



St. Mary's Episcopal Church
Bridgeville, Delaware
"The Little Church with a Big Heart"

A Prayer for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Morning Prayer — Rev. Carl E. Mosley

Sermon — Rev. Deacon Dottie Vuono

August 30, 2020

COLLECT

LORD OF ALL POWER and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. *Amen.*

FIRST READING – Jeremiah 15:15-21

O LORD, you know; remember me and visit me, and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance do not take me away; know that on your account I suffer insult. Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts. I did not sit in the company of merry-makers, nor did I rejoice; under the weight of your hand I sat alone, for you had filled me with indignation.

Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail. Therefore, thus says the Lord: If you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth. It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.

PSALM 26:1-8

(REFRAIN – *Your love, O Lord, is before my eyes.*)

¹ Give 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.

³ For your 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.

⁵ I 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,

⁷ Singing 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

LET LOVE BE GENUINE; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” No, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good..

THE GOSPEL – Matthew 16:21-28

JESUS BEGAN to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

SERMON — Rev. Deacon Dottie Vuono

In last week’s Gospel Jesus says to Peter: “You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church. Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

This week, however, Peter is rebuked by Jesus saying “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me for

YOU ARE SETTING YOUR MIND NOT ON DIVINE THINGS BUT ON HUMAN THINGS.”

The life of Peter, as found within the Gospels, is an up and down merry go round of Peter saying what he feels at the moment. He is enthusiastic, fearful, joyful, wanting to show the Lord how much he loves him and yet, and yet his humanness always seems to get him in hot water. Do you know anyone like that? I do, yup that would be me.

I think if we are honest we could all say, from time to time, that we not always say or do the right thing. And the beauty of it is – Peter was made the head of the Church moving forward. He was the corner stone that proves Jesus takes the most unlikely and makes them more than they ever thought they could be.

The words stated before - setting your mind not on divine things but on human things. Isn't that when we get into trouble? At least I do and apparently so does Peter. He reacted out of fear of suffering and loss, he focused on the fact that Jesus would suffer and be killed. Jesus responds to Peter to focus on divine things, the promise that his Lord will be raised and in the last day, we shall be raised.

In our reading from Jeremiah the Lord says – “If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth... for I am with you to save you and deliver you says the Lord. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.”

In our Psalm – “Test me, O Lord, and try me; examine my heart and my mind. “

And in Romans: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints, extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”

All readings today point to setting our minds on divine things, not human things.

We are living through the most horrific time of our lives. We are all setting our minds on human things. We all have had heartaches that were not of our making. We have all been stressed and anxious and the list can go on and on. But all of these things or thoughts, feelings or whatever are of human things, not divine.

I have an elderly friend who whenever I speak to her says “I'm so tired of being cooped up here. When will this be over?” The last time she said this to me I said, Ah but you can get in your car and go for a ride, you can go get a book from library. “Well, I guess that's true she says.” and I think (at the time I could NOT drive or go get a book as I was home bound recuperating from my fall) Talk about being cooped up. But trying to make the best of it. Accepting what can not be changed.

None of us want our world to continue in fear of “what if.” But if we set our minds on divine things somehow doesn't life seem easier?

Aren't we all guilty of focusing on human things? I, for one, almost never listen to the TV or radio. It's too depressing. I do, however, see things on social media. Some I forward; others I delete. Why? Because I want to focus on the divine or the good that is happening – families are actually praying together, parents are actually interacting with their children. People are finding creative ways to help each day be one of benefit or caring. I had a friend bring me food the other day. I shouted with joy in my heart saying “now I don't have to cook!!”. Simple things, yet huge in the scheme of things. People are reaching out to people, calling or stopping when possible. Businesses are finding creative ways to keep their businesses thriving. In other words we are using our God given talents and putting them to good use.

March what the 15th? Or whenever we went into lock down, we all said like Peter – HEAVEN FORBID this can never happen. And yet here it is the end of August and slowly life is returning to what we all are finding it to be the new normal.

Even in Jesus' time people, like Peter, did not want to accept the things that can not be changed. These understandings sell short the capacity to serve God. They limit us. Peter rescued the infant church

through the new Covenant of the Cross. Jesus tells us that we are called to walk through our crosses into a new life.

This time in our lives is the Cross we all bear. May we keep our focus on the divine and not on human things. May we become more aware of the needs of others. Praying for those on our prayer list, praying for all 165, 000 families plus who have had sometimes more than one death from Covid, asking for peace for those families, praying for the unrest of our nation to come to an end and with a new resolve. There are ways we can bear our Cross and keep our minds on Divine things.

Be creative, be assertive, call, ask, seek and ye shall find.

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from prison, as he faced suffering with great faith:

“What remains for us is only the very narrow path, sometimes barely discernible, of taking each day as if it were the last and yet living it faithfully and responsibly as if there were yet to be a great future.”

This is the divine way. It is also the human way. This is the mystery of faith and keeping our minds on what is Divine and not human.

Perhaps this will help with out thoughts.

Sometimes I just want it to stop. Talk of Covid, protests, looting, brutality. I loose my way. Become convinced that this “new normal” is real life.

But, then I meet an 87 year old who talks of living through Polio, diphtheria, Vietnam, protests and yet is still enchanted with life. He seemed surprised when I said that 2020 must be especially challenging for him. “No”, he said slowly looking me straight in the eyes, “I learned a long time ago to not see the world through the printed headlines, I see the world through the people who surround me. I see the world with the realization that we love big. Therefore, I just choose to write my own headlines. “Husband loves wife today.” “Family drops everything to come to Grandma’s bedside.” He patted my hand “Old man, makes new friend.”

His words collide with my worries, freeing them from the tether I had been holding tight. They float away. I am left with a renewed spirit. My headline now reads:

“Congregation overwhelmed by the spirit of kindness and the reminder that our capacity to love is never ending. Keeping their focus on the Divine.!”

Amen.