

Home Service for September 27, 2020

Welcome and Announcements

Although we cannot meet together in the church building we can share worship together in our individual homes. We will continue to work to stay connected and be there for each other during the difficult time. We are going through something never experience before. I hope this will help you worship God today with those who are in your home. Add hymns if possible, too.

Gathering Prayer:

As we sing our praise to you, O Lord, we remember the multitude of blessings you have given us. We are mindful of the ways in which you have lifted us when we have fallen low. Be with us this day as we gather to hear your word for our lives. AMEN.

Listen to parables and dark sayings of old. Ponder the stories of Jesus and God's mighty deeds of power.

Opening Prayer:

Holy Mystery, the stories of our ancestors touch us as dark sayings of old. Help us behold truths in their stories, we are frightened to see in our own. Open our eyes to see your presence amidst their hopes and fears. Open our hearts to the courage it takes to assume leadership in our communities, while remaining your faithful follower. Open our minds to perceive hope in the midst of despair. We believe, Great Spirit. Help our unbelief. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

God of patience, your people grow weary. We complain and question. We put you to the test. Our mouths say yes, but our deeds say no. When we wander off your path, when we fail to follow through on our good intentions, when we give our attention to trivial things; gently call us back to you. Empty our hearts of anger and pride. Empty our souls of greed and selfishness. Empty our minds of envy, doubt, and mistrust. As you poured out your very self through your beloved Son, pour your Spirit into our hearts today. Forgive us our wrongdoing. Reclaim us with your love. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Friends in Christ, our God is patient, steadfast, and understanding. Christ hears our cries of repentance. The Lord knows our hearts, inside and out. The One who created us promises to care for us, even when we turn away. Hear these words of forgiveness. Be strengthened to walk as disciples. Trust in God's mercy. Amen.

Read Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16

My people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth.
² I will open my mouth with a parable;
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—
³ things we have heard and known,
things our ancestors have told us.
⁴ We will not hide them from their descendants;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
He did miracles in the sight of their ancestors
in the land of Egypt, in the region of Zoan.
¹³ He divided the sea and led them through;
he made the water stand up like a wall.
¹⁴ He guided them with the cloud by day
and with light from the fire all night.
¹⁵ He split the rocks in the wilderness
and gave them water as abundant as the seas;
¹⁶ he brought streams out of a rocky crag
and made water flow down like rivers.

Prayers of the People:

God of grace and mercy, whether we are lifelong laborers, or new arrivals in your vineyard, we know you value us just as we are. Hear now the prayers of thanks and concern that we now speak aloud or raise silently from our hearts.
(Your personal petitions may be offered.) God of the last, God of the first, God of all those in between, hear these concerns as we seek your presence in our lives and in a world in need. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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

Read the Lesson: Exodus 17:1-7

The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"

³ But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

⁴ Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

⁵ The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the place Massah^[a] and Meribah^[b] because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Read the Epistle Lesson: Philippians 2:1-13

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;
⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!
⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.
¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my
presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation
with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order
to fulfill his good purpose.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 21: 23-32

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸ “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

²⁹ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

³¹ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Message

In our Old Testament Lesson, we heard that the Israelites in the desert are thirsty. They are standing around Moses and they are demanding water. They complained incessantly, this time about water.

They had been slaves in Egypt, now they were free; God had performed many miracles for them from the parting of the Red Sea to feeding them with Quail and Manna, still they complained. This was not Moses’ first, nor his last moment of frustration, so he did a little complaining of his own to God: “What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.” The people were testing the Lord saying: “Is the Lord among us or not?” Their answer comes from a hopeless barren rock.

For out of this hopeless barren rock God produces what the people need in order to live—cool, refreshing, life-saving water! Out of a simple rock comes life, comes the proof that the Lord is, indeed, among His people. God was able to bring water from a rock, and thereby, bring life out of death.

Christ’s body was entombed in a cave behind a great rock. Do you remember in Mark’s Gospel, on the Day of the Resurrection of Jesus the two Marys were on their way to the tomb in order to anoint Jesus’ body when they asked each other: “Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?” “But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.” Jesus was no longer in the tomb. Out from behind the huge rock, God had brought forth life; the Life which is necessary for the salvation of us all! Some have said that the threshold of the Christian faith is at that point where the thirsty soul stands squarely in front of the hopeless barren rock, the seemingly impossible, and finds that, through Christ, there is no such thing in life as an impossible situation.

When we look at today’s Gospel lesson, we see the same is true there. Jesus, speaking to the chief priests and elders of the people, says directly: “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.” Can you imagine tax collectors and prostitutes entering the kingdom of God before the religious leaders? Think about it. Weren’t the tax collectors and prostitutes a lot like hopeless, barren rocks? Tax collectors and prostitutes were two very despised groups of people in Jesus’ day. Tax collectors were hated agents

of an oppressive foreign government, who were amassing private fortunes at the people's expense. They were considered to be so untrustworthy that they weren't even allowed to testify in a court of law. And prostitutes were the prime example of immorality. The religious authorities, especially, looked down on these groups and ostracized them from the community.

Who would ever expect any life to spring forth in them? Yet Jesus said, because of their faith, they were entering God's Kingdom ahead of the 'respectable' religious leaders who condemned them.

I can see a connection between Moses striking the hopeless barren rock and God bringing forth the lifesaving water, and people such as tax collectors and prostitutes being struck by the Spirit of God, then believing and repenting, and thus being made new?

God commanded Moses to strike the rock, Moses obeyed and the water came. In the Gospel God is commanding us to strike the lost with the Gospel of Christ, and if we obey, God will bring forth new life in the form of salvation! We will see God perform miracles right before our eyes, miracles we never could have dreamed of.

It is easy to look about our world and see the hopelessness of it all: war, drugs, poverty, racism, immorality, apathy and the list continues. If God can bring forth water from a rock, than there certainly is no such thing in life as an impossible situation! There is no such thing as a person who is beyond the reach of God's saving grace, no matter who they are, no matter where they are on life's highway!

The world may see no hope for the ostracized, the outcaste, the marginalized, the delinquent, but Jesus says otherwise. And as the Church of Jesus, we also should say otherwise. One of the most fantastic things about the Church, if it is functioning as it should, is that no matter one's social status on the outside, in the world, when persons walk through these doors we are all the same, sinners in need of a Savior!

The religious leaders, the prostitutes, the tax collectors in Jesus' day were all in the same boat. They were all a bunch of sinners in need of a Savior. The problem was that one group knew the condition they were in, and therefore were eager for help, while the other group, thought that they were just fine the way they were, and saw no need to repent and believe! Are we more like the chief priests and elders of Jesus' day, or are we more like the prostitutes and tax collectors? We should not purposefully be sinful for we seem to be able to do that with little effort already. I'm saying is that we must realize our sinful situations, repent and believe the Gospel in order to be transformed from being hopeless barren rocks so that we can become hope-filled water gushing fountains!

Jesus is the one who can come into our lives, He is the one who can help us to repent, to turn away from our sins, turn to Jesus for forgiveness. Turn to Jesus for the confidence to live life. Jesus is showing us that sinners who know they are sinners, who know they need forgiveness, sinners who have felt the guilty conscience, those who confess and turn away from their sin, they will be good workers in the kingdom of God. They are the ones who know they need Jesus and respond to him. They are the ones who live in Christ, we feel Christ's love, we feel His forgiveness, we feel the freeing power of the love of God through his son. The person of repentance who surrenders all to Jesus, the person of repentance who acknowledges their dependence on Jesus, the person of repentance who knows that without Jesus all is lost, that person, Jesus says, is the one who will be in kingdom of God. That is the person who becomes the hope-filled fountain of water all are searching for.

We live in a thirsty world. People are standing around, demanding water. God provided water from a rock in the desert for the Israelites. And through Christ, our Rock, God has provided living water and salvation for all who will believe! Are we willing to share this living water with our thirsty world?

Let us pray: Gracious and giving God, quench our spiritual thirst. Fill our hearts with the knowledge that you are always present as we wander through the wilderness of life. Help us to share this belief readily with all those who thirst. In Jesus' name and for His sake we pray. Amen.

Benediction:

Go to share encouragement in Christ.

Go to offer consolation in love.

Go to spread the gifts of the Spirit.

Go to make God's joy complete.

Do these things and you will truly live. Amen.