

Worship for October 13, 2024

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship

Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good;

For the Lord's steadfast love endures forever.

Who can utter the mighty doings of the Lord,
or declare all God's praise?

**Happy are those who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times.**

*Hymn 305 Come, Sing, O Church, in Joy!

Prayer of Confession

**O God, who alone can probe the depths of the heart,
you hear the prayers of the faithful;
you justify the repentant sinner.**

**Grant us the gift of humility,
that we may see our sins clearly
and refrain from judging our neighbor.**

**We make our prayer through your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.**

*Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

God pours out mercy and grace, never giving up on us, but freeing us to live lives worthy of our calling.

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel: Jesus Christ saves us from sin and sets us free to enjoy newness of life.

Know you are forgiven and be at peace. Amen.

First Reading Joel 2: 23-32

Moments With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Luke 18:9-14

Morning Message

You reach into your mailbox and pull out a stack of paper and envelopes. You find an ad for the local grocery store, a power bill, a magazine you will never read, and something different. In a stiff, thick envelope, with your name in an embellished script, is an invitation. How intriguing. What could it be?

When that happens at our house, I open everything else before I open the mysterious envelope. I let the suspense build. Maybe it's a wedding invitation...or a graduation announcement...or an invitation to a party for a famous person coming to town. I'm still hoping for that one.

Imagine how you would feel to receive a personal invitation to join Jesus in his life and work, to be a disciple, walking alongside him daily. Sit with that a moment. How would you answer?

In our text, the man we have always called "the rich, young ruler" kneels in sincerity before Jesus and asks the central question of the faith: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?"

This man is apparently a Jew and Jesus reminds him that he knows the Law, the Ten Commandments, he has been raised in the tradition of the Torah. And the young man says, "I get that, Jesus. I have kept them faithfully my whole life long."

Yesterday I was scrolling though Facebook and came upon a livestreamed worship service from Temple Immanuel in New York City. It must be one of those old temples ornately decorated and packed with a throng of men and women who had gathered for the final worship service of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the most holy of the high holy days in the Jewish faith. It was glorious. There was a female rabbi, a cantor, an orchestra, and lots of little children. I just caught the last

fifteen minutes or so and was sorry when the broadcast ended before the blowing of the shofar, the ram's horn. The shofar represents God's voice going forth in the world. This is a tradition that has been practiced for as long as God claimed the Israelites as his own. The shofar sounded at creation, at the revelation of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments. This tradition is rich and deep.

Jesus credits this young man before him as someone who is a faithful practitioner of the Jewish faith, yet one whose education is incomplete.

What the text says next is perhaps one of the most revealing moments in all the gospels: we get a glimpse into the heart of Jesus. Jesus, looking at him, loved him. The text doesn't say he looks at him with pity. It doesn't say Jesus looks at him with disapproval. No. Jesus looked at him the same way he looks at us: Jesus loved him.

Jesus extends an invitation to come and follow him. But not before he points out that the young man lacks one thing. Jesus says, "Go sell your stuff, and come back ready to travel, ready to bring people into the fold so they, too, can have eternal life."

How would you respond? Run back to your house and put a for sale sign in the yard? Call Goodwill or Habitat and ask them to send a truck?

What does this young man do? Does he ask Jesus to give him a few days to get his affairs in order? No. After hearing how much it costs to become a disciple, the man slumps his shoulders and sadly walks away.

Many others have been called to follow Jesus by this time. And, according to scripture, they have left kith and kin, their jobs, their comforts, their possessions, and have become disciples. This may be the only example of someone refusing the call to discipleship in all of scripture.

This man rejected Jesus. Because to follow Jesus meant he would pay too high a price. He would have to give up his wealth. And that is no small thing.

And I can really identify with the problem. Perhaps this man had a family. What would happen to them? We know he had a prominent position in the community. He would have to give that up. He probably enjoyed more creature comforts than the common folk. No doubt he had tickets on the 50 yard line of the sports arena.

And Jesus tells him to unburden himself of all these distractions if he wants to find true treasure: life that never ends.

The gospel, the New Testament scripture, is our witness to just how risky it can be to be met by Jesus. I think, instead of criticizing this poor fellow, we might give him credit for being honest.

I read a story recently, a first-hand account of a man who had converted to Catholicism from the Evangelical branch of the Christian faith. He spoke about how much it had changed him. He intended to live out his faith by applying those things he had been taught in his Confirmation classes. He said it was not easy. In fact, at times, he knew he was making different choices than he did before he converted. He lost some friends. He lost some business contacts. His faith did cost something. But, it was worth the cost for the peace he felt in his heart. Jesus gave his life for him. He would gratefully give up something for Jesus.

Clarence Jordan, the renowned preacher of the social gospel, an African-American, is said to have once visited a large integrated church in the deep south in the 1960's. Well, you can imagine how unusual that would have been.

Jordan is said to have asked the old country preacher how he had accomplished this. "How did you get the church this way?"

"What way?" the preacher asked.

Jordan went on to explain his surprise at finding a church so thoroughly integrated, not only with blacks and whites, but rich folk and poor folk all in one warm, hospitable fellowship.

The preacher said, “Well, when our preacher left our small church, I went to the deacons and said, “I’ll be the preacher. The first Sunday as preacher, I opened the book and read, “As many of you as has been baptized into Jesus has put on Jesus and there is no longer any Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, males or females, because all of you is one in Jesus.’

Then I closed the book and I said, “If you are one with Jesus you are one with all kind of folks. And if you ain’t, well, you ain’t.”

Jordan asked what happened next.

“Well,” the preacher said, “the deacons took me into the back room and told me they didn’t want to hear that kind of preaching no more.”

Jordan asked what he did then, “I fired them deacons,” the preacher roared.

“Then what happened?” asked Jordan.

“Well,” said the old preacher, “I preached that church down to four. Not long after that, it started growing. And it grew. And I found out that revival sometimes don’t mean bringin’ people in, but gettin’ people out that don’t dare to love Jesus.”

Friends, I think that is the issue before us today, the question the text is asking of us:

Do we dare to love Jesus with our whole heart, and soul, and mind, and strength?
Or do we need to let go of something, lose something, in order to deepen our relationship with Jesus?

Listen to the wisdom of Saint Francis of Assisi:

Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred let me sow love.

Where there is injury, pardon.

Where there is doubt, faith.

Where there is despair, hope.

Where there is darkness, light.

Where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand.
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is pardoning that we are pardoned,
it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

May it be so for all of us. Amen.

*Hymn 475 Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

*Affirmation of Faith A Declaration of Faith, PCUSA, 1985

We are certain that Jesus lives.

**He lives as God with us,
touching all of human life with the presence of God.**

He lives as one of us with God.

**Because he shares our humanity,
He has bound us to himself in love.**

We declare that Jesus is Lord.

**We have an advocate in
the innermost life of God.**

**His resurrection is a decisive victory
over the powers that deform and destroy human life.**

His lordship is hidden.

**The world appears to be
dominated by people and systems that do not acknowledge his rule.**

But his Lordship is real.

**It demands our loyalty and sets us free from all the lesser lords who threaten
us.**

**We maintain that ultimate sovereignty
now belongs to Jesus Christ.**

In every sphere of life,

Jesus is Lord.

**He has been from the beginning.
He will be Lord at the end.
Even now he is Lord.**

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns
Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Gifts of Tithe and Offering
Offertory

*Hymn 607 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

*Hymn 36 For the Fruit of all Creation

*Blessing

May the God of endurance and encouragement, grant you to live in such harmony with one another that with one voice we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Go now in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

*Postlude