



Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost August 30, 2020

Introduction

When Peter doesn't grasp Jesus' words about suffering, Jesus tells the disciples they will find their lives in losing them. Such sacrificial love is described by Paul when he urges us to associate with the lowly and not repay evil with evil. In faith, hope, and love, we offer ourselves for the sake of our suffering world.

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity one God, Father, ☩ Son, and Holy Spirit,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. **Amen.**

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,

**we confess that we do not trust your abundance,
and we deny your presence in our lives.**

We place our hope in ourselves and rely on our own efforts.

We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.

We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.

We fear difference and do not welcome others as you have welcomed us.

We sin in thought, word, and deed.

By your grace, forgive us; through your love, renew us;

and in your Spirit, lead us;

so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen.

Beloved of God,

by the radical abundance of divine mercy

we have peace with God through ☩ Christ Jesus,

through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.

Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope.

For hope does not disappoint,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Gathering Hymn

Day by Day

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

O God, we thank you for your Son, who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world. Humble us by his example, point us to the path of obedience, and give us strength to follow your commands, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Psalmody: Psalm 26:1-8

¹Give judgment for me, O LORD, for I have lived with integrity;
I have trusted in the LORD and have not faltered.

²**Test me, O LORD, and try me;
examine my heart and my mind.**

³For your steadfast love is before my eyes;
I have walked faithfully with you.

⁴**I have not sat with the worthless,
nor do I consort with the deceitful.**

⁵I have hated the company of evildoers;
I will not sit down with the wicked.

⁶**I will wash my hands in innocence, O LORD,
that I may go in procession round your altar,**

⁷singing aloud a song of thanksgiving
and recounting all your wonderful deeds.

⁸**LORD, I love the house in which you dwell
and the place where your glory abides.**

Second Reading: Romans 12:9-21

Paul presents benchmarks for faithful relationships with Christians and non-Christians. Love is the unflagging standard of our behavior. When we encounter evil, we do not resort to its tactics but seek to overcome it with good. While Christians cannot control the actions and attitudes of others, we seek to live at peace with all people.

Read the text [here](#).

Gospel: Matthew 16:21-28

After Peter confesses that Jesus is “the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (16:16), Jesus reveals the ultimate purpose of his ministry. These words prove hard to accept, even for a disciple whom Jesus has called a “rock.”

Read the text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

More than a few years ago, when I was in high school, I had several posters up around my room. The one that was taped to my closet door, which I saw every time I reached into the closet for clothes or shoes, was a beautiful beach scene with a golden sunset and words that I loved to read.

I suppose I thought that they were new then, but now I know that they were written in the early 1920's by the Midwestern lawyer and poet, Max Ehrmann. You might recognize the name of the text: *Desiderata*, which is Latin for "things desired."

It begins with these words that you may remember: "*Go placidly amid the noise and the haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence. As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons...*"

After many calm words of advice about living well, it concludes: "*in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world. Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.*"

Every time I read this passage of Paul's letter to the early Christians in Rome, I am reminded of *Desiderata*. Ehrmann's most famous text is truly filled with desirable things. Positive, uplifting ideas about how to live our lives peacefully.

While its author may have been a man of faith, his desired things are far more ethical than faithful. In contrast, St. Paul's writing reflects his deep, life-changing faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Biblical scholars tell us that Paul was likely re-interpreting Jesus' words from a portion of the Sermon on the Mount when he wrote this passage.

The Sermon on the Mount is a long passage filled with the Beatitudes and familiar but often challenging words from Jesus like: "*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven*" (Matthew 5:12) and "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*" (Matthew 5:44).

Paul wrote an even longer letter to the new Christians living in Rome, struggling in the difficulties of their time, against oppression from both the Jews and the Romans. He takes some of the most familiar teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and reframes them to help shape the faith of those new believers.

Paul starts with love as the primary action. He reminds all of us that the single most important thing we can do is to love. Love God and one another. And then, let all our words and all our actions flow from that love.

As much as I appreciated *Desiderata* – and still do – there are few things more desirable than the ones Paul mentions in this passage: genuine love, affection, and honor. Zeal, service, hope, patience, and prayer. Generosity and hospitality. Blessings and joy. Harmony and peace.

Those are the things we seek in faith – to receive from God, to do ourselves, and to experience in community with others. Those are the things which will bring true, lasting, Christian community, even in the most difficult and divisive times. Times like those we are living in now, with polarizing politics, devastating disasters, and dreadful disease.

There have surely been many times when the world has needed to experience God's love and the love of God's faithful people, but I suspect none of us has ever experienced a time in our lives when that love has been more urgently needed. When our patience and hope have been more sorely tested or more welcomed by others who are tested to the limit, too. When our generosity and hospitality are more needed by those who are unemployed or underemployed, who are sick or suffering, who are exhausted and yet unable to sleep, who are troubled and uncertain where to turn for help.

Now is the most important time in our lives for us to reach out to one another in love – not because we are better than others, or because we will earn a reward from God, but simply because God loved us first. So much so that God's only Son came to earth to live among us, telling us about the Father's love with his own words and showing us the Father's love through his own actions. All the way to moment he willingly gave his own life for us on the cross; and even beyond that as he was raised from the dead into new life to show us the promise of new life.

We have heard important words of faithful advice from 2000 years ago and from a century ago. I would like to close today with wise and faithful words of encouragement that I read just this week. These were written during this difficult year by Rachel Marie Martin, and echo those familiar words from Max Ehrmann, from St. Paul, and from Jesus:

DON'T GIVE UP ON THIS YEAR.
KEEP FIGHTING FOR THE GOOD.
KEEP SHOWING UP.
KEEP LOVING.
KEEP GIVING BACK.
KEEP BEING KIND.
KEEP BEING BRAVE.
KEEP CARING.
KEEP TRYING NEW THINGS.
KEEP SHOWING GRACE.
KEEP ON.
THIS WORLD NEEDS YOU TO BELIEVE IN THE GOOD.

More than ever, we need remember that because we are loved by God, we can keep on trusting, keep on loving, keep on giving and caring, keep on hoping, and keep on living in faith. Amen.

Hymn of the Day

Blest Be the Tie that Binds

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Apostles' Creed

We profess our faith with the whole church in all times and places:

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 again 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. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

God of faithfulness, you call your people to follow Jesus. Set the mind of your church on divine things. Let us trust in you, that we lose our lives for the sake of Christ and thereby discover joy in life through him. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of wonder, the earth is yours and all that is in it. Please heal your creation and give us eyes to see the world as you do. As the seasons change, pattern the rhythm of our lives in harmony with your creation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of all nations, you call us to live peacefully with all. Give us ears to hear one another, even those we consider enemies. Please fill all leaders with mercy and understanding, that they advocate and care for those who are poor and the most vulnerable in our communities. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of salvation, give of us all who suffer a strong and wonderful sense of your presence and love. We ask that you accompany those who are uncertain, raise the spirits of those who are troubled, and heal the sick especially those we name now. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of community, you call us to rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, and to stay strong in prayer. With guidance of the Holy Spirit, make our congregation a workshop of your love. When we argue, bring reconciliation. Guide us to overcome evil with good. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

God of love, look with mercy on those who were harmed or displaced by the flood waters and wind of Hurricane Laura. Give them your strength to meet the days ahead; your peace, which surpasses all understanding; and renewed hope for restoration and rebuilding. Move in those who are able to give aid, that we may be your hands and heart on earth. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of all grace, you have given us everlasting life. With love, we recall all of your holy ones who now live with you in your undying light. In our remembrance, give us a foretaste of the feast to come. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you, O God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Lord, remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray:

**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.

Closing Hymn

Jesus, Still Lead On

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Worship adapted from sundaysandseasons.com. Copyright © 2020 Augsburg Fortress. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission under Augsburg Fortress Liturgies Annual License #SAS027356.

Today's reflection was written by Pastor Ruth Ann Sipe.