visiting our page at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWzOtbCe2z7-bIPvxp62lA>. Thanks, Shawn, for developing this option!

-Zion's church council committed to continue hosting Red Cross blood drives in our Fellowship Hall. The next blood drive will take place on Nov. 21st. A link to register for a donation time will be provided in an upcoming leadership letter. According to the Red Cross staff, they hope for 20 donations at each of these scheduled drives. We are still looking for a volunteer to serve as liaison with the Red Cross for these blood drives that will be held at Zion every other month. Please contact Sara at the church office (315-732-4110 or office@zionluth.com) if you are able to help out.

-Zion's church council finalized and approved the full Ministry Site Profile (MSP), which will be passed along to the Synod this week. A preliminary draft of the MSP without the accompanying detail had been sent to Synod several weeks ago, but the full version, approved by council, is a necessary step in the call process. The MSP task is now completed. Thanks to Jack Henke and the Call Committee, along with MSP Committee members Bob and Bonnie Loomis, Ed Hecklau, and Curtis Pulliam, for their significant contributions in preparing this document.

-As stated previously, although we have not been together in-person for many months, the work of our church continues. We appreciate the efforts of so many Zion members serving on the Call Committee, Worship & Music, Property, telephone volunteers, and in numerous other capacities to continue carrying out Zion's mission, along with your ongoing financial stewardship contributions that make this all possible. Thank you! We are indeed fortunate to belong to such a generous and committed congregation.

-Zion's book group that is looking at "The Book of Longings," will meet at 1:00 PM (instead of 2:00) on Monday, Oct. 5th at Jim and Kim Marscher's house, 8361 Woods Highway in New Hartford. Call or text 315-794-6233 if you have questions.

Rev. Jennifer DeWeerth has spoiled me, as have Rev. Janet and Deacon Patsy. What wonderful supply pastors we have, delivering fabulous sermons week in and week out! In Jen's sermon this past Sunday, she concluded her remarks in this way: "I believe that a bunch of people in the corner of a courtyard met someone who changed them, changed their way of thinking about the world, changed their hearts, and changed history. If the priests want to know where Jesus' authority came from, it came from there. Jesus has authority in our lives because, when we meet him, he changes us. He forgives us and heals us in ways we could not have imagined. He asks us to follow him, and we put one foot in front of the other and we go into the field. His authority is from heaven, and it finds its home here on earth, in our cracked open and healed hearts, our forgiven bodies, and then also in our refusal to comply with systems of injustice, our work feeding, clothing, tending the sick, and welcoming the excluded. We authorize all that he has done when we continue to do what he did. Amen." And so, Zion family members, when there is so much conflict and vitriol swirling around us, let us continue to "work in the field" this week to create a more humane, just, loving, respectful, and affirming world for all.

The Lord's peace be with you,
Mark Thompson and Kristen Burson, church council co-presidents

Pentecost 18 – October 4, 2020



SERVICE OF THE WORD
GATHERING

WELCOME

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the Holy Trinity, † one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Faithful God,

Have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways. We pass judgment on one another before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before those of our neighbors. We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves. Make us humble, cast away our transgressions, and turn us again to life in you through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of † Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world. **Amen.**

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

Alleluia! Christ is risen. **Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

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 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. We praise you for your salvation through water, for the water in this font, 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. **Amen.**

Opening Hymn: *I Come with Joy* #482, Verses 1, 4, & 5 –Mary Senn

Vs. 1 I come with joy, a child of God, forgiven, loved, and free, the life of Jesus to recall in love laid down for me, in love laid down for me.

Vs. 4 The Spirit of the risen Christ, unseen, but ever near, is in such friendship better known, alive among us here, alive among us here.

Vs. 5 Together met, together bound by all that God has done, we'll go with joy, to give the world the love that makes us one, the love that makes us one.

Prayer of the Day

Beloved God, from you come all things that are good. Lead us by the inspiration of your Spirit to know those things that are right, and by your merciful guidance, help us to do them, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

THE WORD

First Reading: Isaiah 5:1-7

Second Reading: Philippians 3:4-14

Gospel: Matthew 21:33-46

Sermon: *The case of the absentee landlord* –Rev. Janet Hoover

After several months of healing and teaching around the Sea of Galilee, Jesus and his disciples have journeyed to Jerusalem, where whispers about this maverick rabbi have already caused a stir. While their entry into the city looks like a march of triumph, the palm branches and hosannas are quickly buried under a barrage of dispute and conflict. Jesus takes his message of forgiveness, of love and mercy, of expanding borders and new ways right into the heart of power— and it is not well-received. The religious authorities fear the erosion of their power. They see the structures of all that they hold dear shaking. They watch Jesus flout all the traditions they work so hard to keep, and soon Jesus' days are numbered. But instead of hiding away from the threat, he continues to speak boldly. He stands in the Temple itself, the air crackling with hostility and suspicion, and addresses the crowd. As is the case with all his parables, Jesus begins with ordinary and familiar situations, and then turns everything upside down. Human assumptions of the way the world works are torn aside, leaving those who listen in a world where human ways are replaced by God's ways. Many of those listening would know exactly what it means to be a tenant farmer—renting the land they farmed. This common practice meant that at harvest time they would have to give a portion of their crops to the landlord...always more than they would have preferred to give. In many cases, the landlord lived in another locale, so he would send his representatives to collect the rent. We may not live under this sort of system, but we have read the stories. Sharecroppers eking out a meager existence in the years following the Civil War. Irish peasants struggling under geographically and emotionally distant landlords. Many of us would align ourselves with the tenants. Shouldn't those who do the work get the rewards? In this case, the tenants decide they shouldn't have to share. And so, when the landlord's rental agents appear, the tenants drive them out. They don't just bar the door and refuse to answer the phone, they set upon the agents—beating, stoning, and killing. Jesus' listeners can predict the next scene. Surely it will involve the revenge of the landowner. But no... the landowner, with full knowledge of what has occurred, with the legal system on his side...takes no punitive action. Instead, he sends an even larger group of collection agents. The tenants, having seemingly gotten away with the abuse of the first emissaries, deal similarly with this second group.

Jesus' listeners assume the next thing will be an action scene, complete with soldiers, swords, and battle. But no...the landowner decides to send his son. Incredible! Into the teeth of this murdering mob, he would send his son? What about the punishment these tenants so richly deserve? Predictably, the son is killed, at which point Jesus asks what his listeners think the landowner would do to these tenants. Sharon Burch says: Everyone in the crowd can tell him. He's going to come and bash them, smite them, pillory them, and rip them into shreds. He's going to draw and quarter them and make an example of them so that people will see what happens when someone belittles his authority. They may be on the side of the tenants, but they know how the world works. Righteous rage is the natural response to a trust so cruelly betrayed. Anger is justified, isn't it, when trust and fidelity are violated? But, as usual, Jesus turns all our expectations upside down. We want to picture the landowner as some sort of hard-hearted tyrant happy only when he gets every last kernel of corn to which he is entitled. But this landowner doesn't fit that image. Notice that it is the listeners and not Jesus—or the landowner—who escalate the violence. The landowner continually reacts to increasing violence with peaceful responses, giving chance after chance. We want to look at this story through the lens of human nature, but God's nature is much different. God has provided this universe and everything within it for the nurture of its inhabitants. But the inhabitants begin to believe that

everything they harvest is their own. They become possessive and destructive. However, even when they misbehave to the extent portrayed in this parable, they are not punished by some sort of celestial bolt of lightning. Indeed, God's son comes with love and grace, and God continues to love. Not because the inhabitants deserve it, but because this is the nature of God. As stories of judgment go, this is a strange one. Bill Carter writes: The tenants come off as complete fools. But the only ones more foolish were those vindictive religious leaders who gave vindictive answers calling for destruction. Everything we know about this landlord has to do with patience, persistence, mercy.

This is a story not of darkness and despair, but of light that pierces the dark side of humanity with love. It is a story of God's justice. God's persistence. God's faith in us. God's determination to keep trying with us. And it is a story we need to hear, for as we look around, we see that the vineyard which God has entrusted to us is in shambles. From all parts of the globe, voices of hatred and violence resound. Divisions between people and groups of people seem to be widening. We seem to be more afraid of each other with each passing day. We are surrounded by fears of pandemics surging, and racial tensions and global warming and political upheaval. In an attempt to ensure our security, we try to control not just our plot of ground, but all the plots around us. We forget that the vineyard doesn't belong to us, but to God. This is a parable for our time, for this parable about the vineyard...the kingdom of God, is a story about what can happen when we set ourselves on keeping the vineyard for ourselves. It is a reminder of the ways fear becomes anger, which moves all too quickly toward violence. Remember—God is not the problem. We are—all of us who find it so hard to be tenants rather than owners. All of us who want to set aside God's ways and put in their place our own ways. All of us who ignore the prophets' cries for justice, who place our needs and desires above those of our neighbors who share the vineyard with us.

The miracle is that God keeps at it—never gives up trying to reach us, teach us, touch us, change us. It is October—a time of harvest. But this is not just a harvest parable, it is a story of Easter celebration. Shortly after Jesus tells this story he is put to death. But even that isn't the end of the story. The death of the son isn't the last word. Sometime between Good Friday and Sunday morning, God rewrote the ending. There Jesus was, brutalized, lying lifeless in the grave. And there was the human family, most of them not even realizing what they had done. Some even smug in the idea that they had overcome the son. John Claypool says: I find what happened in these hours utterly incredible—God awakening the Son, healing those awful wounds in the feet and the hands and the side, and then saying to him: We cannot stop now. They still are my children—your brothers and sisters. It is not my will that any of them should perish. Go back again. God—and Jesus—couldn't even wait for the sun to come up to get back to the vineyard. What no human being ever dreamed would happen, did happen on Easter morning. What we would have done in such a situation is not what God did. God decided on resurrection rather than revenge. That is good news, but it is often seen as so good that we struggle to believe it is true. We look around at the sin and darkness of our world. We look at our own actions and thoughts, our own sin and darkness, and we know that our words and deeds must surely wound God. We wonder if there is any hope for the vineyard. When my daughter was little and learning to write, she would often leave me notes. Things like—can we have ice cream for dessert? Circle yes or no. Can I play with my friend? Circle yes or no. Every once in a while, she would write—do you love me? Circle yes or no. That is often the way we talk to God. We ask questions—can we have good weather and plenty of money? Can we stay healthy? Can we win? But underneath what we are really asking is—do you love us? Do you still love us? Can you possibly love us after all we have done? The great word of the gospel is that, in the sending of the son, in the raising him from the dead, his hands scarred by suffering, God drew a circle around the Yes! Yes, I love you. Yes, you can trust me. For God so loved the world that God sent his son that all who believe in him would not perish but would have everlasting life. Thanks be to God, for God is good and God's love is forever. Amen.

Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come 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.

ANTHEM: I Will Sing of the Mercies -Fillmore/Leatherman

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

Holy God, you call us to work for peace and justice in your vineyard. Refresh the church with your life, that we may bear fruit through work and service. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Thank you for the abundant harvest of the earth. Bless and care for those whose hands bring the fruits of the earth to the tables of all who hunger. May we be inspired by your servants who cared deeply for your creation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Curb the impulses of greed and pride that lead us to take advantage of others. Grant that world leaders seek the fruits of the kingdom for the good and welfare of all people. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Listen to the cries of your people waiting patiently for your healing hand and comforting Spirit especially: those who suffer with chronic pain and all cancer patients, Pr. Mary Etta, Gail, healing for Norm, Claudia and Fran, Edie Marie, Suzee, prayers for Michael Gilleece and family, as Michael recovers from surgery, the Nelson family, Your Neighbors clients, prayers for Ashley's baby, and Theresa, that the light of Christ may shine upon them with hope. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy, through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Thanksgiving at the Table

O God of justice and love, we give thanks to you that you illumine our way through life with the words of your Son. Give us the light we need, awaken us unto the needs of others, and at the end bring all the world to your feast; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Closing Hymn: *The Church of Christ, in Every Age* #729, Verses 1, 2, & 5 -Mary Senn

Vs. 1 The church of Christ, in ev'ry age beset by change, but Spirit led, must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead.

Vs. 2 Across the world, across the street, the victims of injustice cry for shelter and for bread to eat, and never live before they die.

Vs. 5 We have no mission but to serve in full obedience to our Lord; to care for all, without reserve, and spread his liberating word.

Blessing

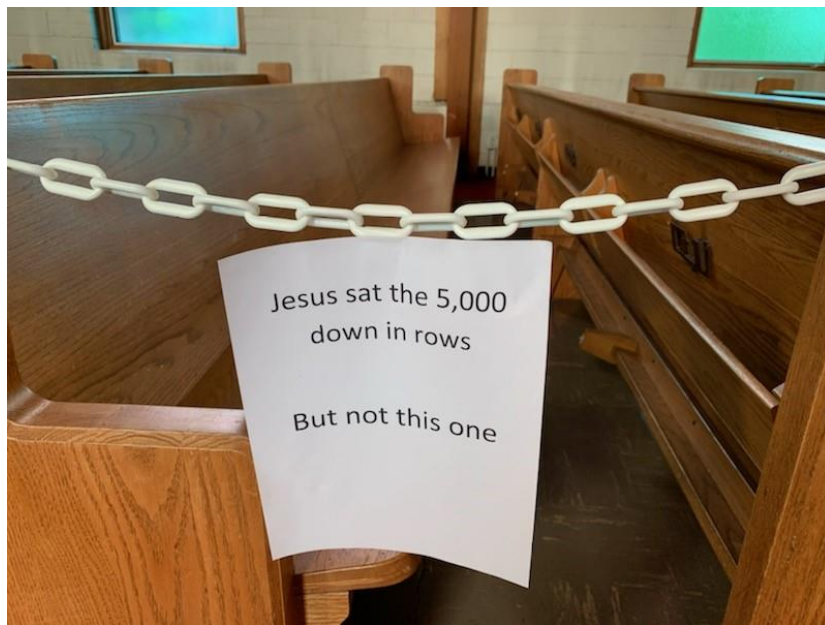
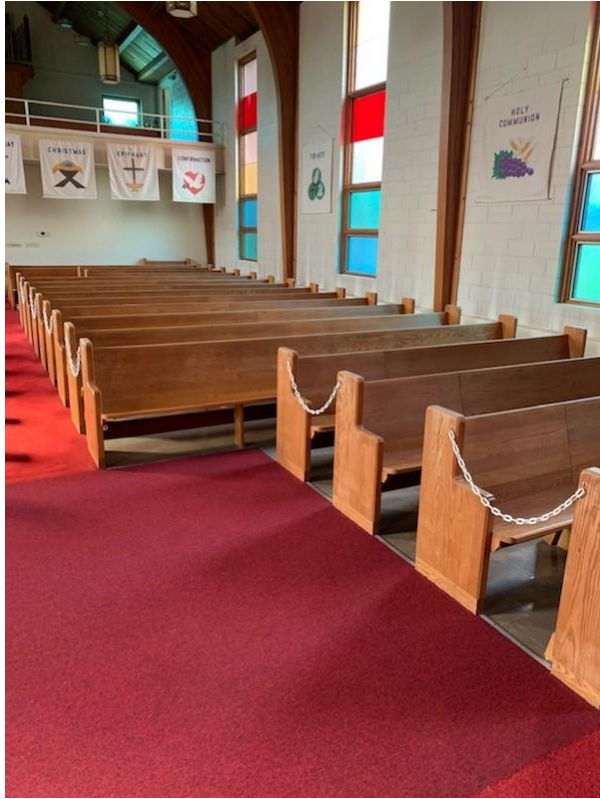
Mothering God, Father, ✠ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you and lead you into the way of truth and life. **Amen.**

Dismissal

Go in peace. Remember the poor. **Thanks be to God.**



Our sanctuary is being prepared for our October 25th service. Cushions, bibles, hymnals, and prayer cards have been removed from the pews to maximize safety for all those attending the Sunday services in-person.



Thank you to Jan Kowaczuk, Jeanne Gymburch, Mark & Nancy Thompson, and Ted McCarthy for preparing the church for in-person worship!

ZION ENDOWMENT FUND ANNUAL DISTRIBUTION FOR 2020

Zion's Endowment Fund has approximately \$15,300 available for distribution in 2020. One fourth of the total distribution will go to each of the following categories:

- (1) Community outreach programs
- (2) Special ministries of Zion
- (3) Missions of the ELCA
- (4) Zion Capital Projects

To be considered for a grant, submit a Zion Lutheran Church Grant Application Form describing your organization and what the funds will be used for to:

Zion Lutheran Church
630 French Rd
New Hartford, NY 13413
Attn: Endowment Distribution
Or send via email to office@zionuth.com

The Grant Application form is available from the church office. There is a link to the form in the Endowment Fund article on the church web site at: <http://www.zionlutheranny.org/Zions-Permanent-Funds>
Deadline for receipt of the form is November 1, 2020. All applications will be considered at the November 2020 Endowment Committee meeting. Recipients will be notified in writing and checks will be sent in late November/early December 2020.

ZION ENDOWMENT FUND OVERVIEW

Zion's Endowment Fund was established in 1985 for the purpose of enhancing the mission outreach of Zion Lutheran Church apart from the general operations of the congregation. The Fund welcomes gifts from Zion and Utica community members. Gifts can consist of memorials, bequests in wills, charitable remainder and other trusts, charitable gift annuities, assignment of life insurance and transfer of property, such as cash, stocks, bonds, or real estate. To-date, most gifts have been from bequests in wills. Planned giving is one method of providing end of life gifting of one's wealth to the Zion Endowment Fund.

YEARLY DISTRIBUTIONS

The Endowment Fund by-laws require that yearly distributions be made from the Fund. The distributions are divided among the following: one-quarter each to; community outreach, missions of the ELCA, special ministries of Zion Lutheran Church and Zion capital projects. The Endowment Fund Committee makes recommendations to the Church Council and Zion's congregation concerning the charitable distributions. Some past recipients include; Community Food Bank, Your Neighbors, Family Nurturing Center, Canstruction, Lutheran Homes Foundation, Vanderkamp, KEYS Program and Foothills Rural Community Ministry.

HISTORY OF GIFTS RECEIVED AND DISTRIBUTIONS

In the thirty-five years of its existence, the Endowment Fund has received gifts and bequests of about \$200,000. Over this same period, distributions from the Fund now exceed \$280,000. The Endowment Fund expects to distribute approximately \$15,300 this year.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE FUND ARE WELCOME

Contributions to the Zion Endowment Fund need not be just in the form of bequests in wills or trusts. Cash or checks, in any amount, in memory of a loved one or in honor of someone special, would be appropriate and welcomed. Our hopes and expectations are that additional gifts, coupled with Fund earnings, will cause the Fund value to increase so that Zion may play an ever-larger part in fulfilling its mission in the world. Your endowment gift would be a part of that process.

Enjoy our 23rd recipe exchange provided to us by Sara Silva

Cheesecake stuffed apples



Ingredients:

4 tbsp. melted butter
2 tbsp. brown sugar
1 tsp. cinnamon, plus more for dusting
4 baking apples, tops sliced, insides scooped
2 blocks cream cheese, softened
1/2 c. powdered sugar
1/2 tsp. pure vanilla extract
Crushed graham crackers, for garnish

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400°. Mix melted butter, brown sugar, and cinnamon. Place apples in a baking dish and brush butter mixture onto apples and bake for 20 minutes.
Beat cream cheese, sugar, and vanilla until creamy. Spoon mixture into stuffed apples and bake 10 minutes more.
Garnish with cinnamon and crushed graham crackers and serve.

