

Sunday, September 15, 2024 – Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

Three weeks ago, we heard Peter's confession of faith as told in John's gospel. This week we hear Mark's version, when Peter says, "You are the Messiah." In John, the stumbling block is Jesus' invitation to eat his flesh, given for the life of the world. In Mark too the scandal has to do with Jesus' words about his own coming death, and here Peter himself stumbles over Jesus' words. But Jesus is anointed (the meaning of *messiah*) in Mark only on the way to the cross (14:3); so we are anointed in baptism with the sign of the cross.

Prayer of the Day

O God, through suffering and rejection you bring forth our salvation, and by the glory of the cross you transform our lives. Grant that for the sake of the gospel we may turn from the lure of evil, take up our cross, and follow your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Proverbs 1:20-33

²⁰Wisdom cries out in the street;
in the squares she raises her voice.
²¹At the busiest corner she cries out;
at the entrance of the city gates she speaks:
²²"How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?
How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing
and fools hate knowledge?
²³Give heed to my reproof;
I will pour out my thoughts to you;
I will make my words known to you.
²⁴Because I have called and you refused,
have stretched out my hand and no one heeded,
²⁵and because you have ignored all my counsel
and would have none of my reproof,
²⁶I also will laugh at your calamity;
I will mock when panic strikes you,
²⁷when panic strikes you like a storm,
and your calamity comes like a whirlwind,
when distress and anguish come upon you.
²⁸Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer;
they will seek me diligently, but will not find me.
²⁹Because they hated knowledge
and did not choose the fear of the LORD,

³⁰would have none of my counsel,
and despised all my reproof,
³¹therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way
and be sated with their own devices.
³²For waywardness kills the simple,
and the complacency of fools destroys them;
³³but those who listen to me will be secure
and will live at ease, without dread of disaster.”

Psalm 19

¹The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky proclaims its maker’s handiwork.
²**One day tells its tale to another,
and one night imparts knowledge to another.**
³Although they have no words or language,
and their voices are not heard,
⁴**their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world,
where God has pitched a tent for the sun.**
⁵It comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber;
it rejoices like a champion to run its course.
⁶**It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens and runs about to the end of it again;
nothing is hidden from its burning heat.**
⁷The teaching of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure and gives wisdom to the simple.
⁸**The statutes of the LORD are just and rejoice the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear and gives light ¹ to the eyes.**
⁹The fear of the LORD is clean and endures forever;
the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
¹⁰**More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.**
¹¹By them also is your servant enlightened,
and in keeping them there is great reward.
¹²**Who can detect one’s own offenses?
Cleanse me from my secret faults.**
¹³Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me;
then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.
¹⁴**Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.**

Second Reading: James 3:1-12

¹Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. ²For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. ³If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. ⁴Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. ⁵So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! ⁶And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. ⁷For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, ⁸but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. ¹¹Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? ¹²Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Gospel: Mark 8:27-38

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Prayers of Intercession

Drawn together in the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray with confidence for the church, God's good creation, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

We pray for the church throughout the world. Form us into communities of forgiveness and grace. Help us to notice where you are calling us into new relationships, and give us courage to embrace the uncomfortable and unfamiliar. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for the earth and all its inhabitants. Protect lands at risk of wildfire and heal dying forests. Where fire brings destruction, raise up new growth. Guide us in tending precarious ecosystems. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for those who govern nations, tribes, and cities. Open them to the cries of people in need. Direct them in shaping policies that prioritize the health and well-being of all who struggle with hunger and housing insecurity. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for all who are ill, all who are lonely or anxious, and all who grieve. Draw them close to you and soothe them with the promise of your enduring love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We pray for teachers, professors, librarians, school administrators, staff, and all who support the education of young people. Sustain them as they shape learning communities, rooted in equity and authenticity. We pray for children of all ages in their learning. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We remember our beloved dead, who with the great cloud of witnesses bear witness to your saving grace. Accompany us in our pilgrimage of faith, that we too place our hope and trust in you. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We entrust these and all our prayers to you, holy God, in the name of your beloved child, Jesus Christ, our Savior.

Amen.

A reflection for this seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost

An Unexpected Kind of Messiah

Today we hear from three teachers. The prophet Isaiah calls himself a teacher, one whose words sustain weary people. James warns about foolish and hurtful use of our tongues, which should be used to “bless the Lord and Father,” but often are used to “curse those who are made in the likeness of God.” The final voice in the trio is Jesus, the teacher, who keeps the disciples quiet about any Messiah identity but speaks openly about his own suffering, death, and resurrection. Peter tries to counsel Jesus that no one willingly chooses to go along with that kind of plan. Nobody likes a loser. But Jesus responds that Peter has lost sight of what is most important in life. Jesus teaches the disciples that they will lose their life for the sake of the gospel.

How does the Holy Spirit move in, through, before, and after worship to sustain weary people with the word and sacraments? How can we make spaces for silence, art, and song so that people living through suffering and facing death can breathe, see, and hear God’s presence with them? In what ways do we make the same mistake as the disciples did, expecting a Messiah but then setting our visions on human rather than on divine things?

Jesus invites people of faith and those who doubt Jesus’ way to engage rather than avoid, conquer, or escape. What practices will help worshipers today to imagine the ways they are being called to “lose” their life in order to save it? From what does Jesus want to free people so that they will be able to pick up a different kind of burden and follow him? Then and now, Jesus invites followers on the way of the cross—a path of daily learning, dying, and new life.



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