

Sunday, September 11, 2022 – Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

The grumbling of the religious leaders in today's gospel is actually our holy hope: This Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. That our God seeks and saves the lost is not only a holy hope, it is our only hope. As the writer of 1 Timothy reminds us, "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Thanks be to God.

Prayer of the Day

O God, overflowing with mercy and compassion, you lead back to yourself all those who go astray. Preserve your people in your loving care, that we may reject whatever is contrary to you and may follow all things that sustain our life in your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Jeremiah 4:11-12, 22-28

The sinfulness of the people will surely bring their destruction. God's searing wind of judgment, in the form of a massive foreign army, will reduce the land to its primeval state of waste and void, as it was at the beginning of Genesis.

¹¹At that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem: A hot wind comes from me out of the bare heights in the desert toward my poor people, not to winnow or cleanse—¹²a wind too strong for that. Now it is I who speak in judgment against them.

²²"For my people are foolish,
they do not know me;
they are stupid children,
they have no understanding.
They are skilled in doing evil,
but do not know how to do good."

²³I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;
and to the heavens, and they had no light.

²⁴I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,
and all the hills moved to and fro.

²⁵I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,
and all the birds of the air had fled.

²⁶I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,
and all its cities were laid in ruins
before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

²⁷For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation;

yet I will not make a full end.

²⁸Because of this the earth shall mourn,
and the heavens above grow black;
for I have spoken, I have purposed;
I have not relented nor will I turn back.

Psalm 14

¹Fools say in their hearts, “There | is no God.”
They are corrupt, every deed is vile; there is no one who does | any good.

²**The LORD looks down from heaven up- | on us all,
to see if there is anyone who is wise, who seeks | after God.**

³They have all proved faithless; all alike | have turned bad;
there is none who does good; | no, not one.

⁴**Have they no knowledge, all those | evildoers
who eat up my people like bread and do not call up- | on the LORD?**

⁵See how they trem- | ble with fear,
because God is in the company | of the righteous.

⁶**Your aim is to confound the plans of | the afflicted,
but the LORD| is their refuge.**

⁷Oh, that Israel’s deliverance would come | out of Zion!

When the LORD restores the fortunes of the people, Jacob will rejoice and Israel | will be glad.

Second Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

The letters to Timothy and Titus are called the pastoral epistles because they contain advice especially intended for leaders in the church. Here the mercy shown to Paul, who once persecuted the church, is cited as evidence that even the most unworthy may become witnesses to the grace of God.

¹²I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, ¹³even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel: Luke 15:1-10

Jesus tells two stories that suggest a curious connection between the lost being found and sinners repenting. God takes the initiative to find sinners, each of whom is so precious to God that their recovery brings joy in heaven.

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus.] ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³So he told them this parable: ⁴“Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

⁸“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Prayers of Intercession

As scattered grains of wheat are gathered together into one bread, so let us gather our prayers for the church, those in need, and all of God's good creation, saying "God of grace," and responding, "hear our prayer."

A brief silence.

Your people receive mercy and your grace overflows in our lives. Fill your church with faith and love, and give understanding hearts to those who work to strengthen our ecumenical and interreligious commitments. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Your creation groans as it suffers the impacts of pollution and lack of care. As the seasons change, renew in us the will to protect plants, animals, and habitats. Bless us with bountiful harvests that all may share. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Your world is shattered and the nations rage. Remember us in your mercy. Teach wisdom to our elected leaders so that we know peace in our world, peace in our homes, and peace in our hearts. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Your children wander homeless and the hungry cry for bread. Seek out those who are lost or lonely, anxious or depressed, or struggling with addiction or illness. Provide for those in any need (*especially*). God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Your work is done in this congregation with our hands, feet, voices, minds, and hearts. Build up the ministries of this community (*local ministries and partnerships may be named*), that we serve our neighbors and welcome the stranger in your name. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Your blessed saints who have died now rest in your presence. Give us thankful hearts for those who have been examples of faith in our lives, and receive us with joy when we come to share eternal life with you. God of grace, **hear our prayer.**

Gathered together in the sweet communion of the Holy Spirit, gracious God, we offer these and all our prayers to you; through Jesus Christ, our Saviour.

Amen.

A reflection for this Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost...

Lost and Found

Today's readings give witness that God has a heart for losers. God reconciles with the idol-worshipping people of Israel. The risen Lord calls the violent, blasphemous persecutor, Paul. The faithful shepherd rescues the wandering sheep and carries it home. The woman who lost one of her ten silver coins searches for it until she finds it. Similarly, God doesn't abandon people even when people abandon God. The cross and resurrection testify to God's faithfulness in that regard. God rescues strays one by one, making the first move to find the lost and create new hearts in them. When (in the first reading) Moses holds God to promises already made in the covenant, the breathtaking picture emerges of a God so committed to relationship that God is influenced—changed—by what people need and ask. This faithfulness of God, shared with overflowing grace in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus, is patient, forgiving, energetic, and ready to celebrate. Take the bread and cup—Jesus hosts the worshiping assembly again this week to welcome sinners and eat with them! Suddenly, "sinner" is no longer the best name for us. Try "guest," "graced," "gifted," "loved," and "empowered." Then it's time to follow Jesus out of the gathered assembly and into the world as apprentice sleuths for missing persons, bent on finding the lost and the broken and giving them an invitation to come home.

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