

Holy Cross Lutheran Church

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

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Houston, TX 77055

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713-686-8254

Rev. Jim Berggren

September 27, 2026

18th Sunday after Pentecost

WORSHIP SERVICE

PRELUDE

WELCOME / ANNOUNCEMENTS

GATHERING SONG

God Is Here!

ELW 526

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: **God of love, giver of life, you know our frailties and failings. Give us your grace to overcome them, keep us from those things that harm us, and guide us in the way of salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

September 27, 2023 – Pentecost 18A

FIRST READING: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

The One Who Sins Will Die

The word of the LORD came to me: ² What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: ‘The parents eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge?’

³ “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. ⁴ For everyone belongs to me, the parent as well as the child—both alike belong to me. The one who sins is the one who will die.

²⁵ “Yet you say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Hear, you Israelites: Is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? ²⁶ If a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin, they will die for it; because of the sin they have committed they will die. ²⁷ But if a wicked person turns away from the wickedness they have committed and does what is just and right, they will save their life. ²⁸ Because they consider all the offenses they have committed and turn away from them, that person will surely live; they will not die. ²⁹ Yet the Israelites say, ‘The way of the Lord is not just.’ Are my ways unjust, people of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust?

³⁰ “Therefore, you Israelites, I will judge each of you according to your own ways, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall.

³¹ Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, people of Israel? ³² For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

The word of the Lord.

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

THE PSALM Psalm 25:1-9

SECOND READING: Philippians 2:1-13

Imitating Christ's Humility

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Do Everything Without Grumbling

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

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 21:23-32

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

²³ Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?” They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.” Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

The Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸ “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

²⁹ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

³¹ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you; the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

The Gospel of the Lord.

Congregational response: Praise to you, O Christ.

CHILDREN’S SERMON

YOUTUBE VIDEO – PR. JIM’S SERMON:



PENTECOST 18A 9-27-26 - MATTHEW 21.23-32

WATCH THE FEET, NOT THE LIPS

Who made you the boss? Since that authority was questioned, it was already self-evident who was the boss. Authority doesn’t need a Public Relations Team. It’s obvious.

In the film parable *BABE; Pig in the City*, the main character, Babe, is a young male pig, who incidentally, through the filming schedule, is actually played by a cast of 48 different female piglets. He and his barnyard friends are staying at a hotel, and they are hungry so they venture

out to find some food. They are attacked by a huge vicious stray dog that chases Babe, trying to kill and eat him. The other animals stand by helplessly and watch.

During the chase, the dog falls into a canal, and tangled up in its collar and chain, begins to drown. The other animals still just watch. It is Babe with his gentle heart that saves the dangerous beast, who was trying to kill him. Babe then talks to the other animals to tell them that if they have food, they should share it. The orangutan demands, “Who says so?” The gravelly voice of the saved dog proclaims, “The pig says so. Listen to the pig!” Who is the authority? Who’s the obvious boss?

A group of elite military leaders were testing a new computer that was able to solve any problem, tactical or strategic. The engineer helping them with the demonstration instructed them to enter the most difficult tactical problem, with the concluding question: Attack or Retreat? The AI super computer hummed busily for a couple of minutes and then printed out its answer----- “YES.”

The generals looked at each other, puzzled, and then one of them sat down at the keyboard and typed: “YES, WHAT?”

Immediately the computer printed out, “YES, SIR!”

The chief priests and the elders in today’s text expected the “Yes, sir,” response, because they were the official authorities! But there was a new rabbi in town for this last Passover celebration in Jesus’ ministry. People loved him. When he was with them, miracles happened: healings, reconciliations, huge wilderness feedings of many people with few resources. The chief priests and elders talked a good game, but Jesus did things. The lips of the chief priests weren’t helping much, but everywhere the feet of Jesus went, Good News happened. Watch the feet, not the lips. Where are your credentials and permissions just to do something nice?

In the Spring of 1991, I thought it might be cool to show up at Memorial Park, at 6:00 AM on Sunday mornings. I found a spot away from the trail, where the joggers were stretching or cooling down. I brought my guitar and a case of water, and just sat around playing hymns and camp songs. Sometimes people would stop for water and talk. After a couple of weeks, the park authorities said I had to leave and get permission to assemble, before I could do this. I checked into that. The permit was going to cost a lot of money. I said “I’ll send a check for the permit for the year. They said, “It’s not an annual license. We can’t do that for a specific religious group. You have to pay for each weekly assembly.” Dude. Joggers don’t carry cash for offerings to support a free service!

The elders and chief priests needed to discredit Jesus as soon as possible to retain their authority. He needed to be exposed as a fraud. A public humiliation in a debate would solidify and elevate their social caste status while destroying Jesus’ status. They are good at this. Subcommittee hearings to discredit. They are great at debate, a Category 5 Tornado of flapping lips, but while they are talking, Jesus is acting to reveal his kingdom on earth, here and now.

So, they ask, “Where is your license to teach and heal and who gave it to you?” Jesus says he will answer that question, right after they answer the relevant question on people’s minds, “Was John’s baptism, God’s idea or John’s idea?” No matter how they answer, they will

have to say that, either they don't like God, or, they don't like his most popular prophet.

They have already lost the debate, because they have to go to committee to talk it over. No matter how they answer, they fear alienating half of their constituency. Technically their status and their credibility are destroyed when their final answer is, "We don't know."

"Rabbi, why do you answer questions with a question?"

The rabbi says, "Why do you want to know that?"

Jesus won the debate and then he uses it as a teaching moment to tell the story of two sons. This is Matthew's version of the Prodigal Son parable. One son refused his father's request for help, but then changed his mind and helped. The other son enthusiastically assented to help the father and then never showed up. Jesus wasn't too subtle about pointing out that the tax collectors and prostitutes who always said NO to God, changed their minds after John's baptism in the Jordan. On the other hand, the chief priests and elders with their "Yay, God," rallies, enjoyed their status and perks of office, but didn't care much about helping people. Watch the feet, not the lips. It is a story about privilege and integrity. There are different ways to say, "NO." There are refusals that later convert to cooperation, community and joy. There are verbalized good intentions that never amount to anything and are just a way to say "NO" slowly and procrastinate *in absentia*.

In our family we laughingly developed a special vocabulary word for the second condition-----"eyezungna". "Eyezungna wash the dishes. Eyezungna check the oil. Eyezungna walk the dogs." The corollary word is, "Budeyedint."

"Sorry, No. I don't have time," is easier to hear than "Eyezungna. Budeyedint." No expectations are somehow easier to handle than betrayed hopes.

It is easy to agree to follow the master and then never fulfill the courageous task of a purposeful, planned spiritual life. It is much more natural to flinch and shy away from such an awesome demand. But whether our reaction is yes or no, the important matter is whether the assignment is ever started. The problem is getting the lips and the feet to match up. God is going to love both children equally anyway! That's His Nature.

Being Christian is an assignment. It is stewardship, taking care of people, places, and things and that assignment always stands in front of us as a duty that will never be discharged fully and completely. It's like climbing Everest without oxygen, like showing up at Wimbledon with a whiffleball racquet. Start with that first "NO" reaction. Give it time. It doesn't have to be the last word. It can convert to a "YES" action.

If it is easier, start slowly. Start with a goal to NOT read the Bible today. Don't do it. And having not read the Bible today, you will have succeeded in setting a goal and completing it. Now the feet and the lips are synchronized. With that performance confidence, tomorrow, it will be easier for you to read one verse or one chapter and succeed at that. Progress. The feet will begin to match the lips. It is better to set a goal to do nothing and succeed at it, than it is to not set a goal. It is the difference between motivation and discouragement.

Following Jesus, we have a big purpose. We are on the Action and Joy Committee of

Matthew 19:26. “With God nothing is impossible.” But it takes big motivation. If it works, start with ‘no’ and then let the ‘yes’ start to work in your life. Sometimes an honest “NO”, even an angry “NO”, sets free the power of grace to manifest. We no longer have to hide behind an embarrassing non-committal, “Maybe.”

As a child actor, McCauley Culkin was quite versatile. In *Home Alone*, he played an ornery child left behind when the family went away for the holidays. Left to his own resources of bad behavior and dirty tricks, he defended his home with slapstick violence and mayhem, toward the unsuspecting home invaders. He wasn’t playing a nice kid! But he turned out to be a loving son in the end.

In the movie, *The Good Son*, Culkin plays a nice kid who has everyone fooled. He manipulates his family by appearing innocent and obedient, while causing horrible things to happen that get blamed on the other son in the family.

Even modern parables illustrate that each one of us has the combination of those two children in us. Each of us can identify with both siblings as manifested in our yes and no reactions in life. God loves both siblings. We live in the divine tension of both accountability and grace. Accountability is to be experienced on those days when we have promised but not acted. Grace is to be experienced on those days when we have come to our senses.

Start with a no if you have to, but then suit up and show up just to be a part of the game. Cal Ripken, Jr., holds the sports history record for playing 2,632 consecutive baseball games. What a record!! That is unbelievable! How many days did he wake up with pain, or exhaustion from a double-header, and thought to himself, “No, I just can’t.....I really don’t have to play today.” And then, he decided to suit up and show up, anyway. They couldn’t keep him out of the lineup.

Life is not easy. The disciples must have said ‘no’ many times. But that handful of people 2000 years ago turned the world upside down. You like civilization? Then say a thank-you prayer for the lives of those first disciples, that started with a ‘no’ and ended with a ‘yes’. They weren’t all brilliant or powerful. Even the status of their rabbi, Jesus was always being tested by those who seemed to really count in the social structure of the day. The disciples weren’t cosmopolitan temple politicians. They were Bubbas from the hill country, tax collectors, and prostitutes. They had all of the good reasons in the world to say ‘no’. Their dedication to Jesus, their appreciation of his grace, changed their lives into ‘YES’.

Before the face of the Father, each of us embodies both brothers of the parable. We face accountability and we receive grace. The Father loves us all. God’s pencil has an eighth inch of lead and 3 feet of eraser. Jesus’ punchline is, “...the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of you.” Everyone has the opportunity of getting into the Kingdom of God. It is just that some, out of their own choice, will be waiting in line a little longer.

Lord God, embolden and strengthen my feet to match my lips. And make holy my lips, to give support and courage to my feet. Amen.

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

"Psalm 150"

J. Clarke

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

Nearer, My God, to Thee

Insert

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
- ♣ Joyce Huey
- ♣ Bryan Kile
- ♣ Ernest Luker
- ♣ Colton Martin
- ♣ David Magrill
- ♣ Stuffy Martinez
- ♣ Jeremy Mitchell
- ♣ Geraine Moore
- ♣ Ed Peterman
- ♣ Dorothy Preuss
- ♣ Lupe Romero
- ♣ Jim Schwabenland
- ♣ Scott Spates
- ♣ Patricia Steapp
- ♣ Gary Sundberg

- ♣ Ann Taylor
- ♣ Bill Tempel
- ♣ Becky Terry
- ♣ Dave Trickett
- ♣ Jaime Urbanski
- ♣ Bennie Valites
- ♣ Susan Wiles
- ♣ Michael Williams

COUNCIL MEETING

Council meeting will be Sunday, **October 18**, 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

TRUNK N TREAT

Saturday, [October 31st](#).

Trunk N Treat is coming to Holy Cross.

We have 6 cars signed up. Sign-up sheet is in Atrium. We need at least 10.

Ask friends and neighbors if they would like to join us. Set up between 4-5.

Costumes are always welcome. BYOC&C! Bring your own car and candy.

If questions, see Julie Richter.

BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

Please join us on Saturday, **October 3rd, 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.**

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.

STEWARDSHIP SUNDAY

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Sunday, October 25th.

Pot luck sponsored by WELCA following the service.

A JOYOUS CELEBRATION!

Russell and Julie Richter

invite the Holy Cross congregation to celebrate with them as they mark
25 years of marriage and Julie's 65th birthday!

Russell and Julie will renew their wedding vows on Saturday, **October 17th**,
at 2:00 p.m. in the main church. Please join us for this joyful occasion as we
celebrate 25 years of love, faith, and life together!

Following the ceremony everyone is invited to continue the celebration with cake
and light refreshments in the FLC.

Please, R.S.V.P. via text message to 713-464-3430, or to Julie in person.

No gifts please!

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
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	Saturday	26-Sep	1:00 pm - 5:30 pm
	RCP + primeros auxilios	\$59			
			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 - available for small children during the service — Crib Room

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

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

THIS WEEK AT HOLY CROSS

[illegible]

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)