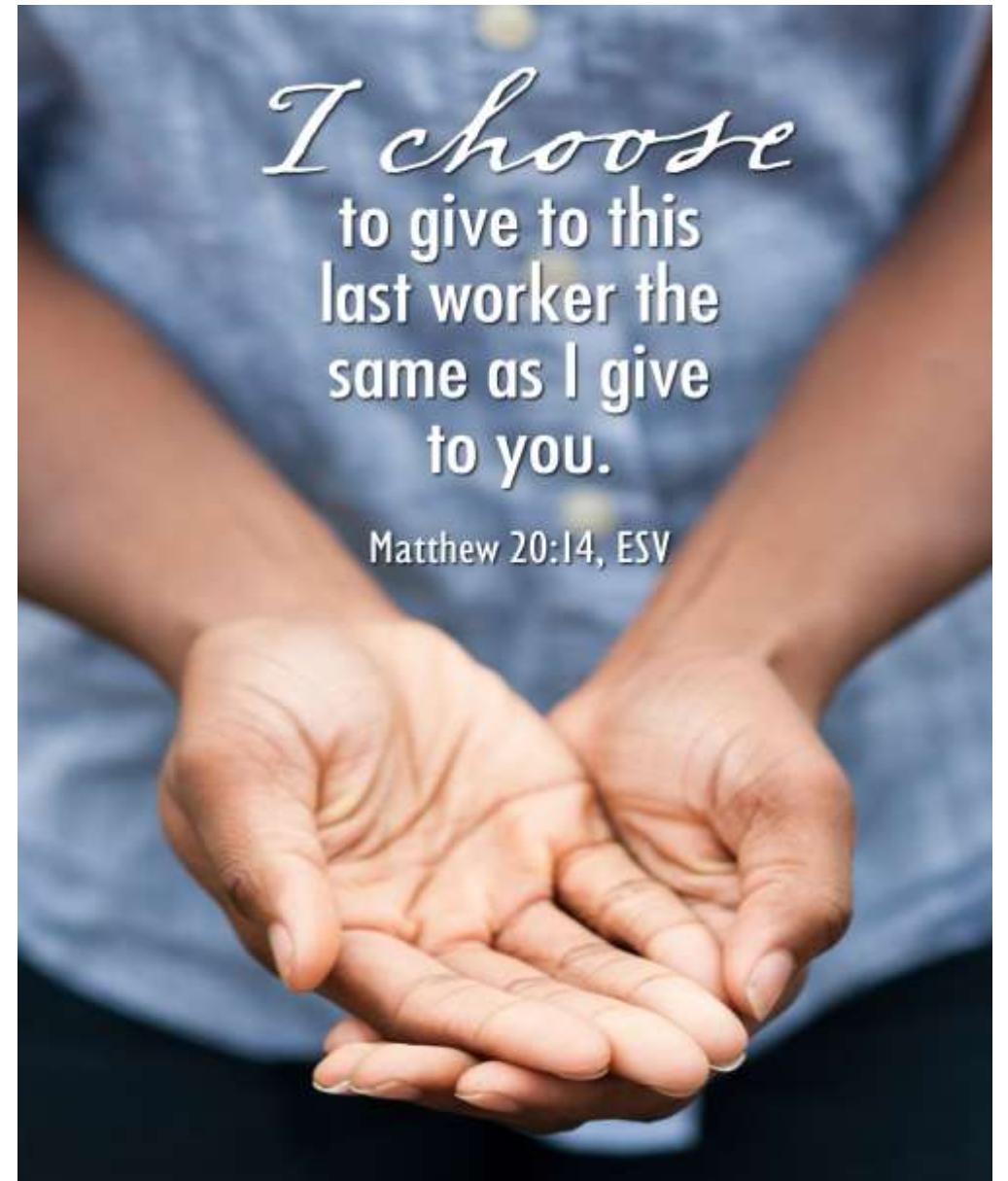




**Sunday, September 20, 2026
9:00 a.m.**

Welcome to St. Paul Lutheran Church

It is a joy to gather together for worship!

St. Paul Purpose Statement

Living Christ centered lives so we may love all, serve our community, and share the Word.

Sunday Worship Schedule

9:00 a.m. In-person worship with Holy Communion

10:15 a.m. In-person Sunday School – September – May

Communion

We celebrate Jesus' presence each week in Holy Communion. This is the Lord's Supper and Jesus invites us: whether you are a lifelong Lutheran, or just considering Christianity; if you are an infant or elderly; if your family has been in the United States for generations, or has only recently arrived; if you are LGBTQIA+ or straight; if you live with disabilities, chronic illness, or are able-bodied and currently healthy; if you are home-blessed or homeless; ... YOU are welcome at God's meal of grace at St. Paul.

Accessibility

Handicap parking, entrance, wheelchair, and restrooms are available. Sound amplifiers and large print bulletins are available. Please ask an usher for assistance.

Children's Offering

The September Children's offering will go to towards The Buddy Bag program. Be assured that every penny donated goes only to the cost of purchasing the food. All administrative costs are covered separately.

Pastor Mark Luepke, Part-time Interim

pastormark@stpaulsterling.com

1701 16th Ave. Sterling, IL 61081

815-625-3069

Church email: stpaulsterling@comcast.net

www.stpaulsterling.com

From sundaysandseasons.com. Copyright © 2026 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved.

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew narrates one of Jesus' controversial parables in which Jesus says that the reign of God is like that of a landowner who pays his workers the same wage no matter what time of day they began to work. When God changes God's mind about punishing Nineveh for their evil ways, Jonah is angry. Yet God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. In baptism we receive the grace of God that is freely given to all. As Martin Luther wrote, in the presence of God's mercy we are all beggars.

Prelude

"There's a Wideness in God's Mercy"

stg. David Cherwien

Welcome/Announcements

Confession and Forgiveness

All may make the sign of the cross, the sign that is marked at baptism, as the presiding minister begins.

P: Blessed be the holy Trinity, † one God, who pours love into our hearts and healing upon the earth.

All: Amen.

P: Confident that God justifies us by grace through faith, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

All: Compassionate God, we confess that we struggle to embody your goodness in the world and in our own hearts. Creation groans from overuse. Jealousy and bitterness strain our relationships. Indifference keeps us from seeking justice. Divisions disrupt your call to show genuine love to others. Turn our hearts back to you. Restore our world and reconcile us to one another. Renew us to live as your holy people, following the way of Jesus Christ. Amen.

P: Hear this good news: We have peace with God through † Jesus Christ, in whom there is no condemnation, but only forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. Receive freely this healing gift of grace.
All: Amen.

Gathering Hymn
“Lord of Light”
ELW #688



1 Lord of light, your name out - shin - ing all the stars and
2 By the toil of faith - ful work - ers in some far out -
3 Grant that knowl - edge, still in - creas - ing, at your feet may
4 By the prayers of faith - ful watch - ers, nev - er si - lent

suns of space, use our tal - ents in your king - dom
ly - ing field, by the cour - age where the ra - diance
low - ly kneel; with your grace our tri - umphs hal - low,
day or night; by the cross of Je - sus, bring - ing

as the ser - vants of your grace; use us to ful -
of the cross is still re - vealed, by the vic - to -
with your char - i - ty our zeal; lift the na - tions
peace to all and heal - ing light; by the love that

fill your pur - pose in the gift of Christ your Son.
ries of meek - ness, through re - proach and suf - f'ring won:
from the shad - ows to the glad - ness of the sun:
pass - es knowl - edge, mak - ing all your chil - dren one:

Refrain

Fa - ther, as in high - est heav - en, so on earth your will be done.

Text: Howell E. Lewis, 1860–1953, alt.
Music: ABBOT’S LEIGH, Cyril V. Taylor, 1907–1991
Text © Union of Welsh Independents
Music © 1942, ren. 1970 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

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

Prayer of the Day
P: Let us pray together:
All: Almighty and eternal God, you show perpetual lovingkindness to us your servants. Because we cannot rely on our own abilities, grant us your merciful judgment, and train us to embody the generosity of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

First Reading: Jonah 3:10—4:11
¹⁰ When God saw what [the people of Ninevah] did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it.
^{4:1} But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ² He prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning, for I knew that you are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. ³ And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.” ⁴ And the LORD said, “Is it right for you to be angry?” ⁵ Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.
⁶ The LORD God appointed a bush and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort, so Jonah was very happy about the bush. ⁷ But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. ⁸ When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, “It is better for me to die than to live.”

⁹But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?” And he said, “Yes, angry enough to die.” ¹⁰Then the LORD said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left and also many animals?”

R: Word of God, Word of Life,
All: Thanks be to God.

Psalm: Psalm 145:1-8

R: I will exalt you, my God and king, and bless your name forever and ever.

All: Every day will I bless you and praise your name forever and ever.

R: Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised! There is no end to your greatness.

All: One generation shall praise your works to another and shall declare your power.

R: I will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty and all your marvelous works.

All: They shall tell of the might of your wondrous acts, and I will recount your greatness.

R: They shall publish the remembrance of your great goodness; they shall sing joyfully of your righteousness.

All: The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Second Reading: Philippians 1:21-30

²¹For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me, yet I cannot say which I will choose. ²³I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better, ²⁴but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶so that, by my

presence again with you, your boast might abound in Christ Jesus because of me.

²⁷Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel ²⁸and in no way frightened by those opposing you. For them, this is evidence of their destruction but of your salvation. And this is God’s doing. ²⁹For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ but of suffering for him as well, ³⁰since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

R: Word of God, Word of Life,
All: Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation

Re - turn to the Lord, your God, for he is gra - cious and mer - ci - ful,

slow to an - ger, and a - bound - ing in stead - fast love.

Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

P: The Holy Gospel according to Matthew the 20th chapter.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵When

he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same.
⁶ And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around, and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' ⁷ They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.'
⁸ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.'
⁹ When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received a denarius.
¹⁰ Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius.
¹¹ And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹² saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.'
¹³ But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius?' ¹⁴ Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you.
¹⁵ Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

P: The Gospel of the Lord,
All: Praise to you, O Christ.

Children’s Message

Sermon
“God’s Grace: Unfair!”

Hymn of the Day
“God’s Work Our Hands”



1 God's work, our hands: work - ing to - geth - er,
2 God's work, our feet: trav - 'ling to - geth - er,
3 God's work, our voice: sing - ing to - geth - er,
4 God is at work in and a - round us:



build - ing a fu - ture, re - pair - ing the world,
fol - low - ing Je - sus to plac - es un - known,
prais - ing, pro - claim - ing to all who will hear,
seed - lings are sprout - ing and bread's on the rise!



rais - ing up homes, plant - ing new gar - dens,
walk - ing as friends, march - ing for free - dom,
pray - ing for peace, shout - ing for jus - tice,
Washed and set free, hum - bled and hon - ored,



feed - ing the hun - gry and shelt - 'ring the cold.
run - ning the race with God's fu - ture the goal.
claim - ing God's love for the lost and the least.
gift - ed by grace, we re - spond in God's love.



Bless, God, our hands as we work in your name,
Bless, God, our feet as we fol - low your way,
Bless, God, our voice as we speak in your name,
Bless, God, our lives as we an - swer your call,



shar - ing the good news of your gos - pel.
shar - ing the good news of your gos - pel.
shar - ing the good news of your gos - pel.
shar - ing the good news of your gos - pel.

Text: Wayne L. Wold, b. 1954
Music: EARTH AND ALL STARS, David N. Johnson, 1922–1987
Text © 2019 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, admin. Augsburg Fortress
Music © 1968 Augsburg Publishing House, admin. Augsburg Fortress

Quilt & Kit Blessing*

Leader: God, you call us to love our neighbors as ourselves. Send forth your Spirit today as we call upon you to bless our work and make it holy. Help these quilts and kits, our offerings of hope, to travel across the furthest distances to reach our most weary neighbors and surround them with your grace and peace.

All: Jesus, open our hearts to love our neighbors.

L: God, we give you thanks for the pieces of fabric, thread, sewing machines, and the items collected for the kits. May their presence be a sign of your faithful promise, may these quilts wrap our neighbors in unending love, and may these kits offer dignity and healing.

All: Jesus, open our hearts to love our neighbors.

L: God, we give thanks for all those who have taken part in creating these quilts and kits. May you guide us to greater empathy for our neighbors in crisis, for mothers who struggle to feed their hungry children, for the fearful, the anxious, the isolated. May these quilts and kits provide comfort and relief to those who are downtrodden around the world.

All: Jesus, open our hearts to love our neighbors.

L: God, be with those who will receive these gifts — neighbors we have never met, neighbors who are far away, neighbors who, like us, long for your grace and mercy. May the work crafted from our humble hands serve as a beacon of light and hope to those who are desolate and hopeless and fill them with the peace that is only found in you.

All: Jesus, open our hearts to love our neighbors.

L: We thank you for this ministry of service and for the opportunity to comfort those in their darkest hours, to remind our neighbors in Christ of your loving presence. Bring us ever closer to your heart and our neighbors in need throughout the world. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, the one who is our hope.

All: Amen.

L: Emboldened by God's eternal and unconditional love for all people, let us go and do likewise, and share our blessings with neighbors near and far, in the name of the Father, the Son +, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

* from LWR Mission Quilt Resources

Prayers of Intercession

P: Reminded of God's gracious and abundant love, we offer our prayers, confident that God hears us.

A brief silence.

P: Hear us, God.

All: Your mercy is great.

P: Grant the prayers we have offered, what we have forgotten to ask, and whatever else you see that we need. We ask this in Jesus' name.

All: Amen.

Peace

P: The peace of Christ be with you always.

All: And also with you!

P: Let us share a sign of Christ's peace in whatever way you are comfortable.

Offering

"Amazing Grace"

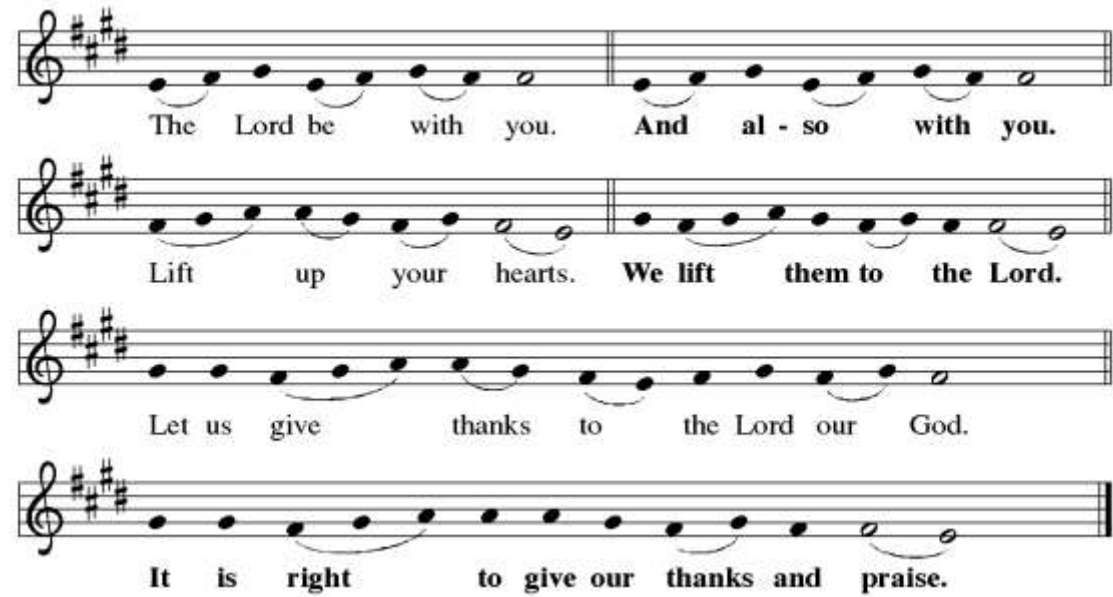
arr. Susan W. Henry

Offering Prayer

P: God of creation, you send rain and the earth springs forth abundantly. All blessings are from you; make us generous with what we have. Use our gifts, our abilities, and our hearts in service to you and in love to our neighbors, today and always.

All: Amen.

The Great Thanksgiving



The Lord be with you. And al - so 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.

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. 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”



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, Lord God of pow'r 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.

The Words of Institution

Lord’s Prayer

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

All: 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.

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

P: Christ invites you to this table. All who are thirsty, all who are hungry, come!

Communion

“Lamb of God”



Lamb of God, you take a-way the sin of the world; have mer-cy on



Communion Music

“Beneath the Cross of Jesus”
arr. Gary Lanier

“We Remember You, Jesus”
Rick Founds

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

P: The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in God’s grace.
All: Amen.

P Let us pray.
Sustaining God, with this bread and cup, you nourish us with mercy and abundant life. By your Spirit, send us from this table to serve a needy world. Make us living signs of your liberation, healing, and love, following the way of Jesus, in whose name we pray.
All: Amen.

Blessing

P: The God of love draw you into full accord and one mind, in the body of Christ Jesus.
All: Amen.

P: The God of hope grant you strength and joy in all circumstances through the interceding of the Spirit.
All: Amen.

P: The God of grace ☩ bless you now and forever.
All: Amen.

Sending Song
“God Be the Love to Search and Keep You”



1 God, be the love to search and keep me; God, be the prayer to
2 Bind to my-self the name of Ho - ly, great cloud of wit - ness -
3 Bright-ness of sun and glow of moon-light, flash - ing of light - ning,
4 Walk - ing be-hind to hem my jour - ney, go - ing a - head to
5 Christ in the eyes of all who see me, Christ in the ears that



move my voice; God, be the strength to now up - hold me:
es en - fold; proph - ets, a - pos - tles, an - gels wit - ness:
strength of wind, depth of the sea to soil of plan - et:
light my way, and from be - neath, a - bove, and all ways:
hear my voice, Christ in the hearts of all who know me:



O Christ, sur - round me; O Christ, sur - round me.

Text: Richard Bruxvoort Colligan, b. 1967
Music: GREEN TYLER, Richard Bruxvoort Colligan
Text and music © 2004 This Here Music, admin. Augsburg Fortress

Dismissal
P: Go out in joy. Be led forth in peace.
All: Thanks be to God.

Postlude

“He Is Exalted/Great Is the Lord”

stg. Joel Raney

We Remember in Prayer; those on our Home Visitation list and those on our prayer list: Craig Green, Tricia M., Ken & Stephanie, Richard J., Callahan McCallister, Brock Woessner, Lori Dewey, Michelle Klinger, Matt Friel, Sandy Julifs, Mike, and Phyllis Jacobson.

Worship Assistants:

Opener/Head Usher/Closer – Dawn Waite

Acolytes – Gale family

Greeters – Janie Billings, Susan Kuehl

Ushers – John Renner, Mel Johnson

Reader – Marilyn Geiger

Sound – David Carrillo

Communion Assistant – John Renner

Altar Guild – Ann Beswick, JoAnn Garcia

Musicians:

Julie Woessner DeJonge

Amy Zeigler

Dawn Zeigler

Next Week – September 27

Worship Assistants:

Opener/Head Usher/Closer – Stacey Avelar

Acolytes – Avelar family

Greeters – Bob & Judy Bartel

Ushers – Keith Peugh, Dan Dir

Reader – Keith Peugh

Sound – Bradyn Arians

Communion Assistant – JoAnn Garcia

Altar Guild – Ann Beswick, JoAnn Garcia

Coffee Fellowship – *Volunteer Needed*