

**Sunday, July 5, 2020**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost**

**Announcement:** We are still closed at least through July. The church council made this decision because of the increase of COVID-19 cases in Black Hawk County and the resurgence in other parts of the country and due to the limitations to worship that we would follow to make a gathering in one place safer.

If you need pastoral care contact Pastor Jeff: 319-464-2895, or email: jblank24582@gmail.com

**Introduction**

The mystery of God's ways is sometimes hidden from the wise and intelligent. Jesus associates with those often excluded from the religious community. Like Paul, we struggle with our own selfish desires and seek God's mercy and forgiveness. We gather to be refreshed by Christ's invitation: "Come to me, all you that are weary." Gathered around word, water, and meal, we find rest for our souls.

**Confession and Forgiveness**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, whose steadfast love is everlasting, whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. Amen.

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Reconciling God, we confess that we do not trust your abundance, and we deny your presence in our lives. We place our hope in ourselves and rely on our own efforts. We fail to believe that you provide enough for all. We abuse your good creation for our own benefit. We fear difference and do not welcome others as you have welcomed us. We sin in thought, word, and deed. By your grace, forgive us; through your love, renew us; and in your Spirit, lead us; so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen.

Beloved of God, by the radical abundance of divine mercy we have peace with God through Christ Jesus, through whom we have obtained grace upon grace. Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope. For hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. 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**

You are great, O God, and greatly to be praised. You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Grant that we may believe in you, call upon you, know you, and serve you, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

**Psalms 145:8-14**

<sup>8</sup> The LORD is gracious and full of compassion,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

<sup>9</sup> LORD, you are good to all,  
and your compassion is over all your works.

<sup>10</sup> All your works shall praise you, O LORD,  
and your faithful ones shall bless you.

<sup>11</sup> They shall tell of the glory of your kingdom  
and speak of your power,

<sup>12</sup> that all people may know of your power  
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

<sup>13</sup> Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; your dominion endures throughout all ages.

You, LORD, are faithful in all your words, and loving in all your works.

<sup>14</sup> The Lord upholds all those who fall

and lifts up those who are bowed down.

## **Second Reading: Romans 7:15-25a**

*Life captive to sin is a catch-22 existence in which we know good but do not do it and do things we know to be wrong. Through Jesus Christ, God has set us free from such a futile existence.*

<sup>15</sup>I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup>But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. <sup>20</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

<sup>21</sup>So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. <sup>22</sup>For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, <sup>23</sup>but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. <sup>24</sup>Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? <sup>25a</sup>Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

## **Gospel: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

*Jesus chides people who find fault with both his ministry and that of John the Baptist. He thanks God that wisdom and intelligence are not needed to receive what God has to offer.*

[Jesus spoke to the crowd saying:] <sup>16</sup>“To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, <sup>17</sup>‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’ <sup>18</sup>For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; <sup>19</sup>the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.”

<sup>25</sup>At that time Jesus said, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

<sup>28</sup>“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

## **Devotion: By Rev. Ruth Ann Shriver (Married to Pastor Blank)**

Freedom Fighters Angelina and Sarah Grimke – “The YOKE of Slavery”

It was a simple quilt. Ten blocks, hand stitched out of scraps garnered from the remains of garments handmade by slaves for the wealthy landowners of Charleston, SC. Its colors were strong; reds, vibrant blues the color of the sky midday, yellows that mimicked the sun’s rays at dawn and the inky black of the night sky. But it was not a normal quilt in the way one would think of a quilt today. No discernible pattern that repeated itself, only figures of people and birds, animals and things of nature. There were few that understood the quilt itself and the story it told. Its maker did not know how to read or write, she only knew that her life held meaning and that it needed to be told, shared with her child and those who would follow after.

The quilt chronicled her birth into slavery, the separation of her family early on, sold into other families, owned by the rich. It told the stories of unspeakable abuse, hope born at the foot of her “spirit” tree, and the final blocks held the stories of her daughters and their struggle for freedom. It is a coming of age story that spans a generation, full of the tears and joy, hope and despair of a people living under the yoke of slavery.

There are many such quilts in museums around the world. but this particular quilt was the thread that held the story of Angelina and Sarah Grimke, sisters of a prominent lawyer in Charleston and several of the female slaves in their family. The story, written by Sue Monk Kidd, is called “The Invention of Wings” and it is a work of historical fiction. It tells the story of the gradual awakening of these sisters to the evils of slavery and leads them into a lifelong battle as

abolitionists and feminists. The year was 1827 and in the south slavery was a way of life no one questioned. Blacks were inferior beings, not worthy of learning to read or write and subjected by their owners to the worst forms of cruelty. If we think that the terrors of being a prisoner of war are too horrid to contemplate, they are at least equal to the punishments slaves endured for minor infractions of the laws the landowners set up for them.

For Sarah and Angelina, born into this tradition, to have come to the conclusion that slaves were equals and therefore worthy of freedom is a most amazing revelation. Sarah studied her father's law books until he finally barred her from his study because as he said it was not acceptable in polite society for a woman to become a lawyer, nor for a woman to speak her mind in public. It was many years after the death of her father that Sarah found her voice in writing and speaking and her sister Angelina followed in her footsteps becoming the voice of freedom that set the fire that burned bright in the hearts of freedom fighters everywhere.

It is astounding to me, as it was to Sue Monk Kidd, that these women's stories have not been told before. There is much historical fact written about their lives and yet their stories have been quieted over the generations.

It is widely known and also recorded in this book that on Sunday mornings the slaves would be gathered in the kitchen or garden of the plantation where plantation owners would read from scripture. A commonly used reading was from Ephesians chapter six beginning with verse five: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free." Of course, they would not read nor hear the following verse, "And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him."

It never ceases to amaze me what scripture verses we can pull out to justify our actions or our prejudices. Because, if it comes from the Bible it must be okay. Further study not needed. This practice is continued to this day to justify our actions in the name of Christ, and it is an abomination. It is sin of the worst sort. There is no freedom in this type of action.

This week we celebrated the birth of our country with the precept of freedom at its very heart. Angelina Grimke spoke these words nearly two hundred years ago, "all the slaveholding laws violate the fundamental principles of the Constitution of the United States. In the preamble of that instrument, the great objects for which it was framed are declared to be 'to establish justice, to promote the general welfare, and to secure the blessings of liberty to us and to our posterity.' The slave laws are flagrant violations of these fundamental principles. Slavery subverts justice, promotes the welfare of the few to the manifest injury of the many, and robs thousands of the posterity of their forefathers of the blessings of liberty."

*Angelina Grimké (1805-1879), U.S. abolitionist and feminist. Letters to Catherine Beecher, letter #2 (1837). In a letter dated June 17, 1837.*

She and her sister Sarah became Quakers after leaving their home, but eventually even the Quakers decried their passion for freedom and cut them off from the fellowship. Their fight became not only for the abolitionist movement but for the women's movement as well. Theirs was the beginning of the fight for the right to vote for women, who, by the way, received that right AFTER black men were given voting privilege.

I speak of these things today not simply because I read a book, but because I feel strongly that freedom for peoples of this world are being challenged daily and often backed up by the use of the Bible, taken totally out of context and with not a thought to the times it was written or for what reason and not considering at all the challenges of this day and how the gospel, the good news of equality spoken by Jesus is failing to be realized even by members of His church. I think he would be appalled at how it has been misrepresented and misused.

In a quote from a speech given in 1837 Angelina also said this, "I recognize no rights but human rights - I know nothing of men's rights and women's rights, for in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female." It is my solemn conviction that, until this principal of equality is recognized and embodied in practice, the church can do nothing effectual for the permanent reformation of the world.

We are the church of Jesus Christ. In the name of freedom, I ask us today to consider in what ways we are guilty of the perpetuation of inequality and therefore preventing the freedom of God's kingdom to bear witness in this place, in our country and in our world.

We believe in the idea of freedom, we speak the words of freedom glibly with rarely a thought to what this might mean, to what everyday people like Sarah and Angelina Grimke gave up to share this message with everyone they could. They were ostracized by family, forsaken by the church, scorned by those they loved in order that the slaves they knew and loved could be free. Following the "order of the day" or saying, "well that's just the way it's done," or simply not giving thought to what ordinary people, not just veterans, have offered up in the name of freedom, will we not continue to build this country into a place where freedom rings.

Jesus said that his yoke was easy and his burden was light and he called all people to him so that they might experience the freedom he offered. Sarah and Angelina as well as so many other freedom fighters gave their lives as offerings in the name of Christ so that others might know and experience what he offers all who come to him and who take his word into their hearts where the flame of freedom burns brightly. Today we remember and celebrate their bravery, their conviction and their willingness to speak out so that others might be free.

This gift comes at a price, but it is also a great joy freely given once understood and acted upon. This same gift is offered to us as we share the bread and wine of reconciliation today. We bring our brokenness and we bring our hopes for freedom for ourselves and others to this table knowing that Jesus' promise is eternal and for us. Take my yoke, the yoke of freedom from all the brokenness in our world, take it into your hearts and let it grow there until it burns brightly and cannot be quenched. Amen.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

We pray for the church. Sustain us as we share your word. Embrace us as we struggle to find our common ground. Lift up leaders with powerful and prophetic voices. Free us from stagnant faith. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for the nations especially the United States as we celebrate our nationhood. Guide leaders in developing just policies and guide difficult conversations. Free us from those things that hinder relationship-building. Lead us to expansive love for our neighbor. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all in need. For all who are tired, feeling despair, sick, or oppressed. Take their yoke upon you and ease their burdens. Give your consolation and free us from all that keeps us bound. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all people who are suffering from the coronavirus, for all who care for those with the virus, and for all to be mindful of others in this time of the unseen spread of the virus as we meet with others around us. Help those who are healthy to be respectful of those who are vulnerable to the virus. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We give thanks for those who have died in faith. Welcome them into your eternal rest and comfort us in our grief until we are joined with them in new life. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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. Christ is with you. **Thanks be to God.**