



The kingdom
of heaven
is like a
merchant
in search
of fine pearls

MATTHEW 13:45

Sunday, July 26, 2026
9th Sunday after Pentecost



BETHLEHEM
LUTHERAN CHURCH

48 Perrin Street, Fairport, NY ~ (585) 223-0634 ~ www.blcfairport.org

PRELUDE

“Schmücke dich”

(Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness - ELW 488)

Johannes Brahms
tune, Johann Crüger

You Are Holy (Prince of Peace)

Marc Imboden, Tammi Rhoton

Congregation is invited to sing words typed in bold. Feel free to join in singing the chorus part as well if you like.

You are holy - **(You are holy)**
You are mighty - **(You are mighty)**
You are worthy - **(You are worthy)**
Worthy of praise - **(Worthy of praise)**
I will follow - **(I will follow)**
I will listen - **(I will listen)**
I will love You - **(I will love You)**
All of my days - **(All of my days)**

CHORUS

(LOW VOICES)

I will sing to and worship
The King who is worthy
I will love and adore Him
And I will bow down before Him
I will sing to and worship
The King who is worthy
I will love and adore Him
And I will bow down before Him

(HIGH VOICES)

You are Lord of lords, You are King of kings
You are mighty God, Lord of everything
You're Emmanuel, You're the Great I Am
You're my Prince of Peace, who is the Lamb
You're my living God, You're my saving grace
You will reign forever, You are Ancient of Days
You are Alpha, Omega, beginning and end
You're my Savior, Messiah, Redeemer, and friend

ALL

**You're my Prince of Peace
And I will live my life for You.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

In today's gospel Jesus offers everyday images that reveal to us the reign of God: a tree that becomes a sheltering home, yeast that penetrates and expands, a treasured pearl, a net that gains a great catch. Even as we seek the riches of God's reign, the great surprise is that God's grace finds us first!

Red hymnal - ELW - Evangelical Lutheran Worship Blue hymnal - ACS - All Creation Sings

GATHERING

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the holy Trinity, ☩ one God, whose compassion endures forever.
Amen.

We confess our sin to God.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Compassionate God,
we confess to you all our sins. Our burden is heavy, and we cannot free ourselves. In your mercy, call us back to you. Your yoke is easy and your burden is light. Restore us to dwell in your peace. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." In the name of God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit, your sins are forgiven. Rest in God's love.
Amen.

GATHERING HYMN	God of Grace and God of Glory	ELW 705
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GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
And also with you.

HYMN OF PRAISE

Glo - ry to you, God, for yours is the earth;
yours the a - noint - ing, the ra - di - ant worth.
Ours the re - joic - ing for spir - its a - flame;
ours the thanks - giv - ing to your ho - ly name.
Ours be the tell - ing of deeds great - ly done;
yours be the glo - ry, O God, yours a - lone.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Let us pray. Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. By your Spirit, give us your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

HEARING GOD'S WORD

READING: Romans 8:26-39

These words celebrate the depth of God's actions for us. Through Christ's death for us and the activity of the Spirit praying for us, we are fused to God's love poured out in Jesus Christ. Nothing, not even death itself, is able to separate us from such incredible divine love.

²⁶ The Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And God, who searches hearts, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸ We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

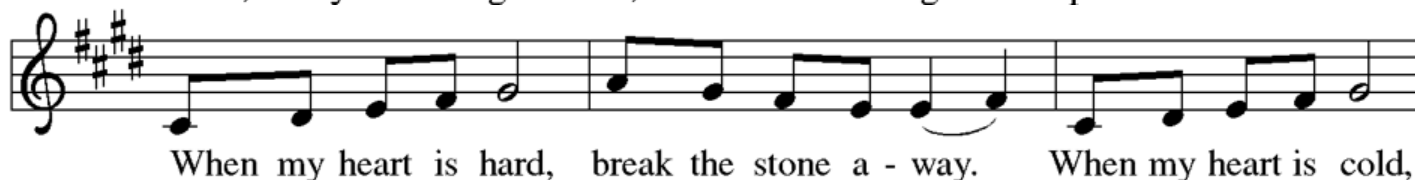
“For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION





The holy gospel according to Matthew.
Glory to you, O Lord.

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

Throughout Matthew's gospel, Jesus and his disciples proclaim the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near!" Here, Jesus offers several brief parables that explore the implications of this announcement for people's lives.

³¹ [Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

³³ He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and reburied; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹ "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." ⁵² And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

The gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

APOSTLES' CREED

Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith.

**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.**

THE PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Our prayers are always offered on behalf of the whole community.

Gathered together by the Holy Spirit, let us pray for the church and the needs of the world.

A brief silence.

#1 God our wisdom and our song, we pray for bishops, candidacy committees, those preparing for seminary, those awaiting call as deacons or pastors, and all who seek to lead your disciples in any way. God of grace,
hear our prayer.

#2 God our breath and our heartbeat, help us to recognize signs of your presence among us. Protect and support diverse ecosystems, from national parks to family farms, from ranches to wild places. God of grace,
hear our prayer.

#3 God our peace and our guide, help civic leaders hear all their peoples' stories with compassion and curiosity, and remind us of your love from which we can never be separated. God of grace,
hear our prayer.

We pray for the leaders already planning the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering in Minneapolis. Raise up youth from across the church who will participate in this life-giving ministry. We pray also for our siblings in faith in our twinned parish in Shurugwi, Zimbabwe. May our partnerships remind us of your abundance. God of grace.
hear our prayer.

We know that all people matter in your eyes and you know their cares and concerns, their hopes and joys. We pray for those whose needs are known to us.

We pray for those who grieve, especially the family and friends of:

- Larry B, cousin of Kathy S, who died on 7/20
- Shirley N, close friend of Ron M, who died on 7/10

We pray for those in need of healing, especially:

- Bob P who is recovering from hip replacement surgery following a fall
- Tom S who has dislocated his hip and recovering from surgery
- Mark F, who has been diagnosed with cancer

Hear the names of those we raise to you in our hearts or on our voice.

Silence for individual prayer.

God of grace
hear our prayer.

Trusting you receive all our prayers, we commend our spoken and unspoken prayers to you, O God, through Jesus our Savior.
Amen.

SHARING GOD'S MEAL

THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.

And also with you.

Share the peace in a way that cares for friend and neighbor. If you worship virtually, share the peace through the comments section or text.

OFFERING

Thank you for your offerings that support the ongoing ministry that we share.

Information about supporting Bethlehem's ministry with your offerings is available in the Welcome insert in your pew rack or by visiting blcfairport.org/support-our-ministry or scan the QR (quick response) code on the right and you'll be brought to BLC's mobile giving page.



OFFERING OF MUSIC

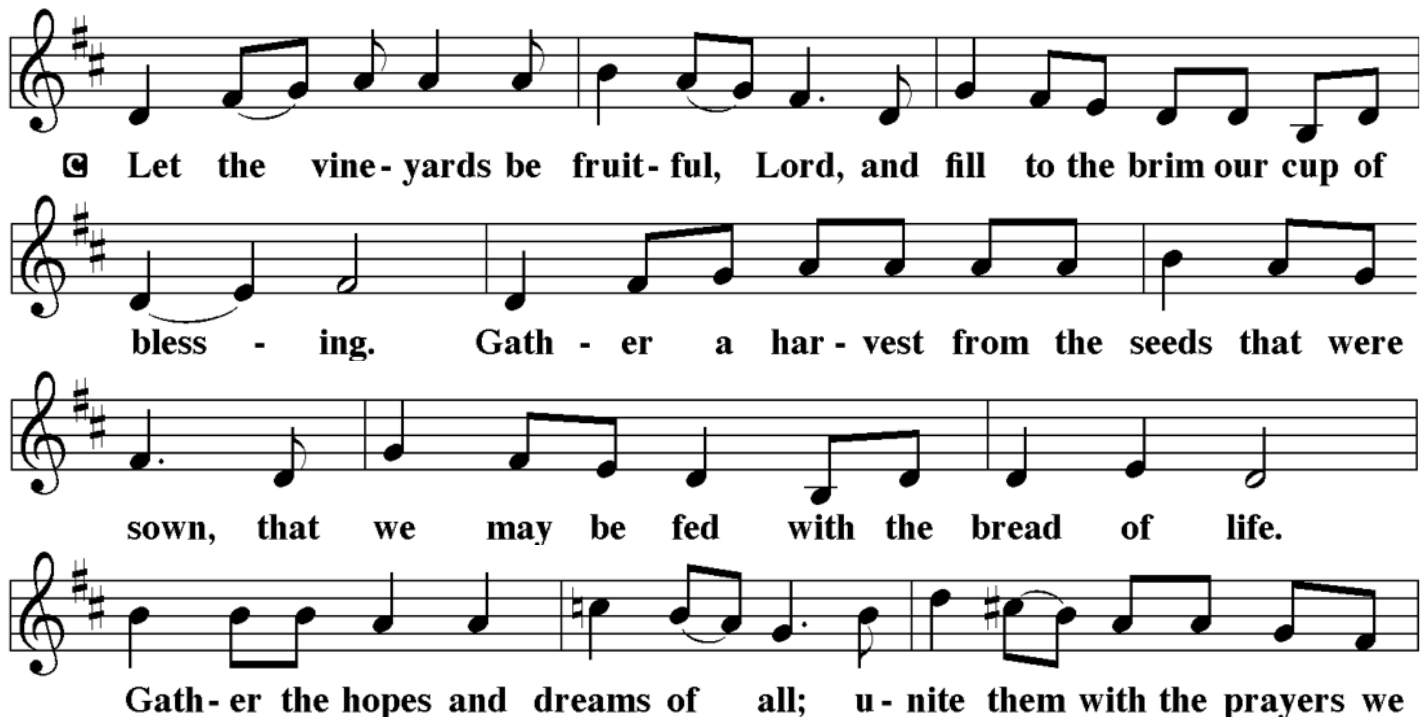
How Great Thou Art

Stuart K. Hine / arr. Pam Bowman
tune, Swedish folk melody

Blessed Assurance

arr. Pam Bowman
tune, Phoebe P. Knapp

OFFERTORY



Let the vine-yards be fruit-ful, Lord, and fill to the brim our cup of
bless - ing. Gath - er a har - vest from the seeds that were
sown, that we may be fed with the bread of life.
Gath - er the hopes and dreams of all; u - nite them with the prayers we



OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray. Loving God,
we offer at your table the gifts of our hearts. Help us take heart in you and share freely of your love, so that all creation can taste your abundance. We ask this in the name of Jesus, through the Spirit abiding with us now and forever. Amen.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

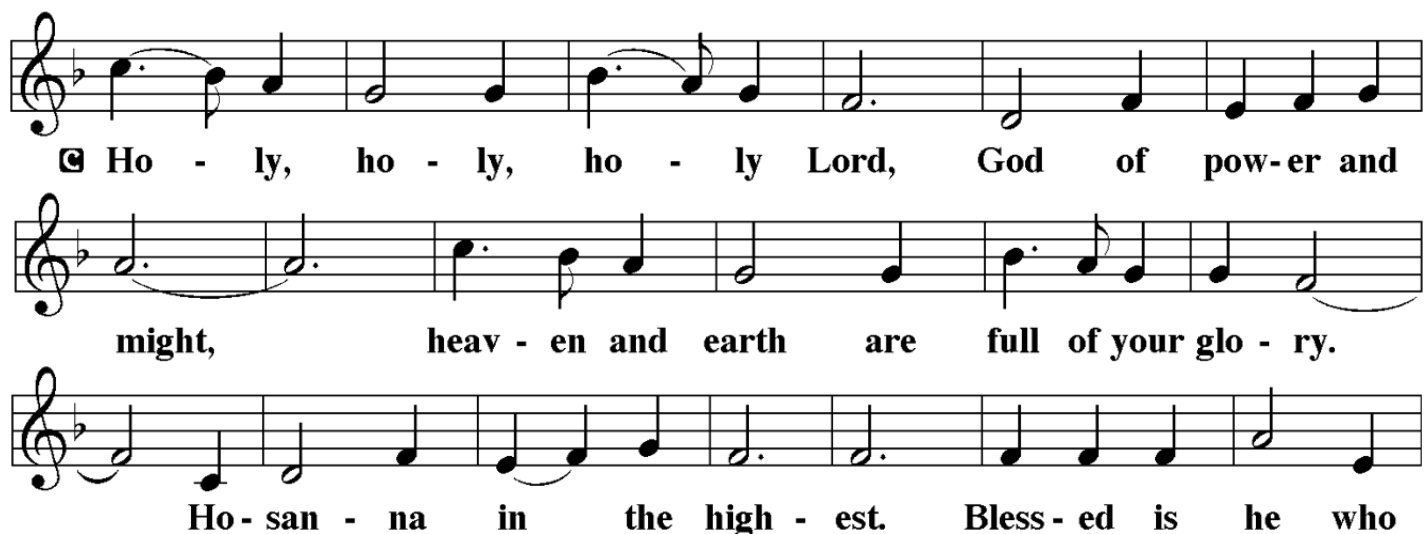
Lift up your hearts.

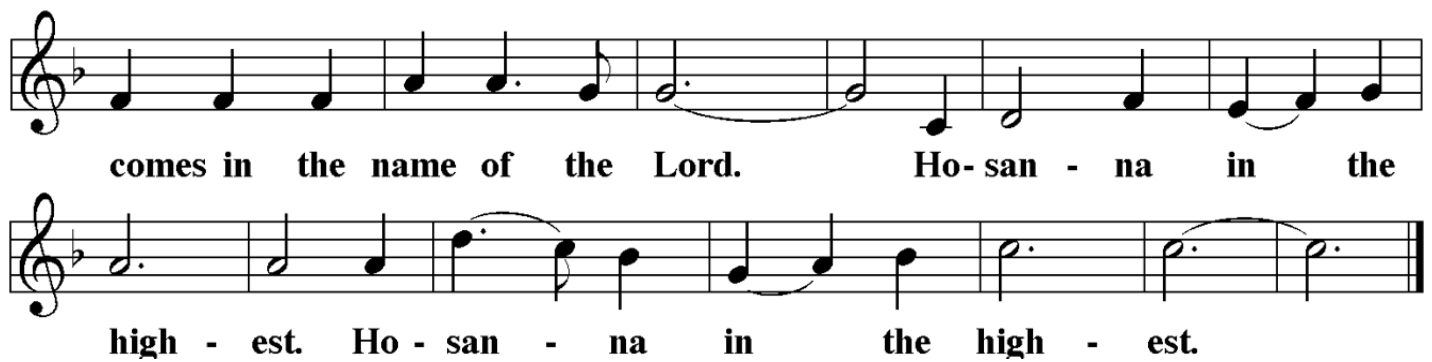
We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy . . . we praise your name and join their unending hymn:





WORDS OF INSTITUTION

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Gathered into one by the Spirit, we pray as Jesus taught us:

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who

sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours,

now and forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Heaven has come near. Come, share in the feast!

Thanks be to God!

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

Our communion bread is gluten-free, unless noted by the pastor. Grape juice is available; indicate your need to the communion assistant.

THE COMMUNION



Come to the ta - ble of mer - cy, pre - pared with the wine and the bread.



All who are hun - gry and thirst - y, come, and your souls will be fed.



Come at the Lord's in - vi - ta - tion; re - ceive from his nail - scarred hand.



Eat of the bread of sal - va - tion; drink of the blood of the Lamb.

HYMN FOR COMMUNION

Be Thou My Vision

ELW 793

HYMN FOR COMMUNION

“Have You Seen Jesus, My Lord?”

Refrain:

Have you seen Jesus, My Lord? He's here in plain view.

Take a look, open your eyes, He'll show it to you.

1. Have you ever looked at the sunset, With the sky mellowin' red,
And the clouds suspended like feathers? Then I say... *(Pause)*
You've seen Jesus, my Lord ***Ref.**
2. Have you ever stood at the ocean, With the white foam at your feet,
Felt the endless thunderin' motion? Then I say... *(Pause)*
You've seen Jesus, my Lord ***Ref.**
3. Have you ever looked at the cross, With a man hangin' in pain
And the look of love in His eyes? Then I say... *(Pause)*
You've seen Jesus, my Lord ***Ref.**
4. Have you ever stood in the family, With the Lord there in your midst,
Seen the face of Christ on each other? Then I say... *(Pause)*
You've seen Jesus, my Lord ***Ref.**

TABLE BLESSING

POST-COMMUNION PRAYER

Let us pray. Compassionate God, through the gifts of bread and wine our hearts are filled with the abundance of your love. Strengthen us that we, through this holy meal, may share your love freely, as you have shared with us. We ask this in the name of Jesus, through the Spirit nourishing us now and forever.

Amen.

LEAVING TO SERVE

BENEDICTION

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer, ☩ one God, bless, heal, and hold you today and always.

Amen.

SENDING HYMN	Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee	ELW 836
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DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Share the good news!

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Postlude in D Minor

René Vierne

BLC Pastors

The Rev. Abigail Zang Hoffman and The Rev. Amy Walter-Peterson, co-Pastors

BLC Musicians

Raelynn Clare, Music Director and Organist

Chrisanne Gates, Chancel Choir Director

Rich Towsley, Director of The Folk Group and BLC Dulcimers

Additional musical leadership provided by:

Offering of Music

Guitar: Rich Towsley

Hammered dulcimer: GerryAnn Westcott

Prelude and Communion

Guitar: James Gates

Vocals: The Gates Family – Anne and James, Ruth and Andy

Special Thanks to Susan DePasquale, organist/pianist, for assisting us with today's worship.

Thank you to all those who participated in worship this Sunday! Want to learn more about what roles are needed in worship or sign-up for a pre-scheduled role? Talk with one of the pastors following worship or send an email to volunteersupport@blcfairport.org and we'll follow up!

Communicate with us: Share more about who you are, request further information, or leave a prayer request or comment through our website - <https://blcfairport.org/share-in-worship/> - scroll down the page to request or share information.

What's happening at BLC this week? Visit the Calendar of Events at www.blcfairport.org. Zoom links for virtual meetings are also found there. If you would like to schedule a meeting or event, please email the church office at office@blcfairport.org or visit <https://blcfairport.org/blc-facility-request/>

Church office hours: Sandy Squires holds office hours on Wednesdays from 9-1 and is responsive to phone and email Monday through Friday during usual business hours. Please communicate your needs through the church office by phone (585) 223-0634 or by email office@blcfairport.org. Our co-Pastors are available Sunday – Thursday and on-call for emergencies. Contact them directly to schedule an appointment either by calling the church office or emailing pastor.hoffman@blcfairport.org or pastor.amy@blcfairport.org

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“Glory to You, God”, All Creation Sings – Holy Communion, Setting 12, Text: Susan Palo Cherwien
Music: J. Bert Carlson, © 2020 Augsburg Fortress

With One Voice - Holy Communion, Setting Five, Music: Jeremy Young, © 2000, Augsburg Fortress
Gospel Acclamation: “Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil”, Text and Music: Handt Hanson
© 1985 Prince of Peace Publishing, Changing Church, Inc.

“Come to the Table”, Text: Claire Cloninger, Music: Martin J. Nystrom
© 1991 Integrity’s Hosanna! Music; Juniper Landing Music (adm. Word Music)

“Schmücke dich” – (Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness)

Tune: Johann Crüger; Music: Johannes Brahms © 1991 Dover Publications, Inc.

“You Are Holy (Prince of Peace)” - CCLI Song # 2332149 Words and Music: Marc Imboden | Tammi Rhoton
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“How Great Thou Art” Tune: Swedish folk melody; Music: Stuart K. Hine
Arranger: Pam Bowman © 2018 Pam Bowman (pambowmanmusic@gmail.com)

“Blessed Assurance” Tune: Phoebe P. Knapp; Arranger: Pam Bowman
© 2018 Pam Bowman (pambowmanmusic@gmail.com)

“Have You Seen Jesus, My Lord?” - CCLI Song # 66270
Music: John Fischer © 1970 John Fischer CCLI License # 22532083

“Postlude in D Minor” Music: René Vierne
© 1980 McAfee Music Corporation

The Kingdom of Heaven Is Like . . .

A string of parables describe the kingdom of heaven, and then we hear Jesus' question: "Have you understood all this?" The mustard seed, yeast, hidden treasure, pearls—these bring good news of growth and joy and riches. Then come the fish, the furnace of fire, and the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Once again this week we hear of a God of mercy and justice. Once again there is good news to be heard in Paul's letter to the church at Rome—nothing will ever separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. How will we reconcile these two images of God?

"Kingdoms" are not common in our world. When most of us think about kingdoms, we call up images of British or other royalty—jeweled crowns, a palace. At the time the Gospel of Matthew was written, the people were subject to the empire, or kingdom, of Rome. Perhaps the writer wants us to contrast the oppressive rule of Rome with a vision of heaven's kingdom of love and mercy. The translation of the Greek *basileia*, a feminine word usually rendered in English as "kingdom," is difficult. The writer of Matthew may have used the expression "kingdom of heaven" instead of "kingdom of God" in order not to offend Jewish Christ-believers who honored the word for God by avoiding its use.

King Solomon asks God for the wisdom to discern between good and evil, for the understanding to live out both justice and mercy as a ruler of God's people (1 Kings 3:5–12). God was pleased with Solomon's request. The wisdom Solomon seeks to rule his earthly kingdom reflects the wisdom of the kingdom of heaven. King Solomon was variously successful in his discernment of good and evil, as are we.