

Worship for July 16, 2023

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

\*Call to Worship

God of grace, you have given us minds to know you, and voices to sing your praise.

**Fill us with your Spirit,  
that we may celebrate your glory  
and worship you in Spirit and in truth;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

\*Hymn 645 Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above, Verses 1 and 2

Prayer of Confession

**Holy and merciful God,  
in your presence we confess our sinfulness, our shortcomings,  
and our offenses against you.  
You alone know how often we have sinned  
in wandering from your ways,  
in wasting your gifts,  
in forgetting your love.  
Have mercy on us, O Lord,  
for we are sorry for all we have done to displease you.  
Forgive our sins,  
and help us live in your light,  
and walk in your ways,  
for the love of Jesus Christ our Savior.**

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear the good news!

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance,  
that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross,  
that we might be dead to sin and alive to all that is good.

I declare to you in the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Be at peace.

First Scripture Reading Psalm 85

## Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 11:1-13

Morning Message

For a young family member, fresh out of law school, the stress of the courtroom, the imposing figure of the judge on the bench, the attorneys on the other side of the courtroom, the fate of her clients- was overwhelming. It was more pressure-filled than she had ever expected. She believed with her whole heart that she was doing a good and noble thing in representing the immigrant population in a major city. But, she quickly realized that people have different ideas about what good, noble, and neighborly mean. The bottom line is how well each attorney presents his or her case, playing by the rules. It did not often break her way. A few years into her career as a defense attorney, our girl changed direction and now does commercial real estate, which is supposed to be less stressful. It seems to suit her better.

What is going on the opening scene of today's scripture? A learned man, spit-polished and noble, with a spine seemingly made of steel and no compassion in his voice, has brought the courtroom to Jesus.

The man, an expert in Mosaic law, stands up to test Jesus. Like the Pharisees, who were his colleagues, he wants to know if Jesus will use the Torah properly to answer the following question: "What must I do to inherit eternal life? Cite the chapter and verse please."

But this is Jesus. And this is the gospel of Luke. Anyone expecting or demanding a direct answer is bound to be disappointed.

Jesus employs a different method of engaging this man. The Socratic method: answering a question with another question. "What is written in the law?"

He might also have asked, "What do you think is the answer?"

How many times growing up did I ask my parents' permission to do one thing or another, something I knew would challenge their idea of safety or expense or what was an appropriate activity for a teenager. Often, I could count on getting one of those looks that said, "You know the answer to that."

The lawyer responds with the prescribed answer: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

Jesus congratulates him on the answer, but, reels him in a little closer and we know, because we've heard the story so many times, that Jesus wants more. He wants all of us, as the scriptures say.

“Do this and you will live.”

And the man takes the bait. After all, he has a reputation to maintain. Maybe he will trip Jesus with this question:

“Who *is* my neighbor?”

Then Jesus begins to tell stories, and his stories are always packed full of meaning and this one doesn't disappoint.

Jesus puts his new lawyer friend in the story so he can't miss the point. When our grandson was visiting for a few days, we entertained him for hours showing him all the videos of himself-from birth on-that were saved on our phones. A day or so later, he climbed up on our bed and said, “Fifi, let's watch videos of me.”

I'm not sure the man in our story would really want to watch videos of himself. But this is how Jesus tells the story:

Two experts in the law walk by a man lying by the side of the road, beaten within an inch of his life. They know the commandments: to love God and neighbor. They memorized those verses as kids. But, even though they know them by heart, they don't stop to help the man in need. No, they pass by on the other side. Their schedules were packed. They had no time to stop and render aid. Or maybe, they didn't consider this man a neighbor at all.

But then a third traveler comes by, and seeing the injured man, shows hospitality and kindness and mercy- all in generous measure. The Samaritan. The least likely character they expect. You know this- Jews and Samaritans had been at enmity for generations. Jews believed Samaritans were infidels. And yet, in Jesus' story, who does the right thing? The Samaritan. The unlikely one. The one who is the theological enemy of the Jewish lawyer.

But listen to this twist of a response: He doesn't say the Samaritan. He says, “The one who showed him mercy.” It is the motive of the Samaritan's ministrations that hit their mark with the lawyer. And we know, this is a matter of the heart.

How many of our hearts were broken last July 4th when we heard the news of the sniper attack in Highland Park, Illinois during the annual Independence Day Parade?

I couldn't bear to watch the news coverage but I couldn't walk away from it either. Where are the helpers, as Mr. Rogers would ask? Who is taking care of the people who abandoned those lawn chairs and purses and hats and baby strollers?

Dear God, why? Why must innocent people die in such a savage, senseless way? And we pray for an end to this madness. Again.

And then the stories started coming in about the victims. And then there were stories about the first responders...and the fellow by-standers, the neighbors, the merchants, the regular folk like you and me. A well-loved Highland Park tradition, one that was sheer frivolity with bands and fire engines and floats and candy tosses. It could very well be Barboursville. What could go wrong? Everything.

The next morning, I saw a couple being interviewed who had been at the parade. They were not injured. During the attack, a young man came running up to them, thrusting his baby into their arms. Will you watch him? My wife was hit and I need to check on her. They exchanged phone numbers and the little boy stayed in the home and the arms of perfect strangers for hours. What trust. What neighborliness. What mercy.

And then there was the couple that shielded their two-year-old son with their own bodies, literally laying down their lives for their child.

There was no time for debate or consultation or background checking or anything else but the will to survive and trust. An uncommon amount of immediate action was taken that day that saved the lives of many.

There were other similar violent scenes all around the country last summer when we learned that Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, had been shot. In the morning we learned he had died. Who will be neighbor to the Japanese? Abe was the first Japanese official to visit Pearl Harbor. What happens to those steps into diplomacy that are so hard won?

Much closer to home, I heard and saw a story on our local news that really inspired me. Wsaz TV awards a "Hometown Hero" award each week to a person in the viewing area who has done some outstanding service. This week's Hometown Hero was a man in Nitro, Greg Savilla. For years, Mr. Savilla has devoted himself to planting and tending summer flowers around the building and grounds of Holy Trinity Catholic Church. It is beautiful. The parish priest says it's a real ministry, it draws people out, people who pass by during fall, winter, and spring, but, who literally stop to admire the flowers and express gratitude to the gardener. What makes this story even more remarkable is that Greg Savilla was born with spina bifida, a disorder that creates great physical challenges. Mr. Savilla has overcome a lot to succeed at this major gardening

project. His work has drawn the neighborhood together. His work, what we could really call his ministry, doesn't stop there. Knowing how difficult life with spina bifida can be, he has organized an annual spina bifida camping experience for children, expanding his and his church's understanding of just who is their neighbor.

Who is your neighbor? Who is in need of God's mercy and how can you deliver a generous portion of it?

The lawyer asks an essential question. Maybe the most consequential question: What must we do to inherit eternal life?

Love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.

Do this and we will live.

May it be so for all of us. Amen.

\* 175 Seek Ye First

\*Affirmation of Faith The Apostles' Creed p. 35

\*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

\*Hymn 607 Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

**Loving God, having received your grace in the redemption of Christ Jesus,  
we live strengthened in the faith, with lives overflowing with gratitude.**

**From the depths of our hearts, we offer to you the very best we have-time, talent, and  
treasure.**

**May our offerings be a sign of our true devotion and thanksgiving. Amen.**

\*Hymn 645 Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above, Verses 3 and 4

\*Blessing

May the God of peace

make you holy in every way,  
and keep your whole being- body, mind and spirit,  
free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

\*Postlude