

Worship for October 16, 2022

Prelude

***Call to Worship**

Shine like stars in the world,
holding fast to the word of life.

***Prayer of the Day**

**Lord, tireless guardian of your people,
Ever-prepared to hear the cries of your chosen ones,
teach us to rely, day and night, on your care.
Support our prayer, lest we grow weary,
drive us to seek your enduring justice and your ever-present help.
Grant this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

***Hymn 14 For the Beauty of the Earth Verses 1, 2, and 3**

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, Lord,
for we are sorry for all we have done to displease you.
Forgive us our sins and help us to live in your light,
and walk in your ways,
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior.**

***Hymn Take, O Take Me As I Am**

Assurance of Forgiveness

Hear the good news!
Who is in a position to condemn?
Only Christ, and Christ died for us,
Christ rose for us,
Christ reigns in power for us,

Christ prays for us.
Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.
The old life is gone and a new life has begun.
Know you are forgiven and be at peace. Amen.

First Reading Psalm 121

Moments With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 18:1-8

Morning Message

“If we can just get him in the house, she’ll let us keep him.”

My friend chuckles as she describes the day she overhears her young children, their earnest logic, their hopeful voices. They had found yet another stray animal, a little dog this time, and they were compelled to bring it into the warmth and shelter of their home. But, first they had to win over their mother. And that would require a plan.

The plan worked, of course, as they knew it would.

In today’s text, Jesus speaks to the act of persistence. Like children who beg their mom to keep a cold and hungry stray puppy, he lifts up persistence in prayer...steadily approaching God for God’s help or favor or healing, or whatever the need is.

By the time Luke was writing this gospel,¹ a generation or so after Jesus’ life on earth had ended, people were starting to feel discouraged. They were tired of waiting for Jesus to bring all things to fulfillment. They were weary of being persecuted as a small minority going against the grain in a vast and powerful empire. They were anxious and suffering.

Jesus reasons with them that if an unjust, disrespectful judge hears the case of a poor widow because she has worn him out with her pleas, then, Jesus asks, how much more will God-the God of the universe, the God of compassion and justice- how much more will God listen and respond to his beloved children in their hour of need?

Once again, Jesus uses someone from the margins of society, a needy, powerless widow, to make his point. Bible scholar John Pilch says the Hebrew word for “widow” is “silent one,” or “one unable to speak.” In the patriarchal Mediterranean world, only men could take on a public presence. They speak for women who are not allowed to speak for themselves. They have no voice, no agency.

So this “silent one” is acting outside the normal bounds when she finds her voice and speaks for herself. Maybe it’s because she knows that there’s a special place for her in the heart of God. Widows, orphans, and aliens are all very close to the heart of God.

We would do well to ask ourselves who the widows, orphans, and aliens are of our day. Who are the ones without a voice.

Pastor Kate Matthews reminds us of the true story of Greta Thune. Do you remember her? She was a sixteen-year-old Swedish environmental activist who called attention some years ago to the urgent need to protect the environment. She was quiet strident in her speeches and serious in her presence.

Many appreciated her advocacy, but others ridiculed her. Greta is only one example of the many young people who have become activists to bring attention and raise a hope for change for the deep problems we encounter these days.

I am reminded of David Hogg and other young people who have traveled the country following the violence that devastated the residents of Parkland, Florida several years ago. Their particular position is for stricter gun control, a hot issue for many American citizens. The young people have found support and they have been met with criticism. Still, they carry on with their cause.

Episcopal priest, Barbara Brown Taylor, takes a close look at the heart of the woman in the parable. Society may tell her that she is to be silent and remind her of her powerlessness. But, she rejects that position. She would persist. “She was willing to say what she wanted-out loud, day or night, over and over-whether she got it or not, because saying it was how she remembered who she was. It was how she remembered the shape of her heart.”

The shape of her heart: it makes us wonder about the shape of our own hearts and the health of our prayer life.

Why does Luke find this story necessary? To pray without ceasing. Why does he ask if Jesus will find any faithful people left on earth when he returns in the fullness of time?

Several years ago, during news coverage of the terrible injustices against the people of Myanmar, a BBC reporter shared the story of Ma Thida, a writer and doctor who was held in solitary confinement for six years after she wrote about the abuses of the government.

When asked how she survived those long years of waiting and suffering, she cited inspiring books that were like vitamins to the prisoners. Then she described her spiritual life. She meditated 18-20 hours a day. The reported noted Ma Thida’s commitment to her Buddhist faith.

She had a deep engagement with a “Holy Other” from whom she sought peace and solace and strength.

Sometimes we have to wonder how many of us Christians are as deeply engaged with our “Holy Other.”

Barbara Brown Taylor says in Jesus’ day and ours, so many of the religious adherents practice prayer like they brush their teeth...morning and night like a kind of spiritual hygiene program.

Prayer shapes our faith, and in turn, our faith gives shape to our prayer life.

Kate Matthew says she believed for a long time that faith had to do with believing the “right” things. Learning and memorizing the faith of our mothers and fathers as handed down to us in creeds and catechisms and religious textbooks. Keeping the faith was about guarding a treasure of beliefs and handing them down to the next generation, safe and intact and unchanged.

Faith was something you had in your head. Theologian Marcus Borg writes that “you can believe all the right things and still be miserable. You can believe all the right things and still be relatively unchanged. Believing a set of claims to be true has very little transforming power.”

Instead, Borg suggests, faith has to do with relationship-our relationship with God, and giving our heart, and our trust, our radical trust, to God.

Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, says that “Faith is like floating on a deep ocean. Faith is like floating in seventy thousand fathoms of water. If you struggle, if you tense up and thrash about, you will certainly sink. But if you relax and trust, you will float.”

Borg describes faith as trusting in the buoyancy of God. Faith is trusting in the sea of being in which we live and move and have our being.

Kate Matthews had a life-long fear of water. She could not even float. She couldn’t put her face in water. She made sure her children all learned to swim and she says they took to water like ducks. One summer they were staying in a place with a pool. Her son, Doug, was about ten years old. He decided, on a day when they were the only two in the pool, that this was the day that Mom was going to learn to swim.

He had utter confidence in his ability to teach her to do something that forty years of fear had prevented. “Mom,” he said, “If you close your eyes and hold your breath and relax, the water will hold you up. Just believe me. It works.”

And then he demonstrated. He floated right there on top of the water.

And so she gave it a try. And it worked. Kate says, “I floated there, held up by the buoyant water but also by the buoyant hope and confidence-and persistence- of my own unlikely little teacher who had already gone ahead of his older, more fearful parent, and discovered new experiences and new possibilities.”

So, this little parable isn’t about a nagging woman or a corrupt judge who gave in to save face. It’s ultimately about the character of a loving God who listens to the cares of our hearts, especially when they point to human need or suffering or longing, freedom, or justice. It’s about aligning our will and intentions with that of God.

Barbara Brown Taylor says our prayer life sustains us even in the worst of times, and it keeps us close to God. “You are going to trust the process,” she writes, “regardless of what comes of it, because the process itself gives you life. The process keeps you engaged with what matters most to you, so you do not lose heart.”

Taylor writes, “prayer keeps our hearts chasing God’s heart. It’s how we bother God, and it’s how God bothers us back. There’s nothing that works any better than that.”

*Hymn Faith of Our Fathers (Insert)

*Affirmation of Faith 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 606 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

*Hymn 14 For the Beauty of the Earth, Verses 4 and 5

*Blessing

Go now and continue in what you have learned and believed.

Pray always, and do not lose heart.

Proclaim God’s message,

endure hostility,

carry out your ministry fully.

And may God be quick to answer your prayers,
may Christ Jesus inspire faith within you,
and may the Holy S[pirit] tutor your hearts and equip you for every good work.
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

*Postlude

Announcements

Bring a Friend and Tailgate Sunday is October 30. Wear your favorite team's colors and bring your best tailgating dishes to share.

Add to prayers:

Marsha Wilson