



## Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 20, 2020

### Introduction

*Jesus' parable about two sons who don't do what they say reveals surprises in the reign of God. Paul urges us to look to Christ as a model of humility, putting the interests of others above our own. Strengthened by God, we offer our lives for the sake of our needy 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

*Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service*

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

## Prayer of the Day

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.**

## Psalmody: Psalm 25:1-9

<sup>1</sup>To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

<sup>2</sup>**My God, I put my trust in you; let me not be put to shame,  
nor let my enemies triumph over me.**

<sup>3</sup>Let none who look to you be put to shame;  
rather let those be put to shame who are treacherous.

<sup>4</sup>**Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths.**

<sup>5</sup>Lead me in your truth and teach me,  
for you are the God of my salvation;  
in you have I trusted all the day long.

<sup>6</sup>**Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love,  
for they are from everlasting.**

<sup>7</sup>Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions;  
remember me according to your steadfast love  
and for the sake of your goodness, O LORD.

<sup>8</sup>**You are gracious and upright, O LORD;  
therefore you teach sinners in your way.**

<sup>9</sup>You lead the lowly in justice and teach the lowly your way.

## Second Reading: Philippians 2:1-13

*As part of a call for harmony rather than self-seeking, Paul uses a very early Christian hymn that extols the selflessness of Christ in his obedient death on the cross. Christ's selfless perspective is to be the essential perspective we share as the foundation for Christian accord.*

*Read the text [here](#).*

## Gospel: Matthew 21:23-32

*After driving the moneychangers out of the temple (21:12), Jesus begins teaching there. His authority is questioned by the religious leaders, who are supposed to be in charge of the temple.*

*Read the text [here](#).*

## Reflection on the Text

Most of us have a favorite verse of scripture. One of mine appears several times in the Old Testament from Chronicles and Psalms to Joel and Jonah: *God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abiding in steadfast love.* Every time I read it or repeat it to myself, I feel the comfort of God's grace, mercy, and love. (Psalm 145:8)

Paul must have had some favorite verses or passages, too! His letters to the early Christian churches are peppered with quotes from the Hebrew scriptures – what we would call the Old Testament - which he likely had memorized. (And yes, I mean to say that he likely had the entire Old Testament memorized – a feat we can barely imagine!)

Last week in our lesson from Romans, we read: *“For it is written, ‘As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God.’ “* (14:11)

Paul was quoting from the prophet Isaiah, where God speaks these words: *“To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.”* (45:23) Turns out that God spoke those words at a very difficult time in the lives of the people of Israel – telling even the Persian King Cyrus the Great that everyone would bow to God rather than to human kings.

This week, we read a passage from Paul's letter to the church at Philippi. It is a letter filled with encouragement for people he knew well and loved deeply, but had not seen in some time. For that reason alone, it seems like the perfect text for this pandemic time when we have been separated so much of the time for so long.

His letter is a reminder to Paul's beloved church members to hold onto their faith in Christ Jesus in the face of difficulty. To love one another and to strive for unity in faith, rather than allow their Christian community to be torn apart by any differences. Working together would give Paul joy, and would certainly please God, too.

Paul reminds them that their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord is what is central, and they should let go of their individual concerns to focus on unity for the good of the church. To be of one mind in faith, and remain as focused as Jesus Christ had been when he left behind the glory of heaven to become human; and to live and die in complete obedience to the Father so that he could show us the enormity of God's love.

Paul continued by writing – or possibly borrowing from an earlier writer – a song of praise. When I read this I wonder what tune they would have sung and what instruments they would have used to accompany it – perhaps it would have been a very simple chant with a stringed harp or lyre, or a flute made of reeds.

Paul reminds us that God the Father exalted Jesus Christ. And so we should bow, not just to God the Father, but also to his Son. I think that is why this quote is a bit different than the verse from Isaiah or even from Romans.

This is a hymn of praise to Jesus Christ, a reminder that he is truly God along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, who Paul mentions as God at work in us, giving us the ability and desire to please God. We don't kneel very much anymore, but this text calls us to kneel in adoration at the very name of Jesus and proclaim through our words and our actions that he is Lord!

Let me close today with the words that Paul actually used as the beginning of his letter to the Philippians, which I know are as true for Pastor Ray and Vicar Mike as they are for me:

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy  
in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the  
gospel from the first day until now. (Philippians 1:2-5)*

Please know that you are indeed held in prayer - even when we don't see you or talk with you as often as we would like. That we rejoice in all that you do to share the good news of Jesus Christ with others – especially in these difficult times – and that we thank God every time we remember you. Amen.

## **Hymn of the Day**

## ***All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name***

*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

Drawn together in the compassion of God, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

*A brief silence.*

God, please give your church unity all over the world. Inspire all the baptized with the mind of Christ. Where the church is powerful and where it struggles, shape us with humility and obedience so that your love may be reflected in us to the world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Your Son took on all of life in our world, even to death. Please preserve and keep your creation, O God. Mend and redeem places that are polluted and damaged, so that all of creation confesses you as Lord. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Turn the nations toward life. Where our ways are unfair, give us new hearts, minds and spirits. Where sin permeates our cultures and institutions, correct us and teach us to trust your authority. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Our lives are yours, O God. Relieve the suffering of those who are ill in body, mind, or spirit. Defend the lives and welfare of your children who are abused or neglected, hungry or exploited, bullied or lonely, especially *those we name now*. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Please guide us away from our own interests and toward the interests of others. Fill us with your compassion and sympathy. Bless ministries of care in our community; make us into signs of your mercy and justice for our neighbors. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Thank you for those who have gone into the kingdom ahead of us—tax collectors and prostitutes, likely and unlikely, obedient and slow to learn. By their witness, teach us to confess Jesus Christ as Lord in life and in death. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your mercy; through 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**

*Oh Master, Let Me Walk with You*

*Listen and sing along [here](#).*

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