

Welcome to Worship at  
Trinity Lutheran Church, Osceola, WI  
Easter 4 - May 3, 2020

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

**Hymn #375 - *"The King of Love My Shepherd Is"***

**The King of love my shepherd is,  
Whose goodness fails me never;  
I nothing lack if I am his,  
And he is mine forever.**

**Where streams of living water flow,  
My Savior gently leads me,  
And where the verdant pastures grow,  
With food celestial feeds me.**

**Confused and foolish oft I strayed,  
But yet in love he sought me  
And on his shoulder gently laid  
And home, rejoicing, brought me.**

**In death's dark vale I fear no ill  
With you, dear Lord, beside me;  
Your rod and staff my comfort still,  
Your cross before to guide me.**

**You spread a table in my sight,  
A banquet here bestowing;  
Your oil of welcome, my delight;  
My cup is overflowing!**

**And so through all the length of days  
Your goodness fails me never.  
Good Shepherd, may I sing your praise  
Within your house forever!**

### **Confession of Sins:**

**P:** Beloved in the Lord, let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins to God our Father, asking Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

**C:** **Almighty God, our Maker and Redeemer, we poor sinners confess to You that we are by nature sinful and unclean and that we have sinned against You in our thoughts, words, and actions. Therefore we flee for refuge to Your infinite mercy, seeking and imploring Your grace and forgiveness for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. O Lord, have mercy on us!**

**P:** Upon this your confession, I as a called servant of Christ and His Word announce to you the grace of God, and in the place of and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**C:** **Amen.**

### **First Lesson: Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60**

In those days, as the number of disciples was increasing, a complaint arose from the Greek-speaking Jews against the Hebrew-speaking Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve called together the whole group of disciples and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, carefully select from among you seven men with good reputations, who are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this service. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word." This proposal pleased the entire group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas, a proselyte from Antioch. They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. The word of God kept on spreading, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased greatly. Also a large group of priests became obedient to the faith. Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Some men who were from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia) rose up and disputed with Stephen. Stephen said, "Gentlemen, brothers and fathers, listen! You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit! You are doing just what your fathers did. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who prophesied the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers - you who

received the law as transmitted by angels, but did not keep it.” When they heard these things, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed up into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He said, “Look, I see heaven opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.” But they screamed at the top of their voices, covered their ears, and rushed at him with one purpose in mind. They threw him out of the city and stoned him. The witnesses laid their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he called out, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” After he said this, he fell asleep. (EHV)

**Psalm 23:**

**Refrain: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

**The LORD is my shepherd,  
I shall not be in want.**

**He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
He leads me beside quiet waters.**

**He restores my soul;  
He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.**

**Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will  
fear no evil,  
For you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

**Refrain: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

**Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,  
And I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son  
And to the Holy Spirit,  
As it was in the beginning,  
Is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

**Refrain: The Lord is my shepherd; there is nothing I shall want.**

**Second Lesson: 1 Peter 2:19-25**

For this is favorable: if a person endures sorrows while suffering unjustly because he is conscious of God. For what credit is it to you if you receive a beating for sinning and patiently endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and endure it, this is favorable with God. Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps. He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (EHV)

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. Alleluia.

**Gospel: John 10:1-10**

“Amen, Amen, I tell you: Anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the door, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. The doorkeeper opens the door for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own sheep, he walks ahead of them. The sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will never follow a stranger, but will run away from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this illustration in speaking to the people, but they did not understand what he was telling them. So Jesus said again, “Amen, Amen, I tell you: I am the door for the sheep. All who came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. “A thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (EHV)

**The Apostles' Creed:**

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

**I believe in Jesus Christ, His 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 into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

**Hymn #474 - “*Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus*”**

**Stand up, stand up for Jesus,  
Ye soldiers of the cross!  
Lift high his royal banner;  
It must not suffer loss.  
From vict’ry unto vict’ry  
His army shall he lead  
Till ev’ry foe is vanquished  
And Christ is Lord indeed.**

**Stand up, stand up for Jesus!  
The trumpet call obey;  
Forth to the mighty conflict  
In this his glorious day!  
Ye that are brave, now serve him  
Against unnumbered foes;  
Let courage rise with danger  
And strength to strength oppose.**

**Stand up, stand up for Jesus!  
Stand in his strength alone.  
The arm of flesh will fail you;  
Ye dare not trust your own.  
Put on the gospel armor;  
Each piece put on with prayer;  
Where duty calls or danger,  
Be never wanting there.**

**Stand up, stand up for Jesus!  
The strife will not be long;**

**This day the noise of battle,  
The next, the victor's song.  
To him that overcometh  
A crown of life shall be;  
He with the King of glory  
Shall reign eternally.**

**The Sermon: Acts 6:1-9; 7:2a, 51-60  
"Stephen - A Man Who Served The Good Shepherd"**

Today we're going to be learning about a man named **Stephen** - a man who had been called to serve the Lord Jesus - the Good Shepherd - by waiting on **tables**. What is meant by the phrase "*waiting on tables?*" In our text, it involved dispensing food and money to the **needy**, especially to the **widows** in the congregation at Jerusalem. But a **problem** arose. **Some** of the widows were being **neglected**, or **overlooked** in this distribution. The whole situation is a problem which would probably not even **occur** today. In **our** society women often hold **jobs**, and are able to support **themselves** and their **children** as well - even after the **death** of their husband. But in the days of the early Christian Church, it was **not** that way. The **one** and **only** vocation of women was to become a **wife** and **mother** - and indeed, that in itself is a very **high** calling. There was much to be **gained** by keeping these women in their **homes**, **raising** their families on a **full-time** basis - and the early Christians **recognized** that fact. Therefore, it came about that there was a **daily** distribution of **food** to the **widows** of the congregation, to **enable** them to continue to put **all** their efforts into their **children**.

No doubt this was an **expensive** program, and we might wonder where the money **came** from to make this daily distribution of food. Actually, it was drawn out of a **common treasury** - a fund which existed through the sale of **private property**. The money which was then received for this property was turned over to the **Apostles** for distribution among the **needy**.

Certainly this was a very **important** work which was being carried out by the Christians in Jerusalem. But it was getting to the point where the **Apostles** were no longer able to be the **administrators** of these gifts to the poor. Why **not**? Well, there were getting to be just **too many people** to take care of, and it was taking **too much time** away from the **other** areas of their ministry. Our text says, "*The number of disciples was **increasing***" - and it was happening **rapidly**. On the day of Pentecost alone **3,000** souls were added to the congregation, and Luke tells us that their number continued to grow **daily**. It's not at all unreasonable to think that the

Apostles had between **20 and 25,000 souls** under their care in Jerusalem. That's a **lot** of people, even for **12 Apostles** - but large numbers were especially **important** at that time. The Christian Church was in its **infancy**, and certainly these large numbers of people who were coming to Christ for salvation were both **comforting** and **encouraging** for the congregation. But these large numbers also presented some **problems**. The Apostles found that they could no longer spend time working on **extra** projects. They would have to **limit** themselves to the absolute **necessities** of their work.

What did the **Apostles** consider to be absolutely **necessary** in their ministry? In their own words they said, *"It is not right for us to neglect the **word of God** in order to wait on tables. Brothers, carefully select from among you seven men with good reputations, who are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this service. But we will devote ourselves to **prayer** and the ministry of the **word**."* The ministry of the **Word** was the number one priority for the Apostles - and **rightly** so. The ministry of the Word includes **any** preaching or teaching of God's Word to His people - whether it is done from the **pulpit**, in the **classroom**, or at a **hospital** bedside - whether it is brought to a **church full** of worshipers, or to a **handful** of troubled Christians in a **counseling** session, or to **whomever** is watching and listening on YouTube. That's where the Apostles felt their time could be **best** spent - in the ministry of the **Word**.

But interestingly enough, they also noted the importance of taking sufficient time for **prayer**. Unfortunately, most of us find too **little** time for prayer - and consequently, we reap few **benefits** from it. Martin Luther used to pray for **hours**, both in the **morning**, and again in the **evening**. When he was asked about how he could **afford** to spend so much time in prayer Luther said, "I can't afford **not** to spend it! If I didn't take this time out to **pray**, I would accomplish **little** or **nothing** during the day." Prayer often seems like such a **little** and **insignificant** thing to us, yet, God **commands** us to pray, and promises that He will **answer** our prayers.

Now, although the Apostles didn't consider waiting on tables to be a **vital** part of their ministry, nevertheless, there are some things which still made it a very **important** work. For one thing, it served the **needy** - helping to supply them with the physical **necessities** of life. And at the same time it also served the **wealthy** - giving those who were rich in **material** things an opportunity to **share** their wealth with the **less** fortunate.

Now let's take a look at the men who were **chosen** to carry out this distribution of food - to wait on tables. They're listed as: "*Stephen, Philip,*

*Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas a proselyte from Antioch.*” Now most of the children listening to this probably recognized the name **Timon** as the name of one of the characters from the Disney film The Lion King. But how many of those names did **you** recognize as being significant in the work of the **Lord**? Out of the **seven**, I only recognized **two** - Stephen and Philip. Philip is the man who later moved south, and Luke tells us about how he baptized the man from **Ethiopia**. But for the rest of the sermon today, we’ll be focusing our attention on **Stephen**.

Stephen had been called to serve the **Good Shepherd** by waiting on **tables**, and he did his work **behind** the scenes - virtually in total **obscurity**. It isn’t hard to find **parallels** in our world today. We might think of the Christian **parents** who daily labor to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Or we might think of those people who serve on the **Church Council**, or on a variety of **committees**. Or we might think of those people who **clean** the church, or who **prepare** the altar flowers and banners. Maybe the people come to mind are those who **donate** offerings, or perhaps those who **count** the offerings. Then again, there are all those who give their time and efforts to **teach** Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. These are people who go virtually **unnoticed** - people who work **behind** the scenes year after year. **Why** do they do it? Why did **Stephen** do it? The answer is, because these are ways to serve **God**. Stephen and the others who had been chosen to “*wait on tables*” could have found **other** things to do with their time. They were just as **busy** as anyone else. But they **chose** to do what they **could** to serve the **Lord**, and in **turn**, the Lord richly **blessed** them.

**One** of those blessings involves the fact that Stephen’s service wasn’t **limited** to waiting on tables. In fact, the Lord provided him with numerous opportunities to do what the **Apostles** did - to share the **Word of God** with others, and to contend for the **truth** of that Word. Again our text tells us, “*Now Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wondrous and miraculous signs among the people.*” The **Good Shepherd** was with Stephen, providing him with the power to perform **wonders** and miraculous **signs** among the people. Nevertheless, just as it continues to be today, there was **opposition** to the preaching of God’s Word - and when Stephen **encountered** such opposition, he didn’t **back down**. Rather as a true soldier of the cross, he **stood up** for Jesus. Listen to what he **told** those doubters. Stephen said, “*You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit! You are doing just what your fathers did. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who prophesied the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers - you who received the law as transmitted by angels, but*

*did not keep it.* "Stephen didn't **mince** any words, but his **persistence** in contending for the **truth** ultimately resulted in his **death**. Our text concludes, *"While they were **stoning** Stephen, he called out, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!' Then he fell to his knees and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin **against** them.' After he said this, he fell **asleep**."* For Stephen, being considered worthy to **suffer** for his faith, and to **die** in that faith, was the ultimate **blessing**. Our text describes his death as a **sleep** - the eternal **rest** which the Lord has in store for all those who put their trust in **Him**. Dear friends, given the circumstances under which we currently live, it's not out of the question that the Lord might call on **us** to serve Him by becoming Christian **martyrs** - to lay down our **lives**, rather than to give up the **truth** of His Word. We have been called to **serve** our Good Shepherd, and whether we have been called to serve Him by **preaching** and **teaching**, or by waiting on **tables**, or in some **other** form of ministry; may we follow the example of **Stephen**, and boldly **stand up** for Jesus - our Good Shepherd. Amen.

### **Prayers:**

Dear Jesus our Savior, You are truly our **Good Shepherd**, because You gave Your **life** for us, Your **sheep**. It was Your great **love** for us sinners who were lost and straying, that moved You to come into this world to **live**, to **die**, and to **rise** again; so we could have a life with You that doesn't **end**. Good Shepherd, we owe You our heartfelt **thanks** and **praise**, and our continual **love** and **devotion** for everything that You **have** done and **still** do, to insure our earthly and eternal **welfare**.

We have **become** Your sheep by **trusting** that You are our Savior and our God. Nevertheless, we must confess that we still have a **rebellious** Old Adam that is **stubborn** and **sinful**, and continually leads us **astray**. Therefore, we need Your loving **patience** as our Good Shepherd, to **deliver** us from our sinful ways, to **protect** us from our own foolishness, and to **forgive** our many sins. We need You to take the **evils** and **dangers** that come to us, and turn them into **good** things. We need You to hear and answer our **prayers**. And **we** need to hear and heed the sound of **Your voice**, as You speak to us in the **Holy Scriptures**.

Lord, by Your continual presence **comfort** and **cheer** us in every journey we make through the dark, shadowy valleys of this life. **Satisfy** us with the green pastures of Your Word, and **nourish** our faith. **Quench** our thirst for righteousness with the refreshing streams of salvation. When we are **oppressed** from every side by troubles, distress, temptations, sickness, sin, and heartache, teach us to turn our

eyes in faith to **You**, our Good Shepherd, and to cast all our cares upon **You**.  
**Refresh** us with Your **help** and **guidance**, and with Your **protection** and **healing**.  
You alone know what is **best** for us. 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.**

**Hymn #440 - "*On Eagles' Wings*"**

**You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord,  
Who abide in his shadow for life,  
Say to the Lord: "My refuge,  
My rock in whom I trust!"**

**Refrain: And he will raise you up on eagles' wings,  
Bear you on the breath of dawn,  
Make you to shine like the sun,  
And hold you in the palm of his hand.**

**Snares of the fowler will never capture you,  
And famine will bring you no fear;  
Under his wings your refuge,  
His faithfulness your shield.**

**Refrain: And he will raise you up on eagles' wings,  
Bear you on the breath of dawn,  
Make you to shine like the sun,  
And hold you in the palm of his hand.**

**For to his angels he's given a command  
To guard you in all of your ways;**

**Upon their hands they will bear you up,  
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.**

**Refrain: And he will raise you up on eagles' wings,  
Bear you on the breath of dawn,  
Make you to shine like the sun,  
And hold you in the palm of his hand.**

P: Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word, for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit! As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

**The Blessing:**

P: The Lord bless you and keep you,  
The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.  
The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace.

C: **Amen.**

**Hymn #427 - "We Are the Lord's"**

**We are the Lord's; his all-sufficient merit,  
Sealed on the cross, to us this grace accords.  
We are the Lord's and all things shall inherit;  
Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.**

**We are the Lord's; then let us gladly tender  
Our souls to him in deeds, not empty words.  
Let heart and tongue and life combine to render  
No doubtful witness that we are the Lord's.**

**We are the Lord's; no darkness brooding o'er us  
Can make us tremble while this star affords  
A steady light along the path before us -  
Faith's full assurance that we are the Lord's.**

**We are the Lord's; no evil can befall us  
In the dread hour of life's fast loos'ning cords;  
No pangs of death shall even then appall us.**

**Death we shall vanquish, for we are the Lord's.**