

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

2353 Rice Boulevard, Houston, TX 77005-2696 ctk@ctkelc.org ctkelc.org 713-523-2864 Telephone

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

July 26, 2026

Thanksgiving for the Life and Faith of Jill Bailer

I Kings 3:5-12; Psalm 119:129-136; Romans 8: 26-39; Saint Matthew 13: 31-42, 44-52

In nomine Jesu!

Our lives—all human lives—are complicated. Across the centuries, we have looked for ways to order them, make sense of them, and live them faithfully. One way we do that is by creating categories—little boxes meant to stay separate: parent and child, spouse and student, teacher and pastor, ruler and subject; executive, legislative, and judicial powers; church and state; religious life, business life, social life, political life. Those boxes can help us manage complex times, and they can even “keep the peace.” But they also make us uneasy when they begin to touch.

Jesus didn't do that, yet over the centuries Christ's Church, trying to make sense of Christ's complex life, has sometimes done that for him. We divide his life into fifty-two weekly segments so we can teach and preach it. We give Jesus distinct titles—Christ the Healer, Christ the Teacher, Christ the Servant, Christ the King. Even our creeds speak of his conception and birth, his passion, death, and resurrection, and his promise to come again in separate phrases. At times we treat the Babe lying in the manger, the man dying on the cross, and the one coming again as though they were completely different from one another.

Jesus didn't do that. Today's parables show that his whole earthly life—his teaching, healing, feeding, suffering, dying, rising, and promised return — has one unifying principle. We call it grace: the totally inclusive, totally committed, absolutely dependable love of God. If grace is what Jesus is about, then the chief actor in these parables is *God*, not us; and the kingdom of heaven is about what God does, not about what we do. If you buy that—and I hope you do—then the sower, the baker, the investor, the buyer, and the fisher—the risk-taker who makes all the sacrifices—is God.

And we, like the birds, the bread, the pearl, and the fish, are the beneficiaries. By the way, the next time you wonder about your worth, remember: you are “the pearl of great price.”

You see, everything about Jesus, everything Jesus is about, flows from grace and is moved by grace. From cradle to grave, in teaching and healing, Jesus made God’s self-giving love central to all he said and did and taught and prayed and lived and died and rose.

We tend to organize our complicated lives in this complex world by creating separate categories—little identity boxes—and doing all we can to keep each box apart from the others.

Jesus didn’t do that. And neither did Jill.

Jill lived a complicated life! Read her biography at the back of today’s bulletin, and you will see her many vocations: daughter, sister, student, teacher, professor, administrator, scientist, curriculum creator, colleague, friend, mentor, docent, church leader, sew-er, usher, welcoming presence, home sharer—the list goes on and on and on. It is no wonder her sudden and unexpected death has left so many of us grieving deeply.

Through her many vocations, Jill touched so many of us. Each of us knew her through different boxes, different parts of life, different gifts she shared. Yet one reality shined through them all: her absolute, unshakable trust, her sure and certain confidence in the totally inclusive, totally committed, absolutely dependable love of God. That trust shone through everything Jill was and everything Jill did.

She was beloved of us all because her whole life and being were shaped by the promise that “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” That made her lovely to us; and that made us lovable to her.

Though she left us suddenly and much too early, Jill left us two indivisible gifts, showing us how to live our own complicated lives in our increasingly complex world.

The first is this: trust God's grace. Let God's grace infuse all of life's vocations. Let God's grace illumine and enlighten us as it illumined and enlightened her, drawing us not only into the brightness of her life, but into the brilliance of the light of Christ.

The second is this: know where God replenishes us with grace. In the Meal, God takes hold of us and says, "This is my body, this is my blood," given and shed for you. There God transforms us and the world, hiding Godself, losing Godself, and finding Godself alive and well and working in us, as God worked in Jill, for the sake of the world.

Thank you, O God, for Jill. And thank you, Jill, for helping us see our lives held together by the fullness of God's totally inclusive, totally committed, absolutely dependable love.

Amandus J. Derr
Interim Senior Pastor