

**Lessons for the Ninth Sunday after Pentecost****July 25, 2021**

Psalm 136:1-9 ~ *Praise for God's enduring mercy shown in the creation.*

Genesis 9:8-17 ~ *God gave Noah His rainbow promise that flood waters will not cut us off from His love.*

Ephesians 3:14-21 ~ *St. Paul described the dimensions of Christ's love which encompasses His people.*

Mark 6:45-56 ~ *After private prayer time, Jesus walked across a windy sea to rescue frustrated disciples.*

**GATHERING THE TEXTS:** Signs of God's Love

God's love is so great - "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ!" - that He can only give us signs of its magnitude! To a world population of eight people devastated by flood waters, God gave His sign in the clouds - a rainbow promise to sustain humanity over the centuries whenever we experience disastrous floods. To a small boat load of fishers of men, frustrated by contrary winds and rough seas, God gave the sign of His loving presence as Jesus stepped into the boat and stilled the storm. God fills us with the measure of Christ's fullness so we may be signs of His love in this world where humanity is drowning in suffering and sin.

**PRAYER BEFORE THE SERVICE:** God of hope, You cover dark clouds with the bright colors of the rainbow to promise Your eternal love in our world. As I have come to know Your love in Christ, let me spread the spectrum of Your light among sad and discouraged neighbors, swamped by contrary winds in their lives. Amen.

**STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT:** Jesus' love spills over into our lives like leftovers at an impromptu picnic and quiets our wave tossed lives when we are threatened with overwhelming fears. We are bearers of that love which cannot be understood, but can only be known in His promise and shared in our lives.

**OFFERING PRAYER:** When baskets fill to overflowing with broken bread and fish  
And waves of fear give way to hope and courage now to dare,  
We thank You for Your presence, Lord, surpassing every wish,  
And bring our gifts to honor You in loving lives we share. Amen.

**CONVICTION AND COMFORT:** God has set us as signs of His love to our neighbors, but the dark clouds of our own insecurities and frustrations obscure the bright colors of grace. Instead of trusting and boldly proclaiming the breadth and depth of God's love in Christ, we are often cowering in the shadows, pleading for more signs to strengthen our weak faith. Thanks be to God, Christ has stepped into our lives and rescued us from destruction by His death and resurrection. He calls us to go with Him into the villages and be signs of His rescuing presence for the crowds.

**Questions to Consider:** How does God describe his love?

- Why did God provide the rainbow among the clouds?
- Since God's love surpasses all knowledge, how can we begin to understand it?
- What is it about the loaves that the disciples did not understand?
- When we know God's love in Christ, what does our care for others represent?