

Sunday, November 5, 2023 – Twenty-Third Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

Micah declares God's condemnation of those who abhor justice. Jesus warns against hypocrisy. Paul urges the Thessalonians to lead a life worthy of God. Called to be humble servants, we gather for worship, seeking justice and welcoming all people to share the banquet of life.

Prayer of the Day

O God, generous and supreme, your loving Son lived among us, instructing us in the ways of humility and justice. Continue to ease our burdens, and lead us to serve alongside of him, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Joshua 3:7-17

⁷The LORD said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. ⁸You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'" ⁹Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the LORD your God." ¹⁰Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: ¹¹the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. ¹²So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the LORD, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap."

¹⁴When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. ¹⁵Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, ¹⁶the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.

Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37

¹Give thanks to the LORD, for the LORD is good,
for God's mercy endures forever.

²**Let the redeemed of the LORD proclaim
that God redeemed them from the hand of the foe,**

³gathering them in from the lands;
from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

⁴**Some wandered in desert wastes;
they found no path to a city where they might dwell.**

⁵They were hungry and thirsty;
their spirits languished within them.

⁶**Then in their trouble they cried to the LORD,
and you delivered them from their distress.**

⁷You led them on a straight path
to go to a city where they might dwell.

³³**You change rivers into deserts,
and water-springs into thirsty ground,**

³⁴fruitful land into salty waste,
because of the wickedness of those who dwell there.

³⁵**You change deserts into pools of water
and dry land into water-springs.**

³⁶You settle the hungry there,
and they establish a city to dwell in.

³⁷**They sow fields and plant vineyards,
and bring in a fruitful harvest.**

Second Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

⁹You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. ¹¹As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, ¹²urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

¹³We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

Gospel: Matthew 23:1-12

¹Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ²“The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat; ³therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father—the one in heaven. ¹⁰Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹²All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Prayers and introductions from
SundaysAndSeasons.com

Prayers of Intercession

Let us turn our hearts to God, our breath and life, as we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

Holy God, encourage and uphold your church around the world. We thank you for your Word, which we receive as holy. Lead bishops, pastors, deacons, and all members of your church in lives worthy of you. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, revive your creation where it is neglected, misused, or abused. Bolster advocates in eco-justice organizations. Nurture endeavors that aid communities affected by hazardous waste, poor air, and polluted waters. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Righteous God, accompany our nation as it prepares for elections. Protect voters, voting officials, poll workers, and journalists. Guide leaders around the world, that fair and wise decisions show care for all, especially those society has forgotten or mistreated. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Nurturing One, bring relief to those carrying heavy burdens. We pray for those in difficult home situations, for foster children, and for all who are in jails or prison. Strengthen those burdened by chronic pain, grief, or other illness. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Welcoming God, accompany those in new and unfamiliar places who need an invitation to community. We pray especially for any who have recently moved to start their first year of college, a new job, or a missionary position in another land. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, you unite all the faithful in at your heavenly feast. We remember your saints gathered in your eternal presence, especially all who have died in the past year. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

We offer our spoken prayers and those held in our hearts trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

A reflection for this 23rd Sunday after Pentecost

If We Honored One Another

In October 1517 Martin Luther's Ninety-five Theses became public. It was a protest against the injustices he saw being committed by the church and its authorities. In today's readings we learn injustices were committed by the people in charge during biblical times as well, and times haven't changed. But while hypocrisy, bribery, and injustice seem a constant throughout our history, God's saving word is an even greater constant and a reason to thank God.

Luther, in his explanation of the fourth commandment, said we are honor not only our parents but also "others in authority." It makes sense to think of the commandment this way. Luther believed that honoring our parents and those in authority was akin to honoring God. But Luther doesn't stop there. It isn't enough for us to honor those with authority over us; they in turn are to honor us by providing for our physical and spiritual needs.

What would the world look like if we simply honored one another? If we really cared about caring for one another? It sounds like a utopian idea, but we shouldn't give up on it too easily. The church is and should be a resource for spreading the gospel, and while good works don't get us into heaven they are a tangible expression of the gospel's message.

It's easy to focus on what's wrong with people today. We are good at pointing fingers. But today's readings should prompt us to look at how we participate, as Paul puts it, in a life worthy of God, who calls us into God's kingdom and glory. God calls us into the kingdom through love and brings us to it through grace. How can your congregation give thanks for that amazing gift?



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