

Holy Cross Lutheran Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

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713-686-8254

Rev. Jim Berggren

September 13, 2026

16th Sunday after Pentecost

WORSHIP SERVICE

PRELUDE

WELCOME / ANNOUNCEMENTS

GATHERING SONG **Awake, O Sleeper, Rise from Death** ELW 452

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

P: In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

C: *Amen.*

P: God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone. Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C: *Amen.*

P: Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Most merciful God,

C: *We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.*

P: God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. In the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Almighty God strengthens you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

C: *Amen.*

**PASTORAL GREETING
THE KYRIE**

CANTICLE OF PRAISE *This is the Feast*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

P: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also, with you.**

P: Let us pray, together.

C: **O Lord God, merciful judge, you are the inexhaustible fountain of forgiveness. Replace our hearts of stone with hearts that love and adore you, that we may delight in doing your will, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

September 13, 2026 – Pentecost 16A

FIRST READING: Genesis 50:15-21

Joseph Reassures His Brothers

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs, we did to him?" ¹⁶ So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: ¹⁷ 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

¹⁸ His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. ²¹ So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

The word of the Lord.

*Congregation response following the reading is: **Thanks be to God!***

THE PSALM Psalm 103:8-13

SECOND READING: Romans 14:1-12

The Weak and the Strong

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. ² One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. ³ The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them. ⁴ Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

⁵ One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. ⁶ Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. ⁸ If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living.

¹⁰ You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ¹¹ It is written:

“‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.’” ¹² So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God.

The word of the Lord.

*Congregation response following the reading is: **Thanks be to God!***

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION:

Alleluia.

Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia.

THE HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 18:21-35

The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant

²¹ Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

²² Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

²³ “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. ²⁴ As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. ²⁵ Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

²⁶ “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ ²⁷ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

²⁸ “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹ “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

³⁰ “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

³² “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

³⁵ “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

*Congregational response: **Praise to you, O Christ.***

CHILDREN’S SERMON

PR. JIM’S SERMON:



PENTECOST 16A, 9-13-2026, Matthew 18,21-35

GETTING EVEN

A man was having a quiet cup of coffee in a restaurant when a big bully walked in. The bully yelled, “Why are you looking at me?” The smaller man said, “I’m sorry, forgive me. I was just thinking and staring at nothing.”

The bully says angrily, “You think I am nothing?” He slams him to the floor and says, “Judo.....Japan.” The small man got up and fearfully said, “It is just a misunderstanding. I forgive you for reacting so violently.” The bully hit him in the neck with the side of his open hand and said, “Karate.....Korea.” The small man struggled out of the door and crawled into his car and left. Fifteen minutes later he came back into the diner, and whacked the bully over the head and said, “Crowbar.....Home Depot.” Getting Even. Something sinfully satisfying

about that.

Three strikes and you are out! You don't see any Umpire saying to Altuve, "You know what, Jose, I forgive you those first three strikes and you can have three more. Try and hit a homer this time, OK?" That just wouldn't happen. Forgiveness is not a regular feature of social interactions. We actually live in a hard world that does not recognize forgiveness as any red-blooded way of dealing with things. To survive, there must be boundaries, rules, regulations, and hard decisions. We have a general idea of what is fair, and forgiveness is something that goes past the normal rules. We count and we keep score for both business and pleasure, for pastimes and in relationships. Rules are there to help us stay even. You get three months and three thousand miles, and then your sin warranty runs out and you pay. If you can't stay even, someone is going to get even.

We heard it as children and we have taught it to children. You will be forgiven three times and if you haven't learned by then, punishment follows. After I count to three. Something about that magic three number.

Peter asks Jesus, how many times should we forgive? The liberal rabbis of that day, said that three pardons were far and away enough. Peter and Jesus both know the story of Cain and Abel, in Genesis 4. Cain kills Abel. God with mercy protects Cain and pronounces that whoever kills Cain will be avenged 7-fold. Years later, Cain's great-grandson, Lamech, will brag to his wives that he will be avenged 70 times 7-fold: 490 lives to pay for 1 death. Jesus says, "No!! 490 forgivenesses to pay for one life!!!" It is so totally amazing how Jesus balances the universe!!

It must have seemed to Peter in his attempt at being a good student of Rabbi Jesus, quite a stretch of charity and liberality to extend forgiveness to seven instead of three offenses, (and then how satisfying to use a stick of power and moral superiority, on the offender after the 7th offense.) Getting even.

Peter's misunderstanding is that he is making forgiveness like the express lane at the grocery store, where we also count and keep score. We approach the check-out and count to see if we have 12 items or less. I can just make it under the 12-item number, if I count those six, 2-liter bottles as one six-pack.

The very act of numbering offenses marks a wayward spirit which never enters into or comprehends the spirit of Christ. Jesus calls for perfect forgiveness as a continuing lifelong experience of trying to put oneself in proper relationship to God, the world, your neighbor and yourself. A world of forgiveness is better than a perfect world, because it is a real world. There will always be clashes of wills within the closest of relationships. What works better? Forgiving? Or getting even?

People are starving for forgiveness, concerning things that we don't even have a clue are going on in their lives. Ernest Hemingway tells a story about a man in Spain named Paco, a very common name. One day a father put an add in a local Madrid paper that said, "Paco, meet me at the Hotel Montana at noon on Wednesday. All is forgiven. Signed, Papa." The hotel had to call the police to break up the crowd. 800 men showed up, each one hoping he was the one being

forgiven.

An integral part of the Christian ethic is forgiveness. The Lord's Prayer includes the petition, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive the sins of those who sin against us." Our Lord is indicating that we are able to receive forgiveness in the same quantity and proportion that we are able to understand and offer it. So, if I can forgive you through a window the size of a dime, then that is the size of the window that I will be able to understand my forgiveness from you through. However, if I can forgive you through a window the size of a hula hoop, or through a window the size of the Astrodome, then there is a bigger, better opening for the fresh breeze of forgiveness to enrich both of our lives and the world. This emphasis on forgiveness distinguishes us from every other religion on earth which teaches good hints on getting even.

Jesus illustrates this with his Parable of the Unforgiving Servant. This servant is trusted with most of the king's property. He is in that position because he is smart. He knows what he is doing. He knows the king makes, and he knows how to get even. He thinks it's fair to appropriate funds for himself. He forgets to keep track of his 'withdrawals.' Actually, so much money is missing that he makes Bernie Madoff look like Santa Claus.

The missing money amounts to ten times the annual income of Herod's kingdom. The king was a better accountant. He figured it out. There is no humanly possible way for the king to get even. Ever. No sufficient collateral to liquidate. No chance of recovery. The lord can only do one thing. Forgive. Go out of the accounting business. On the way home from the pink-slip meeting with the lord, where he was forgiven, the servant runs into a fellow servant who owes him ten bucks. He tries to strangle him to death, and throws him into prison to get even. He couldn't possibly understand his hundred-million-dollar debt forgiveness through his own little itty-bitty, unforgiving ten-dollar window.

We walk free only because of infinite forgiveness. Getting even isn't possible. We can't out-forgive God, but it wouldn't hurt to try. I'm not talking destructive co-dependency, where weaponized forgiveness is another tool in the arsenal of resentment, pain, and getting even. The forgiven one must make the connection. But only God can help with that.

Forgiveness is not saying the offense never happened. It did. Forgiveness is not saying that everything's okay. It isn't. Forgiveness is not saying we no longer feel the pain of the offense. We do. Forgiveness is saying, "I'm okay, and I am willing to let God deal with the situation, and let go of my need to be the instrument of correction and rebuke in your life." I give up my need to be morally superior and keep you permanently in the wrong. You can't drive me crazy, if I don't give you the keys!"

Jesus turns the tables in his parable. The lord says to the unforgiving accountant, "I forgave you so we both could be free from guilt and resentment. You didn't forgive, so now we are both back in the torture chamber. Let's replay this until we get it right. 490 times if necessary. Withhold forgiveness. Stay tied up in painful feelings of hatred and anger. OR, Forgive? Go free. Mercy received is to be extended outward. Before setting a legal limit on forgiveness like Peter, we must not forget our release from overwhelming debt.

Don't forgive and forget. Oh, sure, forget holding on to the memory of the offense. If you are growing spiritually and moving on, it won't mean anything years from now, anyway. But always remember your own forgiveness. You have scars. You have given scars. Remember the good times of the relationship where you got the scars. They are battle ribbons that show you value integrity, relationship, and divine love over temporary feelings. That is what God does. Forgive and remember with joy the mutual forgiveness. Because, if we can't forgive, we burn the bridge over which we must pass.

I had an old car. Everything was wrong with it. I had a flat tire every week. The headlights were stuck on bright. Of course, I had to put them on at night to drive home. I couldn't see anything without lights. But, approaching cars were blinded. Some would honk their horns. Some would switch on their bright lights flashing and leaving them on, blinding me. I was terrified. Some would swerve into my lane and make vulgar signs out their window. I was helpless. I was an offense; a dangerous moving violation. I had no way of communicating that I couldn't change my condition. My lights were stuck on bright. I wanted to scream out the window, "I can't help it!!" Many times, people we interact with are loud and glaring, obnoxious and hurtful. Maybe, they really can't help it. We could get even by running them off the road or simply by trying to out-bright them. Or..... we have the incredible opportunity to understand and minister to them with mercy and restoration.

It is much more than not holding something against someone else. It is atonement. Restoring community. Helping each person to be their best. It is not simply settling past conditions and accounts so that everything evens up. It is better than fair. It is the opening of new life.

Just try to Get Even with God and his Mercy. Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY Our Father, We Have Wandered ELW 606

APOSTLES' CREED

P: God has made us His people through our Baptism into Christ. Living together in trust and hope, we confess our faith:

**C: I believe in God the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;**



**He ascended into heaven,
He is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

THE LORD’S PEACE *(Please share the Peace with a neighbor)*

THE OFFERING **“We Are The Lord’s”** arr. R. E. Martin

THE OFFERTORY RESPONSE *Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful*

THE OFFERING PRAYER

All pray together:

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. Amen.

AGNUS DEI

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
have, mercy upon us.
O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world,
grant us thy peace.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

P: In the night in which he was betrayed, Our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: Take and eat, this is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it for all to drink saying: This cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this in remembrance of me.

THE 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.

COMMUNION DISTRIBUTION

POST COMMUNION BLESSING

The Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and preserve you in Eternal Life.

POST COMMUNION SONG *Thankful Hearts and Voices Raise*

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Presider:

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.

Congregation: Amen.

THE BLESSING

SENDING SONG **Go, My Children, with My Blessing** ELW 543

GO IN PEACE, IN SERVICE

C: *Thanks be to God!*

PSALM 19:14

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*



- ♣ Fred Abrego
- ♣ Ken Beamesderfer

- ♣ Nancy Beamesderfer
- ♣ Susan Caradec
- ♣ Jessica Coleman
- ♣ Paul Houghton
- ♣ Bryan Kile
- ♣ Ernest Luker
- ♣ David Magrill
- ♣ Stuffy Martinez
- ♣ Jeremy Mitchell
- ♣ Geraine Moore
- ♣ Ed Peterman
- ♣ Dorothy Preuss
- ♣ Lupe Romero
- ♣ Jim Schwabenland
- ♣ Scott Spates
- ♣ Patricia Steapp
- ♣ Ann Taylor
- ♣ Bill Tempel
- ♣ Becky Terry
- ♣ Dave Trickett
- ♣ Jaime Urbanski
- ♣ Bennie Valites
- ♣ Susan Wiles
- ♣ Michael Williams

COUNCIL MEETING

Council meeting will be Sunday, **September 20**, at 11:00 a.m. in the Annex.

Church Council

USHERS

Month: September

Team # 03

Leader: Linda Cuzzort

LAY READERS & ASSISTANTS

SEPTEMBER

6 Reader — Bert Martin
P/E — Nancy Beamesderfer

13 Reader — Jay Fort
P/E — Julie Kilkenny

20 Reader — Shannon Martin
P/E — Penny Schick

27 Reader — Ike Thompson
P/E — Sharon Wagner

P/E stands for Prayers and Eucharist

Nancy Beamesderfer

ATTENTION HOLY CROSS MEMBERS

Following the Church Safety Protocol, if you would like to make a reservation to use the church facilities for church or private events, please contact Sussy.

You must to fill out a Calendar Request Form or send an email.

Thank you.

YOUTH GROUP

Come together in faith and friendship to our new Youth Group meetings.

We meet every 2nd and 4th Wednesday

from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. in the Youth Room.

Additional information will be available on the church website:

holycross.us and [Facebook](#).

Pr. Jim Berggren

It's going to be a bushel of fun!

FELLOWSHIP CLUB

will meet

Saturday, September 19, at 4 PM

Harris County Smokehouse

19811 Northwest Freeway - Houston, TX 77065

TRUNK OR TREAT

Save the Date!

Saturday **October 31st**.

Trunk or Treat. More info to follow.

Julie Richter

BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

**Please join us on Saturday, October 3, 2023
for the Blessing of the Animals.**

This is in honor of St. Francis and his love of animals.
What better way to say we love our pets
than to have them receive a blessing!

**Pastor Berggren will be near the West parking lot
at the Fountain Courtyard
from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon to give our pets a blessing.**

There will also be a **short service at 10:15 a.m.**
in the Fountain Courtyard
for those who would like to participate in the service.

We hope to see you and your furry, scaly, feathery,
(*or whatever the case may be*) friends!

MAM

1625 Blalock Rd. - Houston, TX 77080

Amazing things happening at MAM

Mark your calendar!

- Saturday, **October 17** 9 am – 12 noon MAM Shred Day
- Fri. & Sat. **November 6-7** Resale Half-Off Sale (Blalock location)

Resale store - Need volunteers for Restock Days at Blalock,

Scheduled for November 8, 1—4 p.m. Interested please contact Sussy.

The Store is always in need of plastic shopping bags so please consider recycling and donating those bags, especially in preparation for the Half—Off sale in November.

Safeguards Safety Training

Holy Cross Lutheran Church - 7901 Westview Drive, Houston, TX 77055

Call John Lambeth @ 713-854-8085 to register, or register online:

<https://events.humanitix.com/host/634c6d6ed7a0c9053d9f6f58>

Class	Price	Day	Date	Time
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Adult CPR					
	CPR Only	\$74	Sunday	13-Sep	1:00 pm - 4:30 pm
	CPR + First Aid	\$92	Sunday	18-Oct	1:00 pm - 4:30 pm
Adult & Pediatric CPR			Saturday	1-Aug	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
	CPR Only	\$98	Saturday	5-Sep	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
	CPR + First Aid	\$108	Saturday	10-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
Basic Life Support		\$94			
			Friday	4-Sep	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Saturday	12-Sep	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Saturday	19-Sep	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Friday	25-Sep	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Friday	9-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Saturday	17-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Saturday	24-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Friday	30-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
CPR Instructor course		\$299	Friday	2-Oct	9:00 am - 5:30 pm
RCP para adulto, niño y bebé					
	RCP solo	\$49			
	RCP + primeros auxilios	\$59	Saturday	26-Sep	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Saturday	31-Oct	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
			Saturday	5-Dec	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
Holy Cross Congregation Members receive a 15% discount. Use coupon code: HCLC2026					

SUNDAY'S SCHEDULE

9:30 a.m. *Traditional Worship service with Rev. Jim Berggren —WC*

Sunday School / Nursery is available for small children during the service — Crib Room

10:30 a.m. Coffee fellowship following the service —Gym

1—4:30 p.m. SST Adult CPR—MR/YR

2—5 p.m. *Bayou City Band practice—Gym*

THIS WEEK AT HOLY CROSS

14 Mon	15 Tues	16 Wed	17 Thurs	18 Fri	19 Sat
<i>11—12 ELC Chapel –WC</i>	<i>11—12 ELC Chapel –WC</i>	<i>11 am Choir Rehearsal –CL</i> <i>12 pm Bible Study –VR</i>	 <i>8 pm AA Women mtg. —Annex</i>		<i>9—10 am Women's Bible Study –Annex</i> <i>1 —5:30 pm SST Basic Life Support – MR/YR</i> <i>4 pm Fellowship Club –Harris County Smokehouse</i> <i>6 pm Saturday Informal service –AT</i>

AT=Atrium, CL=Choir Loft, CR=Choir Room, ELC=Early Learning Center,
FLC= Family Life Center = **GYM**, FLCA=**Annex**, KiM= Kids in Motion, MR=Media
Room, VR=Volunteer Room, WC=Worship Center, YR=Youth Room,
SST=Safeguards Safety Training (CPR classes)