

Worship for August 1, 2021

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship

We come to hear the stories of God's people in ages past.

We come to hear the stories that are also about God's people here and now.

O God, give us ears to hear and eyes to see,

and hearts to receive God's will for our lives.

*Hymn All Creatures of Our God and King *Glory to God 15, verses 1-4*

Prayer of Confession Psalm 51:1-12

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out our transgressions.

Wash us thoroughly from our iniquity, and cleanse us from our sin.

For we know our transgressions, and our sin is ever before us.

Against you, you alone, have we sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

Indeed, we were born guilty, sinners when our mothers conceived us.

You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach us wisdom in our secret hearts.

Purge us with hyssop, and we shall be clean; wash us, and we will be whiter than snow.

Let us hear with joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

Hide your face from our sins, and blot out all our iniquities.

Take, O Take Me As I Am *Glory to God 698*

Assurance of Forgiveness

God will create in us a clean heart and put a new and right spirit within us.

God will never cast us away from God's presence, and will not take the Holy Spirit from us.

God will restore to us the joy of our salvation, and sustain in us a willing spirit.

Alleluia! Amen.

Old Testament Reading Exodus 16: 2-4, 9-15

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading John 6:24-35

Morning Message

One of the most influential minister mentors in my life was Gray Hampton. Many of you knew him and appreciated his gentle ways, his service to the Church, and his vision for developing a retirement community that would eventually become The Woodlands. He and his wife, Julia, were great cheerleaders for Huntington, they were patrons of the arts, loved to travel, were life-long learners and excellent teachers. They especially loved young people and seemingly never tired of encouraging them in all their efforts.

Gray died due to a chronic illness. He spent about two weeks in the hospital before his death. He was in and out of consciousness. Even so, there were periods of wakefulness that allowed him and his family to share some special moments together.

After his death, as we were visiting with Julia, she said that it was during one of these brief occasions that Gray took her hand and said he was sorry if he had disappointed her in any way. She asked why on earth he would think that. They had enjoyed a rich and full life. They were blessed. Gray replied saying he had never achieved many of the marks of success. He had never been the Senior Minister at a flagship church, had not earned a doctorate, never held a high-paying job.

His wife of many decades expressed her love for him, assured him that she had always counted it her high honor to be called his wife, and recalled the abundant blessings of their life together. And, told him that if he had any doubt about leaving his mark on the earth, he should see the crowd gathered in the ICU waiting room.

In our text, the disciples are debating who had the most impressive resume and what rank and position each should have in Jesus' administration.

Jesus overhears the conversation and seizing upon a teachable moment, sits down with them and explains the way he sees greatness. And Jesus' vision of greatness is not the same as the way the world sees it.

He says, in his realm, whoever wants to be first must be last and must become the servant of all. In Jesus' realm, material acquisition and wealth, position, power and influence were replaced with service, humility, self-sacrifice, compassion.

To further drive home his point, Jesus took a little child in his arms and tells them. "Whoever welcomes one such child, welcomes me." He goes on to say, that they not only welcome Jesus, but the One who sent Jesus to live and labor among them.

In Jesus' day, children had no agency, no rights, no voice. They were completely vulnerable. Powerless. To be compared to a child would not be a compliment.

Sometimes we think that our forebears had no ego-needs, no desire to acquire things like wealth, status, power, but we would be wrong. Wherever two or more people exist, there is a pecking order. It is part of our fallen human nature.

Jimmy Buffet wrote a memoir titled, *A Pirate Looks at 50*. In it he writes about his unsatisfied cravings.

“I sang and worked on a fishing boat, when totally crazy, did a lot of dope, met the right girl, made another record, had a hit, bought a boat and sailed away to the Caribbean.

I started another band, worked on the road, had my second and last hit, bought a house in Aspen, started spending summers in New England, got married, broke my leg three times in one year, had a baby girl, made more records, bought a bigger boat, and sailed away to St. Bart’s. I got separated from the right girl, sold the boat, sold the house in Aspen, moved back to Key West, worked the road, and made more records.”

Another band, another house, a bigger boat. It does not go away, this sense that there is something better out there, and we will be something better and more satisfied when we just have this other thing. Then, life will be the greatest. We will be the greatest.

John Claypool is an Episcopal priest and renowned preacher. He says he grew up with a profound sense of “nobodiness.” His says that his parents meant to encourage and inspire but, the phrase he heard over and over as a young child was, “If you are ever going to amount to anything, you are going to have to make something of yourself.”

He fell into and succeeded in the game of competition-trying to satisfy desires for accomplishments and admiration. He became teacher’s pet, then he became a safety patrol, and then an athlete. Nothing wrong with any of that. Except that, to John, people became objects, They either contributed to his success or hampered it. He says he lived that way until he was 35 years old. Exploiting people on his way up the success ladder.

What happened then was that he became a part of a ministers peer group. As sometimes happens, as people grow comfortable with each other, they begin to risk showing the vulnerable parts of themselves they wouldn’t reveal to just anyone, but, to people they trusted.

So, one day, John confessed to how he had been living. How he continued to strive for worth. He confessed that he was wrung out with the constant competition- always proving how important and indispensable he was.

Then, he says, a word of grace came from the man in the group with whom he felt the least affinity.

“We need to feel the truth of the gospel down in our guts. When Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, “You are the light of the world, he just declared, “You are. It is your birthright. There is nothing to achieve. By birthright, we are persons of great worth. Our worth is not something out there to be acquired, but something in here, to be claimed.”

Claypool says this was a life-changing moment. His agenda shifted from attainment to awareness. He realized that for him to live fully, he was going to have to win the war of the cravings. He simply could not acquire enough of anything to feel worth and significance. It is futile. Worth does not come from what you can attain but from gratitude with what you already have. It is not a tangible possession, but a deep and profound truth that yields satisfaction.

And, when we let that truth sink deep down within us, we are assured of God's love for us, Christ's sacrifice for us, and his instruction to go be a servant, welcome children as if welcoming Jesus, and to find meaning in supporting the struggling and laying aside our biggest ego needs.

One of Gray Hampton's gifts to the Church was his monologues of bible characters. He would don a costume and entertain after dinner audiences, appear in Sunday School classes, and was known to give sermons dressed like Mary and Joseph's donkey. His goal was to present the nativity story in a different character's voice each year.

Who does that? Someone who swaps a pulpit robe for a fuzzy gray donkey costume, makes his voice sound a little like Mr. Ed of TV fame, and invites us all into the old, old story.

Affirmation of Faith
Gloria Patri

The Apostles' Creed

Glory to God p. 35
Glory to God 581

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

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings
Prayer of Dedication

O God, we share these gifts in the spirit of those who shared their loaves and fishes on that day long ago. We ask that you take and use these gifts to feed all your creation-to produce seed and grain, wisdom and strength, compassion and peace. May our efforts help to restore wholeness in all the places where malnourishment exists- in body, mind, spirit, and circumstance. Amen.

*Hymn

Christ Be Beside Me

Glory to God 702

*Blessing

Go out from here and live lives worthy of the one calling we all share.
In humility, gentleness, and patience,
speak what is true and loving
and so grow into the unity that is ours in Christ.

And may God the creator, reshape your hearts;
may Christ Jesus, the bread of life, sustain you always;
and may the Holy Spirit unite you in the bond of peace.

Laughingbird Liturgical Resources

*Postlude

Announcements

Ice cream social announcement from July 25 bulletin

We will observe the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper August 15.