

Sunday, October 23, 2022 – Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

Genuine repentance and pretentious piety stand in stark contrast in the gospel and all around us. All creation stands in need of God's forgiveness. Keep the faith. God's people shall be accounted righteous for Jesus' sake. Our God is merciful to sinners. For this we worship and glorify God forever.

Prayer of the Day

Holy God, our righteous judge, daily your mercy surprises us with everlasting forgiveness. Strengthen our hope in you, and grant that all the peoples of the earth may find their glory in you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Joel 2:23-32

The prophet interprets a plague of locusts as a sign of God's judgment. Today's reading points beyond the judgment to a day when prosperity will return, when God's spirit will be poured out on the people, and when everyone who calls on God's name will be saved.

²³O children of Zion, be glad
and rejoice in the LORD your God;
for he has given the early rain for your vindication,
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the later rain, as before.

²⁴The threshing floors shall be full of grain,
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

²⁵I will repay you for the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent against you.

²⁶You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

²⁷You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.

²⁸Then afterward
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.

²⁹Even on the male and female slaves,
in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

³⁰I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ³²Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Psalm 65

¹You are to be praised, O | God, in Zion;
to you shall vows | be fulfilled.

²**To you, the one | who answers prayer,
to you all | flesh shall come.**

³Our sins are strong- | er than we are,
but you blot out | our transgressions.

⁴**Happy are they whom you choose and draw to your | courts to dwell there!
They will be satisfied by the beauty of your house, by the holiness | of your temple.**

⁵Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness, O God of | our salvation,
O hope of all the ends of the earth and of the oceans | far away.

⁶**You make firm the mountains | by your power;
you are girded a- | bout with might.**

⁷You still the roaring | of the seas,
the roaring of their waves, and the clamor | of the peoples.

⁸**Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your | marvelous signs;
you make the dawn and the dusk to | sing for joy.**

⁹You visit the earth and water it abundantly; you make it very plenteous; the river of God is | full of water.

You prepare the grain, for so you provide | for the earth.

¹⁰**You drench the furrows and smooth | out the ridges;
with heavy rain you soften the ground and | bless its increase.**

¹¹You crown the year | with your goodness,
and your paths over- | flow with plenty.

¹²**May the fields of the wilderness be | rich for grazing,
and the hills be | clothed with joy.**

¹³May the meadows cover themselves with flocks, and the valleys cloak them- | selves with grain;
let them shout for | joy and sing.

Second Reading: 2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18

The conclusion of this letter to a young minister offers a final perspective on life from one who faced death. Though others let him down, Paul was sure of his faith in the Lord, who stood by him and lent him strength.

⁶As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

¹⁶At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! ¹⁷But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. ¹⁸The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel: Luke 18:9-14

The coming reign of God will involve unexpected reversals of fortune with judgment rooted in mercy. Jesus tells a parable in which the one who humbles himself is exalted and the one who exalts his own righteousness is humbled.

⁹[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Prayers of Intercession

In gratitude and humility, let us join together in prayer on behalf of all of God's creation, saying "hear us, O God," and responding, "your mercy is great."

A brief silence.

God of mercy, you are in the midst of us and we are called by your name. Inspire your church to serve and love all people with the unceasing grace you extend to us. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of all creation, you formed a world where even the sparrow finds a home. Preserve the beauty and diversity of all creatures with whom we share the earth. Lead us to protect all living things. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of peace, you are an ever-present help in time of trouble. Rescue families and nations torn apart by violence and warfare (*especially*). Unite all people toward common goals of reconciliation and peace for every person. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of hope, you stand with the suffering and give strength. Comfort your people filled with fear or anger, anxiety or shame. Bring healing to all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit (*especially*). Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of restoration, you call us to trust in you and not ourselves alone. Make this congregation a community of humility and repentance, ready to encounter you in love and follow in your ways. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

God of eternal life, to you be the glory forever. We give you thanks for (*James of Jerusalem* and) all who have fought the good fight, finished the race, kept the faith, and now live with you. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

With grateful hearts we commend our spoken and silent prayers to you, O God; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

A reflection for this Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost...

God Be Merciful

We may expect the religious insider to be blessed, the moral person to be right with God. But as is so often the case, Jesus' parable for today sweeps away conventional expectations. Jesus surprises the disciples and us when he says it's not the Pharisee but rather the tax collector, that morally suspect, second-class citizen, who goes home "justified," right with God (Luke 18:14). Here is a strong reminder for those of us who are church "insiders." We are sinners who beg for God's mercy, utterly dependent on God's forgiveness and love—not merely for ourselves but for all in God's creation.

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