

Worship for September 18, 2022

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship

To your name, O Lord,

help us to bow the knee and all its worshiping,

bow the head in all its thinking,

bow the will and all its choosing,

bow the heart and all its loving. Amen.

*Hymn 31 Let Us With a Gladsome Mind

Prayer

God of love,

you have willed that the last be first and you have made a little child the measure of your kingdom.

We may be reluctant to embrace humility and service, for to do so may imply work and will require a spirit of cooperation and compromise.

Forgive us for our complacency, hesitation, or indifference and give us the wisdom which is from above,

so we may understand, that, in your sight, the one who serves is the greatest of all.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, whose service gives us life and hope. Amen.

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

God's Word is truth: That Jesus Christ came into the world to redeem and re-form our lives.

The old life is gone and a new life has begun.

Your sins are forgiven.

Be at peace with God, one another, and yourselves. Amen.

First Reading Psalm 8

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Mark 9:30-37

Morning Message

I love the rain. Love it in all seasons. I love the smell of rain in the air sometimes hours before the first drop. I love the way the leaves on the trees turn inside out in the windy prelude. I love

the sound of thunder rolling and lightning cracking overhead. I love to hear it early in the morning on days I don't have to get out of bed. I love it late at night, knowing that the world will look all fresh and clean, and maybe a little cooler, in the morning.

What I don't love are the worms that emerge from the ground, making me tip-toe my way down the walk to retrieve the morning paper.

But, some people love those creatures.

Following a night of rain, Rev. Janet Hunt says, she found night-crawlers all over the walk in front of her house. She didn't gag, like I might, because they brought back a welcome childhood memory.

She says when she was a child, those worms were summer's gold. When she and her siblings were young, that was the way they earned their vacation money.

Their parents set them up in business. They went out and bought them an old refrigerator and plugged it into an outlet in the garage, where the worms became bait to sell. They were stored in paper cups and tin cans. Her parents even bought a professionally-made sign- white with red lettering- advertising night crawlers for 75 cents a dozen. It leaned against the maple tree in front of their house.

And so it was, when it would storm, the four kids would be out in force-with flashlights and buckets. Forty years later, she says she can remember it like it was last night. She can still remember the gentle, steady hand it took to pick up those fat worms who had come up for air and drop them into the bucket all in one piece. And she can still feel the crick in her neck from bending over for long minutes at a time. Funny- it didn't bother her then-the wiggling worm or the dirt under her nails.

Vacationers and city-dwellers, on their way for a day's worth of fishing, would pull into their long driveway and purchase a dozen or two. Seventy-five cents at a time the money would pour in, stored in a German beer stein on the top shelf in the kitchen. The week before their family vacation, they would take down the big mug, pour the money out on the kitchen table, and divide it into four equal shares.

Here is what strikes her now: especially after reading today's text, Janet says she can't remember any dispute about the amount each child received. None of them ever accused the others of having captured fewer worms and thus was not entitled to an equal share of the money. Even more, she says there were definitely times when one or the other child was not out there with his or her flashlight. They still shared and shared alike. It never occurred to them to do otherwise.

It could have been different though, couldn't it?

Normally, in life, it is. We expect to get paid for what we do. We don't expect another will be paid the same for doing more or doing less when we are doing the same work.

That's what makes this story so unusual. The world doesn't work like it did on South Main Street where Janet grew up back in the 1970's, or in this parable. In fact, I expect that most of us can relate to those who had been out there early and who had labored hard thru the heat of the day. It comes as no wonder that they were unhappy with the "Johnny-come-late-lys," who didn't bother to show up til the day was nearly over and yet were paid the same.

It isn't fair, is it? Life isn't always fair. We see this played out all the time in family relationships. In a healthy family, no one should be loved more than the others- even if they work harder, or if they've suffered more, or achieved greater things, or obeyed more completely. No, in the world Jesus describes, the owner of the vineyard sees them all the same. In the world where Janet grew up, Mom and Dad loved all the children the same. Just like God loves us.

And, yes, the vineyard and the payroll belonged to the owner of that vineyard, after all. In the same way, Janet's folks owned the land from which the night-crawlers emerged, as well as the fridge and the garage that housed it. They purchased that sign that advertised their live bait and they made sure the electric bill was paid every month. It really was all theirs. They just gave their kids a share on rainy nights.

Like God does for us.

And so it is in the kingdom of God...and in the world where people seek to be part of making that kingdom come. First, or last, it is all God's anyway.

I wonder what change we could make in the world if we lived as though the first were last and the last were really first? I wonder if we are brave enough to experiment a little?

I try this out sometimes. Like when I go thru a drive thru that has two lines. At lunch-time. There's a whole lot of colorful human behavior to be observed then and there. So, I place my order...large unsweetened ice tea...then keep my foot lightly resting on the brake while watching the car next to me. Will we go in order? You can tell who ordered first. You can usually hear, "Three Happy Meals with milk and apple slices." And, most of the time, people are remarkably courteous, letting each other move in turn up to the window. But, every now and then, someone forgets there are others who are hungry and thirsty and have cars full of kids needing to go to the bathroom, or folks my age trying to get to work on time. And they rev up and challenge and cut me off.

I was in a continuing education class this past week. The instructor was Sky Kershner, director of the Kanawha Pastoral Counseling Center in Charleston. One of his props was a battery-operated smiley face that lights up by remote control. He puts it in his car's rear window and when someone does something obnoxious, he hits the remote and the smiley-face lights up. He says it's an unexpected alternative to the other signs people make. And, on the occasion when someone does something he appreciates, he hits the remote and voila- the smiley-face shines. It's an equal-opportunity gizmo.

The kingdom of God has a very different economy, doesn't it? Where the first is last and the last is first and new-comers and late-comers are treated the same. Maybe it's so different, we can't imagine how our lives or neighborhoods or country might change if we put it into practice.

Let's think for a moment. Close your eyes if it helps. Who are the first-place people around you? Picture them. How do you feel about them? How do you think they feel about you?

Now, think about the last-place people. Picture them. How do you feel about them? And how may they feel about you?

The good news is this: God loves us all. No matter the level of benevolence or obedience or sacrifice, we are all desired and we are all welcome in God's home. And God will keep pursuing us all until all the children are in.

*Hymn 727 Will You Let Me Be Your Servant Verses 1-3

*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

We give with gratitude for all our God has given us. In the upside down world of the Gospel, we measure our wealth not by what we have but by what we can give away. Lord, God, receive our offerings today to bless your church, your creation, and your children, wherever there is need. Amen.

*Hymn 727 Will You Let Me Be Your Servant Verses 4-6

***Blessing**

And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be upon you today and always. Amen.

***Postlude**

Announcements

The Session meets today after worship.

Next Sunday is ECCHO Sunday. We will also receive our Cents-ability contributions.

World Communion Sunday is October 2.

Add to prayers Greta Ball (If shes not already on there)