



St. Peter's Lutheran Church
Highspire
Pentecost 9
July 26, 2026

Introduction

As Solomon prays for wisdom, we seek to more deeply know the treasures of faith. 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!

Overview

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. 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.

WORDS OF WELCOME

PRELUDE

Grady Daub

The Gathering

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

*CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

ELW p. 94

P In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

P God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

P Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.
Most merciful God,

C we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

P In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for his sake God forgives us all our sins. As a called and ordained minister of the church of Christ, and by his authority, I therefore declare to you the entire forgiveness of all your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

*GATHERING HYMN

"Gather Us In"***

ELW #532

*GREETING

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

C And also with you.

*PRAYER OF THE DAY

P Faithful God, most merciful judge, you care for your children with firmness and compassion. By your Spirit nurture us who live in your kingdom, that we may be rooted in the way of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

The Word

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

First Reading: 1 Kings 3:5-12

Because Solomon did not ask for long life, riches, or the defeat of his enemies, God gave him what he asked for: wisdom to govern the people well.

5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, and God said, "Ask what I should give you." 6 And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you, and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. 7 And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. 9 Give your servant, therefore, an understanding

mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil, for who can govern this great people of yours?"

10 It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. 11 God said to him, "Because you have asked this and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or for the life of your enemies but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, 12 I now do according to your word. Indeed, I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you, and no one like you shall arise after you."

L The word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm: Psalm 119:129-136 (read responsively)

When your word is opened, it gives light and understanding. (Ps. 119:130)

129 Your decrees are wonderful;
therefore I obey them with all my heart.

**130 When your word is opened it gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.**

131 I open my mouth and pant
because I long for your commandments.

**132 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
as you always do to those who love your name.**

133 Order my footsteps in your word;
let no iniquity have dominion over me.

**134 Rescue me from those who oppress me,
and I will keep your commandments.**

135 Let your face shine upon your servant
and teach me your statutes.

**136 My eyes shed streams of tears,
because people do not keep your teaching.**

Second 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."

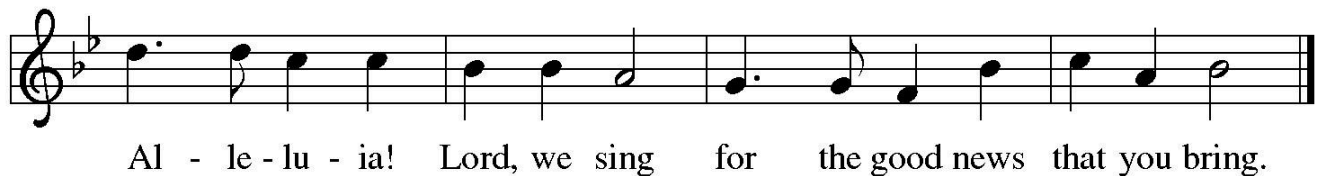
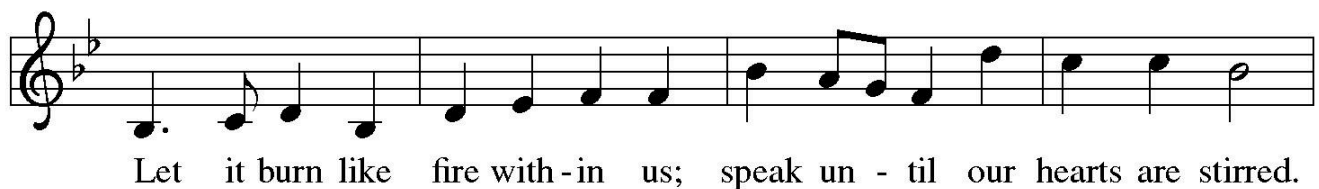
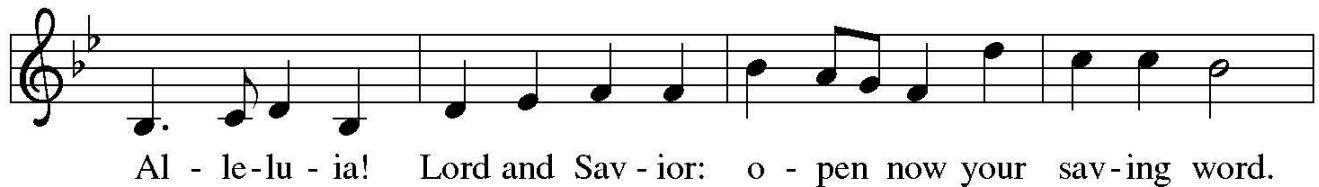
37 No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor

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.

L The word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

*GOSPEL ACCLAMATION "Alleluia! Lord and Savior" ELW p. 205



*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.

P The holy gospel according to Matthew

C **Glory to you, O Lord.**

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."

P The gospel of the Lord.

C Praise to you, O Christ.

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Pastor Alex

SERMON

Pastor Alex

*HYMN OF THE DAY "Be Thou My Vision"***

ELW #793

*APOSTLES CREED

ELW p.105

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.

*PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

A Trusting in God's steadfast love for all God has made, let us pray
for the church, the world, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

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.**

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.**

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.**

God our intercessor and our lawgiver, dismantle the barriers to care and recognition of all who live with chronic illness, mobility struggles, pain, and uncertainty. We pray especially for *Don Alsedek, Connie Barner, Rachel Benkovic, Rose Hoover, Samson Kennedy, Bernie Kunz, and Rob Lipsitt*. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

God our redeemer, may we trust your love above and beyond all else that distracts, annoys, frightens, exhausts, or divides us.

God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God who seeks, finds, and saves, for our community's part in the ongoing gift of creation, and for the riches of faith and hope which came before, we give you thanks. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

P Grateful for your abundant provision and trusting in your goodness, we cast all our cares upon you, through the abundant grace of Christ Jesus.

C **Amen.**

*PEACE

P The peace of Christ be with you always.

C **And also with you.**

SPECIAL MUSIC "Time Has Made a Change" Spike Spilker, soloist

The Meal

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

*OFFERTORY HYMN Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful ELW #182

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 the dreams of all; u -

nite them with the prayers we of - fer now. Grace our ta - ble with your

pres - ence, and give us a fore - taste of the feast to come.

*OFFERTORY PRAYER

A 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.

C Amen.

*THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

ELW p.206

P The Lord be with you.

C And also with you.

P Lift up your hearts.

C We lift them to the Lord.

P Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C It is right to give our thanks and praise.

*PREFACE

P It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should at all times and in all places
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our Savior Jesus Christ;
who on this day overcame death and the grave,
and by his glorious resurrection opened to us the way of everlasting life.
And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

*HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

ELW p.207



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow-er and might,



heav'n and earth are full of your glo-ry. Ho-san - na in the high - est.



Bless - ed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Ho -



san - na in the high - est, ho - san - na in the high - est.

*EUCCHARISTIC PRAYER

P Holy, mighty, and merciful Lord,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
In great love you sent to us Jesus, your Son,
who reached out to heal the sick and suffering,
who preached good news to the poor,
and who, on the cross, opened his arms to all.

*In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

*Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

Remembering, therefore, his death, resurrection, and ascension,
we await his coming in glory.

Pour out upon us the Spirit of your love, O Lord,
and unite the wills of all who share this heavenly food,
the body and blood of Jesus Christ, our Lord;
to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit,
be all honor and glory, now and forever.

C Amen.

*THE LORD'S PRAYER

ELW p.208

P Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

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.

***SHARING THE MEAL**

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

COMMUNION HYMNS:

"Lamb of God"

ELW p.208

"Seek Ye First"

WOV #783

"Here, I Am Lord" ***

ELW #574

***PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

A 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.

C Amen.

The Sending

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

***BLESSING**

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

C Amen.

***SENDING HYMN**

"In Thee Is Gladness"

ELW #867

***DISMISSAL**

A Heaven has come near. Go, share the good news!

C Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE

Grady Daub

We appreciate Grady Daub and Spike Spilker for sharing their musical talent with us this morning. Thank-you.

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Prelude - Grady Daub

Gathering Hymn - "Gather Us In" ELW #532 words & music - Marty Haugen @1982 GIA Publications, Inc. ***

Gospel Acclamation - "Alleluia! Lord and Savior" p. 205, setting 10

Hymn of the Day - "Be Thou My Vision ELW #793 words - tr. Mary

E. Byrne music - Irish traditional SLANE PUBLIC DOMAIN ***

Special Music - "Time Has Made a Change" words & music - Harkins Frye @ 1948 Stamps Quartet CCLI Song #565331 Spike Spilker, soloist

Offertory Hymn - "Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful " ELW #182

"Holy, Holy, Holy" p.207, setting 10 ELW

Distribution of Communion - Lamb of God, p. 208 ELW

"Seek Ye First" WOV #783 words - Matthew 6:33 & 7:7 music Karen Lafferty @ 1972 Maranatha! Music CCLI Song # 1352

"Here, I Am Lord" ELW #574 words & music - Daniel Schutte @1981 OCP ***

Sending hymn - "In Thee Is Gladness" ELW #867 words - Johann

Lindermann music - Giovanni Gastoldi @ arr. 1969 Concordia Publishing

House PUBLIC DOMAIN (text & tune)

Postlude - Grady Daub

*** Congregation Favorite

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If you are in need of Pastoral care, please reach out to our church office at 717-939-3492 or by email at stpetershighspire240@gmail.com .

You can also reach out to Pastor Alex, at 717-434-5037.

Special Music for July

7/26 - Pentecost 9 - Spike Spilker, soloist

Worship Participants for July 26, 2026

Presiding Minister	Pastor Alex Sheppard-Witt
Music Director	Stephen Strauss
Worship Assistant	Matthew Hunt
Musician	Grady Daub
Lector	Clydene Strauss

Worship Participants for August 2, 2026

Presiding Minister	Pastor Alex Sheppard-Witt
Music Director	Stephen Strauss
Worship Assistant	Pat Hawkins
Musician	Juliet Mitton
Lector	Grace Hoover

Altar Flower Sponsor needed

The following date is available for sponsoring the altar vases or centerpiece. If you may be interested, please call Helene Hoch at 717-343-8397.

- **Sunday, August 30th**

Altar Vases: Presented to the Glory of God by son Patrick and family in loving memory of Clarence and Barbara Hawkins.

All are Welcome Bible Study

The All are Welcome Bible Study meets on Tuesday nights at 6:30pm. We are currently reading Isaiah.

We send out a weekly email with the Zoom link, as well as a brief summary of what we covered the previous week. To get the link for attending the Zoom session, or just to get on the weekly email list, please contact Matt and Mary Hunt at allarewelcomebiblestudy@gmail.com .

A Friendly reminder from Sally:

Please remember to take 1 or more Samaritan Bags to hand out to those who may be in need of this outreach .They are located in a basket in the back of the sanctuary to grab and keep available in your travels.

Come to church and stay for Fellowship every Sunday in the Parlor. Enjoy coffee and snacks and friendly conversation! If you would be interested in "Hosting a Sunday" please check the sign-up sheet posted on the bulletin board located in the hallway outside the Music Room/Church Office.