

Sunday, October 1, 2023 – Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

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Introduction

Jesus' parable about two sons who don't do what they say reveals surprises in the reign of God. In the reading from Ezekiel the people claim the ways of the Lord are unfair, while God offers repentance and new life. Paul urges us to look to Christ as a model of humility, putting the interests of others above our own. Nourished by the broken bread and shared cup, we offer our lives for the sake of our needy world.

Prayer of the Day

God of love, giver of life, you know our frailties and failings. Give us your grace to overcome them, keep us from those things that harm us, and guide us in the way of salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

First Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

¹From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ²The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?" ³But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16

¹Hear my teaching, ¹ O my people;
incline your ears to the words ¹ of my mouth.

²**I will open my mouth ¹ in a parable;**
I will declare the mysteries of ¹ ancient times—

³that which we have heard and known, and what our fore- ¹ bears have told us,
we will not hide ¹ from their children.

⁴**We will recount to generations to come the praiseworthy deeds and the power ¹ of the LORD,**
and the wonderful works ¹ God has done.

¹²God worked marvels in the sight ^l of their ancestors,
in the land of Egypt, in the ^l field of Zoan,
¹³**splitting open the sea and letting ^l them pass through;**
making the waters stand ^l up like walls;
¹⁴leading them with a ^l cloud by day,
and all the night with a ^l glow of fire;
¹⁵**splitting the rocks ^l in the wilderness**
and giving them drink as ^l from the deep;
¹⁶bringing streams out ^l of a rock,
making them flow down ^l like a river.

Second Reading: Philippians 2:1-13

¹If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

¹²Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Gospel: Matthew 21:23-32

²³When [Jesus] entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" ²⁴Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' ²⁶But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." ²⁷So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

Prayers of Intercession

Remembering the caring and generous works of God, we pray for the church, creation, and the needs of our neighbors.

A brief silence.

We put our trust in you as we pray for the church. Give bishops, pastors, deacons, and teachers the gifts of wisdom and discernment. Be with them in bold truth and faithful witness. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Lead us in your truth as we pray for creation. Empower us to look to the interests of others as we make choices that impact the environment. Summon us to be advocates for healthy waterways, habitats, and air. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Lead us in justice as we pray for those in government, the military, and other positions of authority (*local and national leaders may be named*). Give them humble and willing hearts, looking to the needs of others. We pray also for our enemies. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Trusting your goodness, we pray for all caregivers and people who are sick or suffering in any way (*especially*). Give them encouragement and consolation in your presence. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Teach us your paths as we pray for this congregation. Be at work in us and unite us in your love as we labor together for the sake of the gospel. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

We give thanks for all the saints who died secure in the knowledge of salvation. Keep us fearless in our faith and certain of your resurrection. Merciful God,

receive our prayer.

Remember us according to your steadfast love as we offer these and the prayers of our heart, trusting in your compassion made known through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

A reflection for this Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

An Invitation to Grace

It is so easy and so tempting to build ourselves up at the expense of others. "I can't imagine ever doing that." "How can people live like that?" "Who would do such a thing?" At some point we all think or say these sorts of things. Like it or not, we use these words to comfort ourselves at the expense of others. These words are a reminder that all people stand in need of God's grace.

Each of this day's readings shows us this reality. In the parable of the two sons, Jesus invites us to choose between two sons when neither fully does the will of their father. Here Jesus makes the point that we are all equally in need of God's grace. Ezekiel proclaims God's invitation, "Turn, then, and live" (Ezek. 18:32). This is an invitation that extends to all people, from a God deeply desiring a loving and life-giving relationship with humanity.

In Philippians, we are reminded of Jesus' act of grace on the cross, emptying himself, becoming sin so that all creation might be redeemed through him. In response, we discover a vision of the day in which all creation speaks with a unified voice, declaring Jesus Christ is Lord.

This is a day of confession and forgiveness. We confess our need for God, our distance from God, and our failures before God. In response, to our joy, we discover again the grace of God outpoured. All humans are in need of God's grace; God extends grace to all, and one day we will confess that salvation as one people. All of today's readings reveal the way in which all humans are equal in the eyes of God.



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