

## Home Service for September 11, 2022

### Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

*Return to God, no matter how long you've been away. Come home, no matter how far you've wandered. But if you don't return on your own, don't be surprised if God comes and finds you anyway. That's what we call grace.*

### Call to Worship:

God calls to the lost, the least, and all who long for home; God calls when we wander from the path chosen for us and waste the gifts we have been given. God calls and welcomes us back to worship this day; let us celebrate and rejoice in God's presence forever; let us worship God together. Amen.

### Opening Prayer:

God of abundant grace, may your Holy Spirit be with us now as we worship you this day. Open our eyes to truly see one another, that we might discover your presence in the smile of a neighbor. Open our ears to the needs of the world, that we might hear your wisdom in the words spoken around us. And open our hearts to your grace and love, that we might find guidance and strength for the journey, for ourselves and for one another. Amen.

### Prayer of Confession:

Gracious and loving God, we find it difficult at times to place our trust in you. Too often we look at the world, and see only violence, pain, destruction, and signs of hopelessness and despair. Too often we rely on our own strength, our own plans, our own devices, rather than trusting in your hand to hold us, your love to sustain us, and your wisdom to see us through. Forgive us, Holy One. Help us turn to you when we are lost, that we might find our way home. Help us navigate the treacherous waters of this world, that we might experience your abundant grace, mercy, and love. Help us put our trust in you, that the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus may shine in our lives for all to see. Amen.

## Words of Assurance

*Jesus said, “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”  
My friends, experience God’s forgiveness and joy—  
gifts that leads to new life!*

## Read Psalm 14

The fool<sup>[a]</sup> says in his heart,

“There is no God.”

They are corrupt, their deeds are vile;  
there is no one who does good.

<sup>2</sup>The LORD looks down from heaven  
on all mankind

to see if there are any who understand,  
any who seek God.

<sup>3</sup>All have turned away, all have become corrupt;  
there is no one who does good,  
not even one.

<sup>4</sup>Do all these evildoers know nothing?

They devour my people as though eating bread;  
they never call on the LORD.

<sup>5</sup>But there they are, overwhelmed with dread,  
for God is present in the company of the righteous.

<sup>6</sup>You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor,  
but the LORD is their refuge.

<sup>7</sup>Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion!  
When the LORD restores his people,  
let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!

## Prayers of the People:

*Good and gracious God, you told us from the very beginning that we would earn our bread by the sweat of our brow. We are interdependent in our laboring, Lord. We depend on the migrant workers who pick our lettuce and our strawberries, the nurses’ aides who empty bed pans, the teachers who form our children’s minds.*

*We thank you, Lord, for the gifts and talents you have given us that allow us to earn a living and contribute something positive to our world. We pray, dear Lord, for those who are without work. Sustain them — us — in your love. Help us to realize that we have worth as human beings, job or no job.*

*But that's hard to get, Lord. Our society preaches to us that our worth comes from success. But our worth comes because you made us. We are your children, no matter what, job or no job. You love us and you call us to love and support each other. We pray for those who do the dirty work in our lives, those who break their backs for us, those who are cheated out of even a minimum wage, those who do not have to health care, those who cannot afford to send their kids to college.*

*Help us to bind together, Lord, as a community, as a nation because we depend on one another — the garbage collectors, the police, the stock people in our grocery stores, the truck drivers, the pilots, the 7-Eleven clerks, the ticket-takers on the turnpike, the plumbers, the accountants, the bank tellers, the landscapers, the lifeguards, those who clean our houses, the cooks, the waiters, the steel workers, the carpenters, the scientists and the writers.*

*Help us to realize this weekend how dependent we are on one another, Lord. We are one. We are family. We need each other. Let us give thanks for each other this Labor Day weekend. Help us to celebrate and give thanks for each other and appreciate the value, the dignity, the contribution that each one makes to keep our country, our cities, our lives going. And in tough times, help us remember the words of Jesus: Come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden light (Matthew 11:28). 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: Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28

At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, "A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward my people, but not to winnow or

cleanse; <sup>12</sup> a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce my judgments against them.”

<sup>22</sup> “My people are fools;  
they do not know me.  
They are senseless children;  
they have no understanding.  
They are skilled in doing evil;  
they know not how to do good.”

<sup>23</sup> I looked at the earth,  
and it was formless and empty;  
and at the heavens,  
and their light was gone.

<sup>24</sup> I looked at the mountains,  
and they were quaking;  
all the hills were swaying.

<sup>25</sup> I looked, and there were no people;  
every bird in the sky had flown away.

<sup>26</sup> I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert;  
all its towns lay in ruins  
before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

<sup>27</sup> This is what the LORD says:  
“The whole land will be ruined,  
though I will not destroy it completely.

<sup>28</sup> Therefore the earth will mourn  
and the heavens above grow dark,  
because I have spoken and will not relent,  
I have decided and will not turn back.”

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. <sup>13</sup> Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. <sup>14</sup> The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. <sup>16</sup> But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive

eternal life. <sup>17</sup> Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Luke 15:1-10

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

<sup>8</sup> “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins<sup>[a]</sup> and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

## Message

I have learned that I never know where I will find inspiration for a sermon, but I count on God to provide it. Well, this week Cindy celebrated her birthday. The energy and excitement of the birthday celebration made me think about today’s Epistle lesson. I am not sure if she was more excited about blowing out the candles, having friends there to run and play with or opening up the birthday gifts, but I would guess it was opening up the gifts especially the ones that were not clothes.

For each and every one of us enjoys getting gifts, no matter what our age is. The fact is we may even enjoy getting them a little too much. Gifts are very often something we look forward to and expect especially during the holidays. But at other times I don’t feel like I deserve any gifts at all. Let’s face it, just because I get another year older does that really earn me another gift? Personally, in my eyes not really. But that is the definition of a gift, isn’t it? It is something which is unearned, undeserved and at times can be very unexpected. In fact in my mind an unexpected gift is the best gift ever! That describes gifts, and we know how we like them, no matter how loud we protest.

Today in our lesson, the Lord talks to us about his most precious gift, the gift of faith. The gift of faith is the beginning. We know from faith there are all other gifts that God gives to us. Without this gift of faith, we would be lost. Without this gift of faith, we would sit in darkness. Without this gift of faith, we would suffer the eternal pangs of hell. Just like every gift, it is an unearned gift, an undeserved gift. As we grow in the knowledge of salvation we discover how this gift is unexpected. We do not deserve faith and cannot earn it. Since faith is a gift from God, it is an important gift, a valuable gift. God's gift of faith is the most valuable gift we possess.

We heard how Paul was thankful that Timothy had faith. Timothy was a Gentile, an unbeliever. The chance of him believing was not very good. Yet, Paul writes: "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." What had God done? God had provided Timothy with a faith. First of all God provided Timothy's grandmother with a simple, saving faith. Then she passed it on her to her daughter and her daughter passed it on to Timothy. God gave that simple faith from generation to generation to generation.

Now as Paul knows that Timothy has this faith, he writes: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God." Paul also writes: "God has saved us and called us to a holy life; not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace." It was God's purpose and God's grace that saved Paul and Timothy. It was not their works. Faith was unearned, undeserved as God's gift to them. Today our loving Lord reminds us to fan into flame that gift of God. God has given to us a simple, saving faith.

The words and experiences of Paul offer each of us a message of hope. These words remind us that no matter who we are, what we have done, what mistakes we have made, God wants to use us! As I read the lesson I felt there were three lessons for us to remember. The first lesson is: Like Paul, God has chosen each of us, even though we are sinners, because He can use what we have to offer. It's nice to be chosen, but sometimes we have trouble believing we are chosen. We ask, "Are you sure?" When I declare to you that "God has chosen you," your first response may be, "Who me? There must be some mistake." But remember God does not make mistakes. You have been chosen to be saved and to serve. God needs you and therefore he chooses you. "Why me? What do I have to offer the kingdom of God?" Do you need a reason? How about three of them?

First, God can use your experience with sin. You know what it is like to be disobedient to God. You know the pain of guilt. You know what it is like to feel remorse after mistakes. You also know how it feels to be forgiven and cleansed by Jesus. Who better to talk about forgiveness than you?

Second, God can use your connections with people. You know a lot of people; some better than others. You know how to talk to them, how to approach them about Jesus and maybe even how to invite them to church. God needs your connections with people.

Third, God can use your abilities, power, and energy to build His Kingdom. The more Christians there are, the more power can be created. God needs your wisdom, your insight, and your experience. God values your contribution.

The next lesson is found in verses 13 and 14. Paul writes with absolute amazement that he has been chosen by God despite what he used to be. In verse 14 Paul states, "The grace of God was more than abundant, more than sufficient." Part of God's choosing is his choosing to forgive. Despite what you used to be, God offers forgiveness. God is a forward-looking God. Your past is not nearly as important as your future. God is looking ahead. Most of us live our entire lives looking at our past. We keep thinking and remembering what we used to do and what we once said, and how we sometimes acted. We remember our mistakes and allow them to hold us captive in the present. Friend, God's grace is sufficient to forgive your sins.

Our third and last lesson is found in verse 12. "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service." The strength of God is a special gift that God shares with his chosen. We need that strength to do his work and service. Philippians 4:13 states, "I can do all things through [Christ] who strengthens me." God gives us the strength to live, to witness, to forgive, and to build.

Gifts, we do not deserve them, yet we get gifts from those who love us. Faith, we do not deserve it and cannot earn it. Our God gives the gift of faith to us that is unlike any other gift that we have. For God's gift of faith is alive. It is a good and perfect gift. Faith reminds us that this is just the beginning. Faith can grow and increase. The Lord says to us today to fan into flame that gift of God. We are reminded that first of all God gives us this simple, saving faith. We are also reminded that God guards our simple, saving, strong faith.

We have made mistakes; our past is most imperfect. But we have been chosen, forgiven, and empowered by God. To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction:

*My friends, go into the world:  
knowing that it is God who loves us,  
Christ who strengthens us,  
and the Holy Spirit who empowers us for service.  
Go in peace and joy! Amen.*