

Devotional for Sunday, September 27th, 2020

Parking Lot Worship Services: Sundays, 8:45 a.m. at Trinity and 10:15 at St. John's – Weather permitting. We will hold services in our church parking lot. You may sit in your cars or bring a lawn chair.

Prayers

Trinity: For the family and friends of Sherri Andrews who passed away September 19th. She was Howard & Phyllis Peterson's daughter.

St. John's: For the blessing of Maddy Johanningmeier & Nolan Newhall who are to be married September 26th.

Devotion for the 17th Sunday after Pentecost

Confession and Forgiveness

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us and all of creation. Amen.

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

Faithful God, have mercy on us. We confess that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves. We turn from your loving embrace and go our own ways. We pass judgment on one another before examining ourselves. We place our own needs before those of our neighbors. We keep your gift of salvation to ourselves. Make us humble, cast away our transgressions, and turn us again to life in you through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

God hears the cries of all who call out in need, and through his death and resurrection, Christ has made us his own. Hear the truth that God proclaims: Your sins are forgiven in the name of Jesus Christ. Led by the Holy Spirit, live in freedom and newness to do God's work in the world. Amen.

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

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.

First Reading: Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32

Ezekiel challenges those who think they cannot change because of what their parents were and did, or who think they cannot reverse their own previous behavior. God insistently invites people to turn and live.

¹The word of the LORD came to me: ²What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge"? ³As I live, says the Lord GOD, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. ⁴Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.

²⁵Yet you say, "The way of the Lord is unfair." Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? ²⁶When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. ²⁷Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. ²⁸Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. ²⁹Yet the house of Israel says, "The way of the Lord is unfair." O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

³⁰Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord GOD. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. ³¹Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³²For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then, and live.

Psalm 25:1-9

¹To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

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

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

⁴Show me your ways, O LORD, and teach me your paths.

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

⁶Remember, O LORD, your compassion and love, for they are from everlasting.

⁷Remember 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.

⁸You are gracious and upright, O LORD; therefore you teach sinners in your way.

⁹You 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.

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹²Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

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.

²³When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" ²⁴Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ²⁶But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." ²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

Message

“Blame the Parent?”

When I was in grade school and Junior High School once in a while my mother would tell me in the morning not to take the bus home and that she would pick me up after school to go to a doctor’s appointment, dentist, or shopping. I remember two times in particular. The first time was in 1st grade. School got out at 3:30 but she didn’t come until 4:00. To a first grader that is a long time. Another time that I remember was in Junior High School when I was in 7th grade. Again, school was over by 3:30 but she didn’t come until 4:15. I remember how much I hated the wait. Each time she would apologize but it was only on a rare occasion that she would be on time. But after the first couple times, I just knew that she would be late. Her word was good, just not accurate. She always picked me up as she said that she would. The end result, however, is that whenever I’m late picking somebody up I just blame my mother.

In our Gospel text, Jesus tells a story about two sons. Which one did the father’s will? Our words have value, but it is our actions that define their value. We learn either to trust or not to trust people’s word by their actions. Jesus was speaking in the temple in Jerusalem. He was speaking to religious people. Like us, as in Jesus’ day, not all the people went to the temple, or were religious folk. But he was speaking to those who were, like I am speaking to you.

He was warning them and us, just because we go to church and say, “We believe”, does not mean that we are in God’s kingdom. The son who said no to his father, did what was right. The son who said the right words, did what was wrong. To be a Christian is not just coming to church and saying all the right words. To say we love God with all our heart, with our soul and all our strength means absolutely nothing if do not also love our neighbor.

Are we Christians or just church goers? There are people outside of the church that do a better job than we do when it comes to loving our neighbor? We may say, “We love you God,” but if we have no regard for our neighbor, are we any more a Christian than the one who has never set a foot inside a church and does the same thing? Our words are only as good as our actions. And our actions are probably a better sign of what we believe than what we say.

The prophet Ezekiel was speaking to people who were in exile and blaming their parents and ancestors for their situation in life. Their parents and ancestors had forgotten God. Even though they never stopped worshipping God, because they were very religious people, they stopped loving their neighbor. Their problem was, they talked the talk, but didn’t walk the walk. They stopped caring about the poor. They oppressed foreigners and took advantage of any one they could as a nation. Because of this, their country became weak and was conquered.

The children of these exiles and the inheritors of their way of life were blaming their ancestors for their own sins. Much like I could blame my mother when I’m late. But the Lord said to them, “Repent and return to me and you shall live again. I have no pleasure in punishing you for the sins of your fathers. Give up the evil ways of your ancestors, follow me and you will live.”

What does this say to me about my mother? It says that I can either blame her for whenever I’m late, or I can change my ways and be on time. I know what it was like to have to wait for my mom, but the lord tells me, “Forgive her and change your life, get up and move on, do not live in the shadow of your mother’s sin, but repent and live.”

About my mom, she was not a bad mother, just chronically late and when I learned to live with that, I became a better person. The end result, I am very seldom late, but also, I am very seldom early.

So, how does this all apply today? As we head to the elections and the appointment of a new Supreme Court judge we will hear lots of words but it will be the actions that will prove the words that are said. It will be the actions of our leaders and voters that will tell the truth about who we are in our society. Will we treat our neighbors with Christ like actions? This election will be most difficult one in my life so far. I know that there have been more divisive elections in the history of our country but they were before I was born. Now it is our turn to figure out who we are. Will our words and actions reflect who we are as Children of God? If not, now is a good time to repent, to turn our lives around to reflect the grace of God in all things.

Prayers of Intercession

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

In all the world, give your church unity. 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 at work in us. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Your Son took on all of bodily life in our world, even to death. 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 and new spirits. Where sin permeates our cultures and institutions, change our minds 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 children who are abused or neglected, hungry or exploited, bullied or lonely. 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.

We give you thanks for lives of Sherri Andrews and Judge Ruth Bader Ginsberg and all that they shared with so many in their journeys in life and the impact they have made in so many lives and bless Maddy & Nolan Newhall in their life together as husband and wife. 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

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.

Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace. Amen.

Dismissal

Go in peace. Serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.