

02.09.2025 – Worship Service

Morning Prayer –

This morning I'd like to invite you to turn to number 1040; we'll end our prayer together with this.

Loving God, we thank you for your presence, for your power, for our purpose in our lives. We ask that you would be especially close to Steve and Sandy this week as they return to Phoenix to the Mayo Clinic. Be with the team of doctors and nurses and other medical folks who will consult on Steve's case. Give him and Sandy your Spirit of comfort, of peace and of trust as they go through the first days of travel and testing. Wrap them in your love through their time there – no matter how long or short it may be.

We pray also for Ann Hiebert as her bones continue to heal. Give her your patience and support her with your presence and love.

O God, in this season of flu and other illness, we pray for healing and relief from discomfort for those who are sick. Be with each person and each household who's struggling; grant wholeness and a return to health.

Be with those who are studying, learning, going to school at whatever grade level, God. And be with those who are teaching and supporting them. Help them to have perseverance and give them energy to keep giving their best efforts.

Give us wisdom and yieldedness as we live each day in this world, God. Help us to remember that we belong to you and our citizenship is in YOUR kingdom as we follow Jesus.

Leader: In defiance of corruption and falsehood,

People: We commit to truth and integrity, and we pray for honesty and uprightness to increase in our world.

Leader: In defiance of apathy and hatred,

People: we choose to be proactive in love, and we pray for understanding and peace to increase in our world.

Leader: In defiance of skepticism and cynicism,

People: we embrace the mystery of faith, and we pray for humility and wonder to increase in our world.

Leader: In defiance of self-interest and human arrogance,

People: we celebrate God's salvation, and we pray for compassion and faith to increase in our world.

Leader: In defiance of all that would oppose God's purpose among us,

People: we choose again to follow Christ, and we continue to pray, not just now, but at all times. Amen.

Message -- Gelassenheit

Gelassenheit – have you heard the word before? It's a German word, so you won't find it (directly) in the Bible (at least, not in our English Bibles!), but the idea of it, the concept, is all throughout scripture.

If you google “What does *gelassenheit* mean in English?”, you’ll get this: “Some words don’t translate well into English. *Gelassenheit* is one of them. This German word means ‘to let be’, ‘to allow’, ‘abandonment’ or ‘serenity’. And the more academic meaning of the word is ‘releasement’ – the act of releasing or letting go.”

Google will also answer the question, “What does *gelassenheit* mean in Amish?” The first thing that tells you is that google thinks “Amish” is a language, so... for what it’s worth, this is what it says, “Roughly translated, *gelassenheit* means yielding oneself to a higher authority. The Amish speak of ‘giving themselves up’ to the church. *Gelassenheit* carries many meanings – self-surrender, submission, yielding to the will of God and to others, contentment, and a calm spirit.”

One more. If you google “what does *gelassenheit* mean in the Bible?” it’ll say this: “*Gelassenheit* is a German word that has no simple translation into English but is often described as yieldedness. Having this character trait is essential to having a strong relationship with God and his church.”

Google will also take you to “*gelassenheit* in the Anabaptist tradition” and to GAMEO, the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. That article is much more in line with our conversation this morning, although still somewhat challenging to decipher and describe. It says, “*Gelassenheit*, self-surrender, resignation in God’s will, yieldedness to God’s will, self-abandonment, the (passive) opening to God’s willing, including the readiness to suffer for the sake of God, also peace and calmness of mind, in Dutch devotional literature... (it) suggests about 15 possible translations, none perfectly fitting.” So... you get the idea that this morning we’re wrestling with a concept, a notion, an attitude, one might even say a mystical, meditative state that is not only very hard to describe and define, it’s even more difficult to achieve.

The editors of our denominational curriculum for this 4-Sunday series that commemorates 500 years of Anabaptism thought that this word, “*gelassenheit*” was significant enough to be one of the four topics, so... here we are. I’ve heard it said that sermons really ought to be preached *for* the preacher as much as *by* the preacher. I think there’s wisdom in that and this sermon definitely fills that bill. Yieldedness is a challenge for me – to understand it, yes, but to DO it. Whew! It’s hard. So where’d the Anabaptists come up with this idea? And why was it so important? And is it still so important 500 years later?

You may remember that it was the Radical Reformers who, in the year 1525 in Europe were part of the Great Reformation. Those Radicals were folks who didn’t think the Reformation was going far enough; they didn’t want to re-form the church, they wanted to start over.

They wanted to read and understand the Bible for themselves – WITH the guidance of the Holy Spirit! They wanted themselves and their children to learn the stories of Jesus, the teachings of Jesus and the behaviors of Jesus – and they wanted themselves and their children to come to their own, adult understanding and commitment to Jesus – within the nurture and education of the believing community – again, WITH the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Those early re-baptizers had a fire in their belly. They had “an intense desire to know and to do the will of God – as they understood it through the life and teachings of Jesus.”

And that’s how they coined *gelassenheit*. They read throughout the gospels, examples of Jesus yielding himself, surrendering, submitting, trusting, having fearless confidence, contentment, a calm spirit, serenity, releasement, yieldedness – to God. And they also understood, as they read the gospels and the epistles the importance of having *gelassenheit* with one another – WITH the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Always the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Radical Reformers understood the church, as described by Paul and others, as the body of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 1 and 5, Colossians 1, Romans 12, Hebrews 13 we read that WE are now the hands and feet of Jesus on this earth. WE are to know the stories, the teachings and the behaviors of Jesus – and not just know them, but emulate them. WE, WITH the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are to carry on what Jesus started – bringing the upside-down kingdom of God to earth, as it is in heaven.

The imagery that Jesus used, as told by John, of living on the vine is one of the most clear explanations of *gelassenheit* that the Bible gives us. Willard Swartley writes about it as “mutual indwelling”. Not only are we, as the branches, dependent on Jesus, the vine, but we’re also inextricably connected to one another and all together we’re entirely in the hands and care of God, the gardener, the vinegrower. Neither the vine nor the branches make any unilateral decisions about their own growth or destiny. In fact, all they have to do is grow! But in order to do that they must stay connected. And they have to yield to the wisdom and care of the vinegrower. The vinegrower will prune and trim and tend and dig and fertilize and water the vine and its branches – so that the whole plant will produce good fruit.

Jesus showed us how to be “mutually indwelling”. He spent lots of time keeping himself firmly connected to the source, the vinegrower. All those times when we read about him going off by himself to pray, when his disciples and the crowds were searching for him, when he was in the Temple as a boy and his parents were searching for him... AND he spent lots of time teaching his disciples how to be “mutually indwelling” with one another. They left their homes and their families, they gave up their jobs and their stuff and they had to figure out how to live together. And it was hard. They got pruned a lot.

The Anabaptists read the Bible, the New Testament in particular, and they understood the kind of yieldedness that Jesus was showing and that the early church tried to emulate. They wanted to be faithful to that. In the new Community Anabaptist Bible, there’s a note in the margins of John, chapter 15, verse 14 that says, “All things which Christ has taught and commanded us, he wants us doubtless to obey. If we don’t, woe to us.” Menno Simons.

Five hundred years later, in the midst of a culture that prizes rugged individualism and prioritizes taking care of #1, is *gelassenheit* still a word that can be meaningful and useful for us?

What does it even look like for us in 2025? Could we trust The Holy Spirit – and one another – enough to demonstrate yieldedness?

Maybe the key is found in verses 10 and 11 of John 15. “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

Maybe yieldedness in 2025 is about love – about abiding in love. And that is not an easy thing to do because all around us there’s chaos and hubris and anger. There’s confusion and fear and uncertainty. And in the midst of all that, I don’t want to be yielded! I want to be right! And I want to be in control! And I’m happy to abide in love – when I feel like it, and on my terms.

Clearly, I need some help with this. For most of us, *gelassenheit* is a discipline, an effort. It doesn’t just happen because we think it’s a nice idea. Being yielded is being vulnerable. Not out in the world, but here – with each other. It’s being willing to be real with one another, so that we can see The Holy Spirit moving in and through each other. Of course, if we can see that, we can likely also see the not-so-holy coming through. Do we know each other well enough – do we have strong enough trust and solid enough relationships that we can oh-so-gently call each other back to keeping the commandments together and abiding in God’s love? Man, I hope so! Because we only have one lifetime – just a few decades on this earth – to abide in God’s love and to reflect it back out to the watching world.

This yieldedness that the Anabaptists identified is completely counter-cultural – which is what makes it such good news! When we can yield to one another and to The Holy Spirit, Jesus promises his joy. Not happiness or glee, not good fortune or optimism, but joy. Contentment. Peace. A deep knowing that all’s well with our soul. Huh... sounds a lot like *gelassenheit*.

Benediction – Go into the world, fearless, yielded, resting on the firm foundation of Jesus. Take your strength from him, knowing that he is with you through deep waters and fiery trials. His grace is sufficient and his joy will make you complete. Amen.