

Home Service for September 6, 2026

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Awaken to the call of love, for love fulfills the law. Live fully in the light, as children of the day, embracing the grace and hope of our salvation.

Call to Worship:

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. We lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. We owe no one anything, except to love one another, for love is the fulfillment of the law. We come to worship with hearts awakened, ready to cast off the old and embrace the new. Let us awaken to the call of God, to live as people of the day, and to shine God's love in all we do. We worship the One who calls us into the light, to love one another as God has loved us. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, as we gather in your presence, we seek to put on the armor of light, and to live as your children. Help us cast aside the darkness and embrace the love that fulfills our law. Awaken us to your call, that we may walk in the light of Christ each day. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Merciful God, we have not always sought reconciliation as you have called us to do. We have allowed pride and fear to keep us from addressing conflicts with love and grace. Forgive the times we have withheld forgiveness and failed to seek peace. Helps us approach others with an open heart, ready to heal and restore relationships. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

Friends in Christ, know this: the mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting, and I remind you of this surpassing grace – in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

Read Psalm 149

Praise the Lord.^[a]

Sing to the Lord a new song,

his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.

² Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;

let the people of Zion be glad in their King.

³ Let them praise his name with dancing

and make music to him with timbrel and harp.

⁴ For the Lord takes delight in his people;

he crowns the humble with victory.

⁵ Let his faithful people rejoice in this honor

and sing for joy on their beds.

⁶ May the praise of God be in their mouths

and a double-edged sword in their hands,

⁷ to inflict vengeance on the nations

and punishment on the peoples,

⁸ to bind their kings with fetters,

their nobles with shackles of iron,

⁹ to carry out the sentence written against them—

this is the glory of all his faithful people.

Praise the Lord.

Prayers of the People:

Lord of light, in the midst of darkness and fear, you call us to be a community of peace, love and hope. You remind us of the blessings we have and the opportunities to share those blessings with others. We praise and thank you for all these things and for your constant presence with us. Today, as a community seeking peace and healing, we offer the names of loved ones who are struggling with illness, with loss, with feelings of alienation and fear. We have named those dear ones aloud in this congregation that all may enter the prayer for these people, seeking your healing and hope in their lives. As we have lifted up our concerns, we also offer messages of love and rejoicing. Let us offer prayers of Thanksgiving and Joy for this community of faith. Lord, we thank you for your healing mercies and your sustaining love for us. We are confident in your abiding presence with us. Help us to be faithful to you in all times and in all places. Give us the grace to accept the forgiveness you have offered to each of us. For it is in Jesus' name that we offer this prayer. AMEN.

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

Read the Old Testament Lesson: Exodus 12:1-14

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ²“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb^[a] for his family, one for each household. ⁴If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. ⁵The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. ⁸That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. ⁹Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. ¹⁰Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.

¹²“On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord. ¹³The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

¹⁴“This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord—a lasting ordinance.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 13:8-14

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹The commandments, “You shall not

commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,”^[a] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”^[b] ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.^[c]

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 18:15-20

“If your brother or sister^[a] sins,^[b] go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’^[c] ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸ “Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be^[d] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^[e] loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

Message

How many of us have a set of keys with us today and yes you can count a car fob. As Christians we also possess another set of keys that, while we cannot actually hold them in our hands, these keys are far more important than any other key we have. These are the Keys of the Kingdom given to us by Jesus himself and so we want to treasure them. We do that when we understand what these keys are and when we use them faithfully.

Two weeks ago our Gospel told us how Jesus said to the Apostle Peter: “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:19). The first part of that verse is simple enough. Jesus is giving Peter, as the spokesman of the apostles, keys to the kingdom of heaven. But what does it mean that these keys can bind and loosen things on earth and in heaven? When called to

teach Lutheran catechism I discovered Luther's explanation: "The use of the keys is that special power and right which Christ gave to his church on earth, to forgive the sins of those who repent, but to refuse forgiveness to those who do not as long as they do not repent."

It is confirmed again in today's Gospel. We heard about how Jesus told all of his disciples, and not just Peter, what they were to do if a fellow Christian was caught in a sin. They were to first and go and speak to that individual privately about his sin and call him to repentance. To repent of sin means to be sorry for the sin, to stop committing that sin, and to trust that Jesus has forgiven the sin. But if the individual refuses to repent, then the disciples were to "bind" the sin to the individual. That is kind of what a police officer does when he pulls over a speeder and gives him a ticket. That ticket binds the infraction to the driver so that he has to answer for it in court or by paying a fine. They cannot just drive away and act as if nothing has happened. In the same way when we say to someone who does not repent, that his sin is still bound to him, we are announcing that he will have to answer for his sin on Judgment Day as long as he does not repent.

On the other hand, if the sinner repents and says he is sorry and expresses his trust in Jesus' forgiveness, then we are to "loose" the sin like untying a boat on a river so that it floats downstream and out of sight. Loosing sin is just another way to say that the transgression has been forgiven and has floated out of God's sight or the person is forgiven and the sin is forgotten.

Jesus does give us the power to forgive or not to forgive sins. That is what the Keys of the Kingdom are? And he has given this privilege to all believers and not just to Peter and to the Twelve Disciples, or definitely not just to pastors? When Jesus said, "If your brother sins..." he was not just thinking about the Apostle Matthew sinning against the Apostle Peter. He was speaking about anyone who calls himself a believer. If such a person sins, then other believers who witness that sin should call that individual to repentance.

It seems so dangerous to give this power to sinful human beings? What, if someone does not like the other person? Could they just refuse to forgive our sins, and in that way keep us out of heaven? No. The Keys of the Kingdom are not a loaded gun that God is hoping we will use correctly. What Jesus literally said in both Matthew 16 and 18 is this: "...whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven...and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven." In other words, our use of the Keys does not force God's hand. Just because I say to someone that their sins are not forgiven, that does not obligate God to withhold forgiveness from that person. God continues to bind and loose sins according to

whether one repents or not, not based on what I or you say or think about that person.

So why does Jesus bother to entrust the Keys of the Kingdom to us if he can and will override our misuse of the Keys? While we cannot force God's hand, God does want to extend his hand through the proper use of the Keys. You see, God could certainly send a lightning bolt down from heaven whenever we sin, but thankfully he has not chosen to do that. Instead, He wants His children to call each other to repentance. And so, all those who would say, "What I do with my life is between God and me. Only he can judge," do not understand that with the Keys of the Kingdom God has made it every Christian's business to be concerned about their fellow believers and the lifestyle choices they make. So, when we announce to a fellow sinner that by his lack of repentance he has turned his back on forgiveness, it is as if God himself is speaking to that individual. That is what Jesus was getting at when he said: "...where two or three gather together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20).

We tend to misuse that passage. We like to quote it when only a few have gathered for a worship service or a Bible class. While it is true that God is still in the midst of that small group, it is also true that he would be present only if one person showed up for worship. Jesus' point in today's Gospel is that when God's people use the Keys according to his will, it is as if He Himself is speaking the words of warning; even if only two or three Christians are bold enough to call sin a sin. God speaks to us through the witness of faithful Christians.

Let us not forget about the other Key of the Kingdom, the loosing key. With this key we announce forgiveness to those who are sorry for their sins. We want them to know that because of what Jesus has done, their sin is no longer tied to them. We should be happy to use this key, but sometimes we are just hesitant. Sometimes we feel we need to see proof that the person who has asked for forgiveness is really sorry. Certainly, if they are truly repentant, they will make amends for what they have done and make changes to their life so they don't fall back into that sin. But being repentant does not mean that they are going to be able to totally clean up their life. Remember that they and we are just human. They may have to offer this prayer in connection with a particular sin for the rest of their life: "I do not like what I have done. I don't like the way that I am. I have disobeyed you, O God and have hurt your people. I don't want to keep living like that. Lord forgive me! Lord help me change!" Whenever such a prayer is offered in sincerity, that is repentance and we will want to use the loosing key on such an individual.

Withholding forgiveness from someone until they "prove" themselves is like withholding medication from a sick patient until he can prove that he is getting

better. It is the very power of forgiveness and the message of God's grace that can motivate and empower the individual to fight against future temptation. Be happy and eager to use the loosing key and assure each other of Jesus' love and forgiveness.

When you hold a set of keys in your hand, think about the Keys of the Kingdom that have been entrusted to you; the privilege to retain or release sin. Then pray that the Lord keep you faithful in using those keys because when you treasure the Keys of the Kingdom you not only cherish God's Word, you treasure the people around you. You show that you love them enough to care about where they will spend eternity. Think about that if someone uses the Keys of the Kingdom on you and calls you to repent of some sin. Confess the sin and repent. For you will then hear that, for Jesus' sake, your sin is forgiven and the kingdom of heaven is open to you.

The Keys of the Kingdom really are much better than other keys on earth. May the Lord keep each one of us faithful in the use of those keys and may he also give us an attitude that welcomes their use! The Keys of the Kingdom have been entrusted to every believer. It is a way for us to show our love for God's Word and our love for God's people. Amen

Benediction:

Family of God, the lessons of reconciliation and peace-making are not easy. As you move into the week ahead, may God bless you with the desire to restore community when it is broken, to hold boundaries with firmness and grace, to listen with curiosity, and to speak with gentleness, that all may know we are disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.