

**The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost • July 19, 2020<sup>i</sup>**  
*St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA*  
*Rev. Braun Campbell*  
Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 (Isaiah 44:6-8; Romans 8:18-27)  
“Endings”

**Today we look back.**

For the past fourteen years, our Lord has graciously given me the honor, privilege, and responsibility of serving as your Associate Pastor here at St. John's. So much has happened in the time in between! The world has changed. We've seen the dawning of the iPhone and the modern smartphone. Social media platforms have reshaped the way many people communicate. You can now watch the 23 (and counting!) superhero movies in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, starting all the way back with *Iron Man*. Time keeps speeding along. Considering the past year alone, we can see that things are not as they once were. We've over four months into the continuing pandemic. The people of our nation are contending with the weight of our collective history, a desire for justice, and social unrest. In the grand scheme of things, fourteen years isn't all that much time; yet, it's still a whole lot of time.

As I wrote in my letter announcing my acceptance of the Call to serve at Immanuel in Belvidere, Illinois, this congregation, and you, the people of St. John's, will forever be a part of our story. In a very tangible way, this congregation has been a home for my family and me, connecting to many aspects of our lives. Here in this congregation, I married a wonderful woman. The Lord granted us the gift of two imaginative, joyous children who were baptized in this sanctuary. Our family has been blessed by St. John's Lutheran Early Childhood Education Center (ECEC) and its teachers and staff. I've been blessed to work with a great team here under Pastor Meehan's leadership and in partnership with the gifted members and friends who've given of themselves to serve our larger community and each other, as well. God's grace has abounded.

This Sunday marks an ending for me –and us – here at St. John's. I'll miss this place. I'll miss you all. And I give thanks to God for all that He has done in the time that we've spent together.

**Today we look ahead.**

We're getting back into onsite worship here, not jumping right back into how we did things months ago, but rather learning and adapting for how we might serve a changed world. Like many other congregations, we're now live-streaming worship to connect with people outside of our sanctuary walls, something that hadn't been in our plans even six months ago. We're considering how we might need to change our educational plans and fellowship activities in the new socially-distant landscape. We're hoping for a time when we can come back together more fully to reunite with friends and family without the specter of disease looming over us. We don't know what the future may hold in store for us, yet we can't stop looking ahead. And as we do, we can know that God will provide what's needed.

One of the reasons that I've been at peace in accepting the Call to serve another congregation, even in this time of pandemic, is the team we've got here at St. John's. The Lord of the Church has blessed this congregation with a capable and caring staff, in addition to all the lay leaders who have served and do serve in making all the things happen in our ministry together. I don't have time right now to say how much they've made a difference in my work among you, but God knows. I've learned much from Pastor Meehan's example over the years and have seen how God is at work through him as a servant leader. I hope to carry those lessons into the future wherever I might serve God's people. Please join me in lifting up our team here in prayer as they continue the work of the gospel with you, adjusting to a changed landscape, looking ahead to what our Lord will be doing here in this community.

While this Sunday might be an ending for me here at St. John's, I know that it's the beginning of a new chapter for your life together in Christ, and great things lie ahead. I can say this with confidence, for while the world might have changed, Jesus has not.

**Today we look to Jesus.**

Jesus is why we're here. He's the one who has sown the good seed of his word in your life and my life. Jesus told the parable of the sower, the wheat, and the weeds to help us understand that God continues to be at work in our world even when things don't seem to be going in the best direction. The disciples were probably wondering what might come next. The crowds certainly were.

What the people couldn't see at the time – and what we might have a hard time understanding even now – is that the “kingdom of heaven” isn't some far-off thing that finally comes on the Last Day. The kingdom of heaven is already breaking in. It's God's reigning. His “king-ing,” as one of my seminary professors put it. The kingdom of heaven is wherever the King reigns. This King is our God, the same God who spoke words of hope to His people through the prophet Isaiah in today's Old Testament reading (Isaiah 44). No kings of the earth, no human powers will be able to provide the lasting peace that humanity needs with God or with the rest of creation. Our idols fail us. Only the reign of God brings peace that lasts. God's reigning was happening in Jesus' ministry. He healed. He proclaimed God's peace. And through Jesus, God's reigning is happening among us even now.

Our world isn't perfect. Part of the reason the happy ending of a story can be so enjoyable is because it seems that such endings don't come around often enough in life. In Jesus' parable, the field, our world, remained unweeded until the day of harvest. As you look back at the past – not only in the history of our world but also in your life and relationships – you'll find suffering. We live in a broken world. And as we've been seeing in the current “cancel culture,” it's a world that doesn't readily offer forgiveness. Sin and brokenness don't seem to have an ending. You and I won't live in a world completely free of that which causes sin and brokenness until the time our Master returns. But still we hope.

As Paul reminds us, Christians are people who live in hope. We're living in confidence that something – some One – is coming, looking ahead for what we're not seeing right now. The word that's translated as “wait eagerly” in today's Epistle from Romans 8 gives the sense of craning your neck out to get a better view of what's coming. And while we stretch our necks out, God calls us to trust and patience. Trust and patience might feel like a reach when it seems as if you're deep in the weeds of life. But as people who follow Jesus, you don't have to turn to yourself for hope. You don't even have to seek it out in the world around you. You've got sure hope of what's ahead through Jesus.

Jesus' parable of the sower, the wheat, and the weeds is a message of assurance for his people. All will be sorted out in the end because he's the one who is making it happen. You can look back and know that **you were saved** by Christ's gift of his life on the cross. **You are saved** by Christ, even in this world where sin and brokenness continue to make their presence felt. And as he later explained the parable to his puzzled disciples, **you will be saved** by Christ from God's judgment against sin and brokenness on the Last Day. You will have the fulfillment of your hope, lasting peace with everything, in Jesus. What better ending is there?

So yes, this Sunday marks an ending. But God's love for you as His own child will never end. I take great confidence in the knowledge that, even in times that might seem uncertain, we can confidently trust that God knows what we need, even if we don't. God the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, overcoming any weakness in prayer, giving us the assurance that our Father will hear our prayers.

And this is my parting prayer for you today: May our Lord who by his life and its all-encompassing sacrifice on the cross, bless you with trust and patience and hope as you eagerly await the ending of sin and brokenness, living the restored life with God he has won for you and all people. Lasting peace be yours in Christ Jesus, our Savior.

Today we look back. Today we look ahead. Today we look to Jesus.

**Amen.**

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<sup>i</sup> Passage for memory:

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. – Romans 8:26*