

**June 29, 2025, 3<sup>rd</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**  
**Pastor Tom Olson, Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church**

**PRELUDE:** Carol Gustafson (Osthus/Reynolds)

**CALL TO WORSHIP:** From Psalm 16

PASTOR: Keep me safe, O God,

ALL: For in you I take refuge.

PASTOR: I said to the LORD, "You are my Lord;

ALL: Apart from you I have no good thing."

PASTOR: The sorrows of those will increase

ALL: Who run after other gods.

PASTOR: The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;

ALL: Surely I have a delightful inheritance.

PASTOR: I will praise the LORD, who counsels me;

ALL: Even at night my heart instructs me.

PASTOR: You have made known to me the path of life;

ALL: You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

**HYMN #631 "My Country! 'Tis of Thee"**

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**HYMN #629 (vss. 1&4) "The Star-Spangled Banner"**

**CHILDREN'S SERMON:**

**Reader: Jacob O'Flanagan**

**OLD TESTAMENT LESSON: 1 Kings 19:9-21**

**9 There he went into a cave and spent the night.**

**And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"**

**10 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."**

**11 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by."**

**Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. 12 After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. 13 When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.**

**Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" 14 He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."**

**15 The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. 16 Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. 17 Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. 18 Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and all whose mouths have not kissed him." 19 So Elijah went from there and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen, and he himself was driving the twelfth pair. Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him. 20 Elisha then left his oxen and ran after Elijah. "Let me kiss my father and mother good-bye," he said, "and then I will come with you." "Go back," Elijah replied. "What have I done to you?" 21 So Elisha left him and went back. He took his yoke of oxen and slaughtered them. He burned the plowing equipment to cook the meat and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his attendant.**

**GOSPEL LESSON:** *Luke 9:51-62 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them, 56 and they went to another village. 57 As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." 59 He said to another man, "Follow me." But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." 60 Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family." 62 Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."*

**READER:** Here ends the reading of God's Word.

**CONGREGATION SINGS:** God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

**CONFESSION OF FAITH:** *Apostles' Creed- I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen*

**GLORIA PATRI:** *Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 (please put on screen) Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER**

### **PRAISE SONGS PICKED BY CAROL**

**SERMON TITLE: "TO LOVE OR TO DESTROY"** *Galatians 5:13-26; Pastor Tom Olson; June 29, 2025 Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen*

**BACKGROUND:** The church in Galatia was a good church. They received the pure gospel of grace. The message of forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the finished work of Christ filled them with joy. The Apostle Paul said that they were *"running well."* They were not crawling or stumbling, they were running. Running means, they were moving forward and doing great things. Souls were being saved. People were being delivered from legalism to the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

**PROBLEMS:** Then something happened that messed up this great, growing and life-changing church. Teachers came to them and said that it was good to believe in Jesus but that they also had to follow the Levitical law. They had to be circumcised and follow the other Jewish laws as well to be saved. They were drawn away from salvation through faith in Christ alone. Their new belief was faith in Jesus plus the Jewish law equal salvation. It went from faith alone to faith plus works. Sadly, there are many people today that believe it is Jesus plus their own good deeds.

**DIVISION:** This led to factions in the church. Before long praise to God turned to backbiting, envy and division. Satan works hard to hurt good churches that are moving forward. The way he did it

here was to get the people divided on an issue. He sends someone to sow discontent and confusion and soon the group is no longer moving forward. Let's look at this and see that it has application also for families, marriages and even friends. TO LOVE OR TO DESTROY, Galatians 5:13-26...

## I. THE CHOICE: SERVE OR BITE

***Galatians 5:13-15 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. 14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.***

FREEDOM: To become a believer is to walk into freedom. FREEDOM FROM...sin, habits, the devil, destructive relationships and the list goes on. We had dinner last Thursday with a young couple in Inver Grove Heights. Both the husband and wife had histories of bondage to drugs, immorality, and all sorts of self-destructive behaviors. They both met the Lord Jesus Christ and got a new life and the power of the Holy Spirit. They now have been freed from the terrible path of self-destruction they were on. Jesus set them free.

FAULTS: But these two Christians still have an old nature. They still struggle with attitudes and actions that come between them having a happy life together. Any of the married people here know that we have to fight the temptation to pick at the faults we see in our partner. We have to fight that in the church as well.

- James 3:8 ...the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.
- LUTHER: We should fear and love God, so that we do not lie about, betray or slander our neighbor, but excuse him, speak well of him, and put the most charitable construction on all he does.

JELLO: Years ago I hear the true story of a church that got into an argument about whether or not the Jello they served should have Cool Whip or real whipped cream on it. The argument got so bad that it eventually destroyed the congregation and the church had to fold.

ALTERNATIVE: Paul says here that if the Galatians keep biting each other they will end up destroying each other. He instead gives them a different focus. Instead of biting or picking or another word would be criticizing each other he says this in verse 13: ***SERVE ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE.***

SERVE: This would be a good practice for all of us in the home, at work or at church that when we are tempted to give someone a verbal jab or behind the scenes criticism...immediately do something to serve them. When we serve people our harsh attitudes toward them melt away.

SALVATION ARMY: Our church in Ohio served a meal once a month in the inner city. It was really hard to criticize the homeless people who came when you served them a good hot meal and saw their smiles and when you sat with them and ate together and heard their sad stories about life.

JESUS: Isn't that the example of Jesus? He served the people. He taught the people. He healed the people. He died for the people. He offers salvation to anyone of us.

INVITED: If anyone has a right to criticize our views or failures or shortcomings it is our perfect Savior. But instead of biting us he invites us to come to His table and come to His family and come to His home in heaven. Even those who nailed him to the cross got their sins forgiven when he said: ***"Father, forgive them for they no not what they are doing."***

MEDITATE: Meditating upon Jesus and the way He lived helps us to move away from biting people back to serving them in love. OUR CHOICE IS TO LOVE OR TO DESTROY. SECONDLY...

## II. THE SOURCE: SPIRIT OR SINFUL NATURE

*Galatians 5:16-18 So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. 17 For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

LED: The way to make this beautiful life of love blossom in our midst is that we must be **LED BY THE SPIRIT** as we read in verse 18. The Holy Spirit of the Lord will lead us into the places described in Psalm 23 like **“Green pastures and still waters where our souls are restored.”**

POSSIBLE: Paul reminds the Galatians that they can “live by the spirit or live by the sinful nature.” He says that these two natures that both reside in us “are in conflict with each other.” We all have this division in our souls and our words and actions will proceed either from our ugly old sinful nature or our beautiful new nature.

KEY: The key is to walk daily in the new nature. It is called “daily renewal.” If we daily confess our sins and claim the blood of Christ, if we continually fellowship with God in prayer and if we daily feed our souls on the Word of God, our old nature will be restrained and our new nature will flourish.

FERTILIZER: I have noticed on our lawn that if I neglect to fertilize the grass, soon the weeds multiply and begin to take over. But if I fertilize the grass, it will take over the weeds. It is tempting to not spend the time and money on fertilizer, but the long-term cost is to have ugly weeds instead of a soft green carpet of grass for the children to play on.

CRITICAL: If you know that your tongue is getting more and more critical of someone in your family or at work or in church, the best thing to do to take some time of feed your new nature and let the fruit of the Spirit return to your life like **LOVE, JOY and PEACE**.

KEY: A well-nourished soul is key to peace among people. The tensions and divisions in our country today is due to people who have never received a new nature from God and also due to believers who have not kept their souls healthy. THE SOURCE of our issues is found in the depths of our inner person, our souls. The choice we have is TO LOVE OR DESTROY. Thirdly...

## III. THE PATH: PAIN OR PEACE

*Galatians 5:19-26 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

QUESTION: When we read these two lists here, the deeds of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit, ask yourself this question: “Where do I want to live?” Do I want to live in a place of hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, factions, drunkenness and the like? Or do I want to live in a state of “love, joy, peace, patience and kindness?” I know where I want to live. I know what I want. I want the fruit of the Spirit. Don’t you?

PERSIA: Which world do you live in? ...the world of pain or the world of peace? Just look at the thousands of years of pain we see in the middle east: the ancient animosity between the Persians and the Jews, between Iran and Israel, never ends. It has put us on the cusp of World War 3.

LIBERIA: Sharon served as a missionary teacher in Liberia, West Africa for eleven years. She liked living there with fruit trees in her yard. Liberia could be paradise on earth if the ancient tribal divisions did not keep erupting in war.

KENYA: Last Sunday, when it was so hot I asked Richard Ooga if it felt like Kenya where he grew up. He said, "No, it never gets so horribly hot like this in Kenya, it is more comfortable there." If the people of Kenya would live by the Spirit, it also could be paradise on earth.

CALIFORNIA: California was once considered paradise but the troubles there between people and factions that is ruining the state. Californian scholar, Victor Davis Hanson recently stated, "*it has caused many people to move to a place with a much less favorable climate.*" California needs to choose between the good life led by the Holy Spirit or the painful life that flows from sin and evil.

JOSHUA: But what about you personally? What do you choose today? Do we choose PAIN OR PEACE? Joshua put it this way, ***Joshua 24:14-15 "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15 But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."***

CHOICE: The choice is before us today: TO LOVE OR TO DESTROY. If you would like to choose the life of peace, perhaps

you might like to come to the altar after the service and pray with someone about it. Yesterday the altar was used for a wedding. Two young people promised to love and serve each other for life and have a home of peace. Today it is open for such vows to be renewed for us. CHOOSE LOVE AND NOT DESTRUCTION. Amen

*May the peace of God that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through faith in Messiah Jesus. Amen*

**HYMN #451 "Lead On, O King Eternal"**

**LORD'S PRAYER & BENEDICTION**

**CLOSING SONG: Picked by Carol**

**POSTLUDE: Carol Gustafson**