

## Pentecost 9 Leadership Letter

Dear Friends, The Sermon on the Mount is rich with insight and guidance...and deserves a careful reading. This study is offered as a means for you to use in your study and reflection. Pastor Janet

Day 1 Read Matthew 5:48 This verse may have caused me more discouragement than any other. Be perfect—like God!!! It is important to remember that perfection doesn't mean getting an A+ on every test. It has nothing to do with looking beautiful or never making a mistake. Perfection means to be the way God made you. It is to be filled with love and respond to the world with love. Perfection means to serve God with a single-minded devotion—to take seriously all that Jesus says. Is it easy? Absolutely not. Is it possible? Yes, because even when we fail, through Jesus we know that we are forgiven and set back on course. To be perfect is to keep trying, to admit our struggles and ask for help, to celebrate our strengths and not dwell on our weakness. Perfection isn't something we do; it is something we are. For we are created in God's image—and God says, "It is good."

Day 2 Read Matthew 6:1-4 How do you give? When you give your time and money and energy, do you give for the joy of giving, or do you seek a thank-you? It is nice to be appreciated, to have what we do noted and commented on. But Jesus warns against that. He uses a word we find harsh - hypocrite. In Greek, hypocrite is a stage actor—doing everything with an eye on the grandstand, listening for the applause. If we are motivated only by the thought of a plaque on the wall or an effusive thank-you note, then we are on the wrong track. If, however, we remember that all that we have and are comes to us from God, then our giving becomes an outpouring of gratitude and a true offering of love.

Day 3 Read Matthew 6:5-8 One of the most difficult parts of leading worship for me as a Presbyterian pastor was what we call the "Prayers of the People" (or as my daughters used to describe it—the long prayer). I struggled to make it a true prayer—not marked by well-crafted phrases, not an opportunity for a second sermon, but a heart-felt prayer of need and thanks. It's hard to pray aloud before a group, isn't it? We worry about how our words sound, how profound and noble are our thoughts? Jesus reminds us that prayer is not performance but connection with God. The words we say aren't as important as the longing the words contain. God doesn't need fancy words and flowery phrases. Instead, God waits to hear our heart beat out a song of need and thanks, praise and confession, trust and longing. In silence or with words, turn to God trusting that God hears and knows and is ready to wrap you in grace.

Day 4 Read Matthew 6:9-10 Here in the center of the Sermon on the Mount we find perhaps the most familiar words in Scripture. Jesus has talked about prayer, now he prays. He begins with honor and praise, which is our natural response when we reflect on God's presence. What an amazing God has created us. God loves us as intimately as a parent—walking with us, feeding us, cradling us, guiding our steps—and at the same time is awesome and full of glory and beyond anything we can imagine. Our prayer is to begin with praise and a desire for this incredibly loving and powerful God to pull back the curtain so that the whole world might see and know and be part of the glory and the wonder. Are you ready? Are you ready for the joy of heaven to be a part of your everyday life? Are you ready for God's will to be lived out in workplaces and schools and homes and neighborhoods and churches? Then get on your knees and lift your hearts and minds to God who loves us and works for us—always.

Day 5 Matthew 6:11-12 We begin our prayer with the glory and love of God. Then we move to our need for God. We tend to think of ourselves as self-sufficient but, if we are honest, we know that without God we are helpless. Each day we need to feel God's presence, to hear encouraging words, and to be fed with grace and mercy. Everything we have and are comes from God—and yet instead of living out our thanks with joyous gratitude, we turn from God. We try to protect ourselves at the expense of others. We owe God so much and we give back so little. The gift of God is that, as we admit our weakness and failure, God erases the slate and offers us new beginnings. Are you ready to acknowledge God's goodness? Are you ready to be wrapped in God's forgiving love? Are you ready to take that same love into the world? Then get on your knees and lift your hearts and minds to God, whose generosity knows no bounds and whose love is forever.

Day 6 Read Matthew 6:13 It's fairly easy to gather on Sunday morning in the sanctuary (or on Zoom or Facebook or YouTube) and hear words of challenge and comfort. It is much harder to take those words out into the world—a world of terrorist threats and institutional corruption. It is hard to be a disciple of Christ in an X-rated world where violence is cheered, and scandal accepted. None of us will know how we will respond if real persecution comes our way. Will we deny? Stand firm? Each day as we head out into the problems and joys that await, we must remember that our strength comes from God. Are you ready to face evil with courage? Are you ready to fight hate with love? Then get on your knees and lift your hearts and minds to God—who strengthens the weak and supports the fainthearted. Remember, there is nothing that can separate us from God's love through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## Information and Updates for the Week Ahead:

-Despite the limitations presented by the COVID-19 virus, the Zion congregation continues our weekly gathering for worship. This past Sunday, 40 households joined together on Zoom, along with those utilizing the Service of the Word and viewing the livestream on YouTube. We feel truly blessed for this continued commitment to our faith and one another by so many. Rev. Janet Hoover leads our service this Sunday. Please join us again for worship at 10:00 AM as 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 may call in to 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=TDJGTkwwSTBER2lNbl0lQzd6WGxDdz09> Meeting ID: 843-5484 0714, Password: 022654. Or by PHONE, One tap mobile, 6465588656, 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>.

-Recognizing that late July and August are often a time for vacation, the Zoom, livestreaming on YouTube, or Service of the Word actually make it possible to continue Sunday worship with your Zion family from wherever you may be.

-The Ministry Site Profile (MSP) committee met earlier this week to continue refining the document describing our Zion ministry and congregation for use in recruiting our next pastor. Your feedback has been included in the version that will be forwarded to the Synod at the end of this week. Thanks to committee members Bonnie and Bob Loomis, Ed Hecklau, Curtis Pulliam, and especially Jack Henke for their work on preparing this important document for the call process.

-The Task Force on Return to In-person Worship met on Tuesday evening via Zoom. The protocol for our eventual return to in-person was reviewed and refined, along with identifying the needed supplies and staffing. A "walk-through" of the protocol will take place within the next few weeks. A number of factors will influence the decision about when we return to gather in person, including Oneida County/NYS/CDC recommendations and guidelines, securing the needed supplies and volunteers to staff the service (which is a larger number than a pre-COVID service required), and the readiness of both members of our congregation and our supply pastors to return to the sanctuary. We will be surveying our Zion congregation about your readiness to return to in-person worship via telephone and on-line in the next few weeks.

-Our summer Bible study (via Zoom), led by Rev. Janet Hoover, continues this Thursday from 7:30-8:30 pm. It is not necessary to have attended previous sessions to join us this Thursday. The link to join: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83302013288?pwd=cGpwTnYwMjduMk96OE0rQXVNTTREQT09>. Meeting ID: 833 0201 3288. Password: 834215. Hope to see you there!

-Please continue to remember Fran and Claudia King in your prayers. And if you have a moment this week, consider using the Zion directory and sending a card or making a call to a fellow congregant to say you're thinking about them.

In closing, I was struck by two messages from this past Sunday's service. The opening hymn that Mary played for us was *If You But Trust in God to Guide You*. The last line of the 4th stanza reads (sings), "This is our confidence indeed: God never fails in time of need." Rev. Jen DeWeerth underscored that sentiment in the final words of her wonderful sermon. "We take comfort in the promise that God is with us in this journey, in this flesh, in this moment, in whatever chronic condition of life we are experiencing now; we cannot be separated from the love of God. Together with the God of love we are not conquerors, always victorious in the game, but we are something more than conquerors. We are inseparable." We are grateful for our loving God who remains with us regardless of circumstance, and especially during the difficult times (like now). And we are grateful for you, our brothers and sisters of Zion, as we continue together despite physical separation. Have a good week ahead!

Peace,  
Mark Thompson and Kristen Burson, council co-presidents

Pentecost 9



SERVICE OF THE WORD  
GATHERING

**WELCOME**

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

Blessed be the Holy Trinity, ☩ one God, whose steadfast love is everlasting, whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. **Amen.**

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Reconciling God,

**We confess that we do not trust your abundance, and we deny your presence in our lives. We place our hope in ourselves and rely on our own efforts. We fail to believe that you provide enough for all. We abuse your good creation for our own benefit. We fear difference and do not welcome others as you have welcomed us. We sin in thought, word, and deed. By your grace, forgive us; through your love, renew us; and in your Spirit, lead us; so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen.**

Beloved of God, by the radical abundance of divine mercy we have peace with God through ☩ Christ Jesus, through whom we have obtained grace upon grace. Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope. For hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. **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:** *Bread of Life from Heaven #474, Verses 1 & 2 –Mary Senn*

**Vs. 1** Bread of life from heaven, your blood and body given, we eat this bread and drink this cup until you come again. Break now the bread of Christ's sacrifice; giving thanks, hungry ones, gather round. Eat, all of you, and be satisfied; in Christ's presence the loaves will abound.

**Vs. 2** Bread of life from heaven, your blood and body given, we eat this bread and drink this cup until you come again. Seek not the food that will pass away; set your hearts on the food that endures. Come, learn the true and the living way, that the fullness of life may be yours.

**Prayer of the Day**

Glorious God, your generosity waters the world with goodness, and you cover creation with abundance. Awaken in us a hunger for the food that satisfies both body and spirit, and with this food fill all the starving world, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

**THE WORD**

**First Reading:** Isaiah 55:1-5

**Second Reading:** Romans 9:1-5

**Gospel:** Matthew 14:13-21

**Sermon:** *Divine Interruption* -Rev. Janet Hoover

These verses are fairly familiar to us. This feeding of the 5,000 as it is sometimes called—is included in all four gospels. So familiar, that it is easy to graze the surface of the text, assuming we know what it says. Listen—again—this time as it is told by Eugene Peterson: When his disciples thought Jesus had gone on long enough—it was quite late in the day—they interrupted. We are a long way out in the country and it's very late. Pronounce the benediction and send these folks off so they can get some supper. Jesus said: You get some supper for them. They replied: Are you serious? You want us to go spend a fortune on food for their supper? But he was quite serious. How many loaves of bread do you have? Take an inventory. That didn't take long. Five, they said. Plus, two fish. Jesus got them all to sit down in groups of fifty or a hundred—they looked like a patchwork quilt of wildflowers spread out on the green grass. He took the five loaves and two fish, lifted his face to heaven in prayer, blessed, broke, and gave the bread to the disciples, and the disciples in turn gave it to the people. He did the same with the fish. They all ate their fill. And the disciples gathered twelve baskets of leftovers.

This is an amazing story of grace and hope, a powerful demonstration of what faith and trust in Christ can do. But this week I was struck—not so much by Jesus' ability to feed the multitude, but as the disciples' part in the miracle. Did you notice that while Jesus broke the bread, it was the disciples who handed it out? They were the ones who enacted the miracle. They had a part to play in this demonstration of compassion, a part they undertook with hesitation. While we may wonder a bit at their reluctance, a look at what precedes the story makes their reluctance understandable. According to Matthew, it hasn't been easy for Jesus or his followers. Jesus has preached in his hometown...and been rejected. Then they get the word that John the Baptist has been killed by Herod. Everywhere they look they see death and loss, failure, and disappointment. So, Jesus decides to get away to grieve, to think, to try to discern what he might do. His plan is to find some quiet to replenish his spirit. We might say he wanted some "me time." That was the plan. The crowds had figured out where they were going and, using a short cut, got to the destination before he did. And his retreat is cancelled—almost before it begins. But it doesn't seem to bother Jesus. For he looks at the desperate faces of the crowd, he sees the brokenness, the pain, the longing, the hunger for healing and wholeness, and he changes his plans. Instead of resting, he begins teaching and feeding.

While I love the story of the loaves and the fishes, this part of the text frustrates me, for I am the kind of person who is happiest when things go according to plan. I like calendars and lists and agendas. If we are supposed to get from point A to point B, I want to follow the most direct route and avoid unpleasant detours. But what this text seems to say is that if we do that, if our focus is on sticking to our plans, then there's a very good chance we'll end up missing out on God's plans. If Jesus and the disciples had stuck to their plan of R&R, they would have ended up missing the opportunity to work wonders in the lives of the crowds—and in their own lives as well. If we have our eyes fixed only on where we want to be headed, we may very well miss seeing where it is that God wants us to be headed. Plans are good—we aren't called to just lie in bed every morning until we get a divine word for our day. But...even as we plan, we need to be open to divine interruptions. We live in a world where 24/7 has become a part of our vocabulary, meaning that many of us are involved in work and activities that seem to take up 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And living in that kind of a 24/7 world, interruptions are about the last thing we want, but perhaps interruptions are what we really need, because at times those unexpected detours are God's way of getting our attention and directing our steps toward the place God intends. I think that one of the reasons we resent interruptions is that, at heart, we feel inadequate. What if someone asks us to do something that may take more energy than we think we have, or is beyond our physical or mental ability, or makes us too uncomfortable? We prefer to be busy with things that we enjoy or feel competent at or can control. The disciples wanted to send the crowds away because they knew that their resources were less than sufficient. They may have trusted Jesus, but they didn't trust themselves, and the possibility of failure made them want to turn away from the situation. We all know what that feels like, don't we? Parents sometimes feel inadequate when it comes to raising their children in these difficult times when no decision feels right. Children and youth feel that they'll never be good enough to please their parents or impress their peers. Adult children with aging parents feel inadequate when it comes to the responsibilities and decisions they face. Performance reviews at work, tests at school—create a nervous anxiety in us. And if we feel inadequate in our personal lives, we crumble when we look at the big issues around us. How can we do anything to make a difference when it comes to global warming? Covid-19? Violence in our city streets? Starving children in Africa? Homelessness? We echo the discomfort of the disciples: This one is too big for us to handle. Please just make them—make it—go away. That's why this is a story for our time, for people like us who cringe at the thought of interruptions that might tax our resources. This story tells us that it is the interruptions that may open us to new worlds of wonder and opportunity where we are not only blessed but can also become channels of blessing. This story also reminds us that we don't have to worry about our ability, our strength...all we have to do is share what we have and let God do the rest.

Jesus doesn't tell the disciples to arrange a 15-course meal for the crowds. He asks them to bring what they have, trusting that it will be enough to feed their hunger. God doesn't tell us to bring Pulitzer-prize winning novels, Heisman trophies, Nobel prizes...God says: Bring me what you have. Offer soup and crackers, a smile (even behind your mask). Lay what you have in my hands and let me work through it so that the hungry are fed, the lonely find a home, the lost are found, the broken made whole. Sometimes all we have to offer God is the equivalent of five loaves and two fish. The problems are large. Our resources are small. But our God is a God who knows, who cares, and who is just waiting for someone to take the first step so God can bring God's mighty power and resources to the aid of a world hungering for justice and peace and love. You—just as you are—are the one God needs. So, go into your week—schedules prepared, calendars marked, appointments made, lists ready—to do the work that is needed. But be ready for the divine interruptions. Whenever the early Christians wrote to each other and discussed plans for the future, they always put the letters DV at the end of each sentence. DV—the abbreviation for the Latin phrase Deo volente, which means: God willing. Or as we said in Oklahoma—God willing, and the creek don't rise. In other words, even as they planned, they reminded themselves that what was most important was not what they had planned for the future, but what God had planned. They lived each day open to the possibility that God would interrupt and change their plans. In the times when we feel we are losing hope, when our efforts seem futile, remember this story and see in your hearts and minds bread and fish passed from hand to hand. See Christ hanging on the cross—seemingly defenseless, seemingly powerless. All his resources seemingly spilled out and useless. Remember that God took that weakness and made of it a beacon of resurrection hope and promise. Remember and let your remembering be a source of courage and strength. And then, trusting in God's grace, turn to face the challenges and struggles, turn to confront all that hurts and wounds, turn to all that is born of greed and injustice. Take your stand and there offer what you have. And then watch and see the wonders God can work.

### **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: Holy Manna -Moore*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

You take resources that appear to be meager, bless them, and there is enough. May your church trust that what you bless and ask us to share with the world is abundantly sufficient. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You offer yourself to all the nations and peoples of the earth, inviting everyone to abundant life. Bring the prophetic vision to fullness, that all nations will run to you and that nations who do not know you will find their joy in you. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You offer freely the fullness of salvation. Give our congregation such a welcoming heart, that our words and actions may extend your free and abundant hospitality to all whom we encounter. 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, peace and comfort for Mary Ellen Van Allen, Gail, Fran and Claudia, comfort for Cassie, Joe and family, the family of Debbie Presite, Edie Marie, Suzee, Michael Gilleece and family, healing and peace for Jack and Jim, the Nelson family, Your Neighbors clients, Theresa, and residents of the Presbyterian Home, that the light of Christ may shine upon them with hope. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you, through Jesus 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 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:** *You Satisfy the Hungry Heart* #484, Verses 1 & 5 -Mary Senn

**Vs. 1** You satisfy the hungry heart with gift of finest wheat. Come give to us, O saving Lord, the bread of life to eat. As when the shepherd calls his sheep, they know and heed his voice; so when you call your fam'ly, Lord, we follow and rejoice.

**Vs. 5** You satisfy the hungry heart with gift of finest wheat. Come give to us, O saving Lord, the bread of life to eat. You give yourself to us, O Lord; then selfless let us be, to serve each other in your name in truth and charity.

## Blessing

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. God, the creator, † Jesus, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the comforter, bless you and keep you in eternal love. **Amen.**

## Dismissal

Go in peace. Christ is with you. **Thanks be to God.**

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## Summer Bible Study on Zoom, with Janet Hoover

Bible Study is held on *Thursdays from 7:30-8:30 PM.*

**August 6** Mary, Elizabeth, and Joseph: Great Expectations, Luke 1:1-45, Matthew 1:18-25, Matthew 2:13-23

**To join on Zoom:** <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83302013288?pwd=cGpwTnYwMjduMk96OE0rQXVNTTREQT09>  
Meeting ID: 833 0201 3288. Password: 834215.

**To join by phone:** Dial 646-558-8656, Meeting ID: 833 0201 3288, Password 834215.

## Enjoy our 15<sup>th</sup> recipe exchange provided to us by Sara Silva



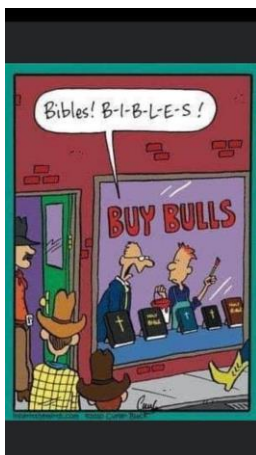
Summer garden stew (*Optional, serve with baguettes and a ricotta spread!*)

**Ingredients:** 2 zucchini, 6 mini yellow peppers, 1 sweet potato, 1 medium eggplant, olive oil, garlic.

Spices: turmeric, cayenne pepper, salt and pepper.

**Directions:** Dice zucchini and peppers. Remove skin from sweet potato and eggplant before dicing. Brown as much garlic as you like in olive oil and then add vegetables and as much of your seasonings as you like.

Cook on medium with lid on until desired texture, *no need to add water.*



*A joyful heart makes the face cheerful.*