

Worship for September 25, 2022

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

\*Call to Worship                      Psalm 100  
Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth.  
Worship the Lord with gladness.  
Come into God's presence with a song!

Prayer of the Day

**Gracious God,  
give us pure hearts that we may see you,  
humble hearts that we may hear you,  
hearts of love that we may serve you,  
hearts of faith that we may live in you,  
reverent hearts that we may worship you,  
here and in the world beyond our doors,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

\*Hymn 32                      I Sing the Mighty Power of God

**Prayer of Confession**

**Holy and merciful God, in your presence we confess our failure to be what you created us to be.**

**You alone know how often we have sinned  
in wandering from your ways,  
in wasting your gifts,  
in forgetting your love.**

**By your loving mercy,  
help us to live in your light  
and abide in your ways,  
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior.**

Hymn 698    Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation.  
The old life is gone and a new life has begun.  
I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ,

our sins are forgiven and we may be at peace. Amen.

First Reading Psalm 91

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 16:19-31

Morning Message

This week's gospel lesson could be "The Hard Sayings of Jesus, Part 2." We could go off in a number of directions, but, we are going to take a pretty focused view today.

Have you ever felt invisible? Maybe you are in a restaurant and all the customers around you have been waited on, but, you and your party are overlooked. Or maybe you are trying to join in a conversation with others and someone interrupts you and talks over you, as though your contribution were unimportant.

I was in an exam room at a doctor's office one day. The wait always seems long when you are wearing nothing but what amounts to a big paper towel and the air conditioning is registering a North Pole temperature.

I waited. And waited, My stomach started growling. It was lunchtime. Finally, I heard a voice and the door cracked a little and an arm reached into the room to turn off the light... before the nurse realized the room was occupied.

She screamed, "Oh, I didn't know anyone was in here! You should have let us know!"

Right. I was about twelve months pregnant and I was going to climb down from that table and waddle out into the hall in my paper towel and find a staff member? Fat chance.

That happened to my dad once in his doctor's office and he passed the time by tearing off a piece of his paper sheet and made a toe tag. When his doctor finally came in, he played dead. He had a better sense of humor than I did.

No one appreciates being overlooked or brushed aside or being made to feel their presence or their concerns are unimportant.

Churches receive their fair share of people dropping by in need of help. It is to be expected. "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." That's part of the charge Jesus gives the Church.

These are often people others fail to notice, or ignore, the last to be served. The problems can run deep. Generations deep in dysfunction.

Some years ago a family came repeatedly to Beverly Hills in search of help. They were legitimately in need. There were small children involved. We did what we could, but our small church had limited resources, and we were about tapped out. We had to let them know that we were no longer able to assist them. But, we could direct them to resources that could help and we would gladly take them to a social service agency where they could find assistance.

Our hope was that they might get to the root causes of their dysfunction and come up with a plan to turn that around so that they didn't have to resort to begging for help.

We failed. Or did we?

There is a South African phrase, "Ubuntu." It means "I am because of you." In his book *No Future without Forgiveness*, Desmond Tutu defines "ubuntu" like this:

"Ubuntu speaks of the very essence of being human. We say, 'So and so has ubuntu.' That means you are generous, you are hospitable, you are friendly and caring and compassionate. You share what you have. It is to say, 'My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.' We belong in a bundle of life. We say, 'A person is a person through other persons.' A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good, for he or she has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are tortured or oppressed, or treated as if they were less than who they are."

Author Bruce Epperly says that the tragedy of this parable is that the rich man, who isn't named, by the way, has all the resources to uplift his neighbor but was seemingly indifferent to Lazarus, who is obviously suffering.

Why was that? Maybe he saw his wealth as a matter of entitlement and effort and saw the poverty of the beggar as a matter of laziness or lack of initiative. His failure to see and hear, to empathize, created a gulf in this life that echoed into eternity.

When we fail to recognize the plight of those in need, when we fail to have compassion, when we are apathetic to others' pain and suffering, we aren't just alienated from them. We are ultimately alienated from God.

Epperly says God called the rich man to a simple spiritual exercise that would have changed everything and awakened him to a new way of life: Pause, notice, open, stretch, and respond. That's all it takes.

We know there are limits to what we can do, how far our resources can stretch, the type of counsel we can give. But we are never off the hook from noticing opportunities to live into "ubuntu, I am because you are."

When we think about our efforts in this way, we measure our work differently. Sometimes our efforts are abused and we sour on any further help. That's natural. But, hang onto this thought: we can't control the actions of others. What's important is our response.

John Wesley penned these words centuries ago. They are packed with meaning for Christians of this age as well:

Do all the good you can,  
by all the means you can,  
in all the ways you can,  
in all the places you can,  
at all the times you can,  
to all the people you can,  
as long as ever you can.

And you will find ubuntu.

\*Hymn 714 God of the Fertile Fields, verses 1 and 2

\*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

\*Hymn 714 God of the Fertile Fields, verses 3 and 4

\*Blessing

Go now and take hold of the life that really is life.

Shun eagerness for fortune,  
but be rich in good works.  
Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.

And may God be your refuge and fortress;  
may Christ Jesus free you from all that ensnares you;  
and may the Holy Spirit provide you with peace and contentment. Amen.

\*Postlude