

Proper 10/Eighth Sunday after Pentecost (Series C)

“Where Charity and Love Prevail” (*Lutheran Service Book* #845)

I recall reading years ago (unfortunately, I don't recall precisely where) a story about a young girl and a man who would have formerly been called a “hobo” or vagrant. Their encounter was triggered by her singing the 19th-century hymn “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” In response, he wrote on a piece of paper: “God is nowhere.” The young girl read it, and said “Exactly right! God is now here!”

“Where Charity and Love Prevail” begins with a similar confident statement, an answer to the imagined question “where can we find God?” The original Latin hymn, *Ubi caritas et amor*, 1000 years older than “What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” answers (in the translation of Omer Westendorf): “where charity and love prevail there God is ever found.”

Traditionally, the *Ubi caritas* was sung on Maundy Thursday, during the washing of feet. In the liturgy of the Three Days, we would answer: “God is found in Christ, washing the disciples’ feet. God is found in Christ, lynched on a tree. God is found in Christ, brought to life again.”

On Proper 10, in the summer, when the Gospel reading is the story Jesus told of the merciful Samaritan, we would answer: “God is found in the neighbor, and especially the foreign born neighbor. God is found in the Church, as it turns its eyes outward from the liturgy to the ones beaten, and robbed, and left for dead at the side of the road.”

A final thought: the Latin word *caritas* does mean charity. But it also means dearness, costliness, high price. The whole world, everyone, is dear to God. Jesus paid a high price because God loves everyone. That includes the child sold into sex slavery in North America. That includes the family now homeless due to war in Syria. That includes people with all sorts of gender identities and expressions. God loves everyone.

Our charity is thin if it does not cost us dearly, if we do not love at a high price. There is no cheap grace, and there is no cheap love.

All-loving God, you love the whole world, everything you have created. Open our eyes to see you in the last and least of your people, open our hearts as Jesus opened his arms on the cross, and grant that our charity would be a reflection of your love; through Jesus Christ, our healer and our Lord. Amen

Michael Krentz
The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia



Where charity and love prevail,
there God is ever found;
brought here together by Christ's love,
by love we thus are bound.

With grateful joy and holy fear
his charity we learn;
let us with heart and mind and soul
now love God in return.

Forgive we now each other's faults
as we our own confess,
and let us love each other well
in Christian holiness.

Let strife among us be unknown;
let all contentions cease;
be God's the glory that we seek;
be ours his holy peace.

Let us recall that in our midst
dwells Christ, His only Son;
as members of His body joined,
we are in Him made one.

For love excludes no race or clan
that names the Savior's name;
his family embraces all
whose Father is the same.

Text: Latin, c. 9th cent.; English translation by Omer E. Westendorff, 1916-97, altered.

Tune: TWENTY-FOURTH. Lucius Chapin, 1760-1842

Text © 1960 World Library Publications. 3708 River Rd., Suite 400, Franklin Park, IL 60131. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music. It may be downloaded and duplicated for local use.]