



Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost September 26, 2021

Introduction

Someone who isn't part of Jesus' own circle is casting out demons in Jesus' name, and the disciples want him stopped. They appeal to Jesus, as Joshua did to Moses about the elders who prophesied without official authorization. Like Moses, Jesus refuses to see this as a threat. Jesus welcomes good being done in his name, even when it is not under his control. The circle we form around Jesus' word must be able to value good being done in ways we wouldn't do it, by people we can't keep tabs on.

Confession and Forgiveness

In the name of the Father, and of the ✚ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

God of all mercy and consolation, come to the help of your people, turning us from our sin to live for you alone.

Give us the power of your Holy Spirit that we may confess our sin, receive your forgiveness, and grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sins in the presence of God and one another.

Most merciful God,

we confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves.

**We have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done and by what we have left undone.**

**We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.**

For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.

**Forgive us, renew us, and lead us,
so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.**

God, who is rich in mercy, loved us even when we were dead in sin, and made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved.

In the name of ✚ Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.

Almighty God strengthen you with power through the Holy Spirit, that Christ may live in your hearts through faith. **Amen**

Opening Hymn ELW # 835
LBW # 527

*All Creatures, Worship God Most High!
All Creatures of Our God and King*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

Prayer of the Day

Generous God, your Son gave his life that we might come to peace with you. Give us a share of your Spirit, and in all we do empower us to bear the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

What constitutes legitimate need and legitimate leadership is the focus of this reading. God provides manna in the wilderness, yet the people crave meat. What is truly needful? God bestows the spirit on seventy elders, yet two men not designated as leaders prophesy in the power of God's spirit. What constitutes real leadership?

Read the complete text [here](#).

Psalm: Psalm 19:7-14

⁷The teaching of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure and gives wisdom to the simple.

⁸**The statutes of the LORD are just and rejoice the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear and gives light to the eyes.**

⁹The fear of the LORD is clean and endures forever;
the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

¹⁰**More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.**

¹¹By them also is your servant enlightened, and in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²**Who can detect one's own offenses? Cleanse me from my secret faults.**

¹³Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins;
let them not get dominion over me;
then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.

¹⁴**Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable
in your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.**

Second Reading: James 5:13-20

Marks of the Christian community include praying for those who are sick and in need, celebrating with those in good health, restoring those who have strayed, confessing sins to one another, and offering forgiveness to each other.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Gospel: Mark 9:38-50

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus teaches his disciples about ministry that involves service and sacrifice. His disciples are slow to realize that these words apply to them as well as to others.

Read the complete text [here](#).

Reflection on the Text

I started a conversation – perhaps more of an uproar – recently with a Facebook post about getting in trouble for using your mother’s sewing scissors to cut cardboard. That might not have been a problem in your house, but it certainly would have been in mine! If I had seen one of my brothers doing that, I would have tried to stop them. I would have been very surprised if my mother told me to let them go ahead.

Have you ever been certain that someone else was acting inappropriately and tried to stop them; only to be told by someone in authority to stop stopping them? Can you remember how surprised you felt? Maybe your feelings were even hurt.

Today’s gospel text follows immediately after the passage from last week. Remember that we heard Jesus foretell his suffering and death for the second time; while the disciples argued among themselves about who was the greatest. Then Jesus silenced them all by asking what they had been arguing about, and he told them the one who wanted to be first must be last – the servant of all; welcoming the least in his name.

In response, the Apostle John tells Jesus that they saw someone casting out demons in his name, and they tried to stop him, because ‘he wasn’t one of us!’ After all, if there was ever a contest to decide on the best Jesus-follower, it certainly could not be someone that was not one of the twelve disciples, could it? How could this stranger be using Jesus’ name – and apparently succeeding – when they are sure Jesus did not send him out to do that ministry. Jesus must have surprised the twelve when he told them to stop trying to stop that other person, because anyone doing something good in his name could not be against him.

If you paid attention to the first lesson from Numbers, you will see many similarities between the situation that Moses experienced with Eldad and Medad prophesying in the camp and this situation with Jesus and the unnamed and unauthorized exorcist.

Reading this passage reminds me that we must bring heartache to Jesus if we belittle or try to stop the ministry that our brothers and sisters in Christ do in other congregations or denominations.

I also believe that we must bring joy to Jesus when we learn how to work cooperatively with other Christians, especially for the sake of others who need the ‘drink of water’ or other service that we can provide.

Next Jesus returns to the subject of the children, or little ones, as he launches into a list of dire warnings that we struggle to understand. I imagine that the disciples struggled with these too. Honestly, the next several verses are worthy of an in-depth hour-long bible study filled with questions and answers, rather than a brief sermon.

It may help to remember that earlier in the gospel of Mark, he wrote that Jesus taught many things in parables (Mark 4:2). If we understand these verses as a series of pithy parables, they are not nearly as troubling as if we try to read these verses as literal truth.

Then we can imagine the effect of throwing a millstone into the sea, without fearing having that stone tied around our own neck for our actions. We can consider the struggles of life without a whole, healthy body without planning to do ourselves harm because of our sins. And we can let go of the need to understand the phrase ‘salted with fire’ which has baffled biblical scholars for centuries. Instead, we can reflect on what we know from history and our own experience about both salt and fire.

Salt has been used for thousands of years as a way of preserving food, especially fish and meat. We still use it as a flavor enhancer in everything from bakery items to potato chips, and meats to vegetables – yet we know that too much salt is not good for our health.

Fire is much the same, right? It can be useful for light and warmth. We even use it in our church sanctuaries to light our candles as a reminder of God’s light and love. Yet fire, unchecked, is dangerous; even deadly. The reference to fire in this text is mostly likely not to heat or light or an out- of-control blaze, but the fire used to refine and shape precious metals.

It is powerful to think of ourselves as God’s beloved children; precious little ones who will be both preserved and refined. Perhaps it could help us to think of this pandemic time as both a time when God wants us to be kept safe (and to work to keep others safe) and a time when we are experiencing a process of refinement.

Not only are we being changed as individuals, but our businesses, congregations, and communities are also being refined and changed as well, as we adapt to the evolving conditions around us. We have not been abandoned by God, nor would I say that God has caused this as a time of trial, yet I know that we are being changed as we live through this time.

As individuals, we have an opportunity to make choices about how we live in faith and in community with others. And congregations, as communities of faith, have a profound opportunity to change the way we work with others to shape and serve the communities around us.

I love the way that Eugene Peterson paraphrased these last two verses in **The Message**: “Everyone’s going through a refining fire sooner or later, but you’ll be well-preserved, protected from the eternal flames. Be preservatives yourselves. Preserve the peace.”

How can we be preservatives of those things that are central to our faith and helpful to others in an ever-changing time? How can we work to preserve the peace of the Lord in our lives and the lives of others around us when everything seems so tumultuous?

These verses are not threats of punishment for our behavior, but invitations to seize this opportunity to become part of God's work in the world in a new way. May we all be ready to step up and joyfully join in this holy work, as we serve our neighbors and help our congregations and communities live in love and peace during this difficult time and into the future that God wills for all of us. Amen.

Hymn of the Day ELW # 806/LBW #504

O God, My Faithful God

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 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

Made children and heirs of God's promise, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

We pray for the church and its ministry. Bless the newly baptized and encourage them in their journey of faith. Sustain all members of the body of Christ in lives of prayer, service, and worship. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for natural wonders of your creation. Restore damaged forests, waterways and natural habitats and lead us to be good stewards of what you have provided. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those in authority. Give them wise minds and compassionate hearts. Strengthen in them a desire to protect the vulnerable and care for those underserved. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are struggling with cancer, dementia, or any other disease. Provide them with peace and resilience for the days ahead. Sustain caregivers with energy and patience. We pray especially for those we name now. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We give thanks for all your saints, those we have loved and known and those from every time and place. Continue to guide us by their example and reassure us of your promised salvation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those in our hearts known only to you; 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 ELW # 769/LBW # 453 *If You but Trust in God to Guide You*

Listen and sing along [here](#).

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