

Trinity Sunday

Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31 - Wisdom is not anything new. Today's reading reminds us that wisdom existed before the foundation of the earth. Yahweh possessed wisdom at the beginning of his way, even before the process of creation. Wisdom is superior to all earthly things and wisdom invites us to the paths of nobility, integrity, and fidelity.

Romans 5:1-5 - Those in Christ have received peace with God, access to God, and hope! As a result we can live with daily confidence – even when life is difficult. These attributes (peace, access, and hope) allow suffering to develop perseverance, which in turn develops character, and ultimately strengthens our hope.

John 16:12-15 - Jesus was not oblivious to the confusion of his disciples. He was aware that too much “up-front” instruction could be mind-boggling. As a result Jesus encourages them that when the time is right, the Holy Spirit would reveal and guide them into all truth.

There's No Place Like Hope!

Everyone loves a party! We decorate, wear our finest clothing, prepare special meals, and celebrate the occasion. But not all of life is a party. We go to work, pay bills, help children with homework, and weed the yard. It is those day-to-day routines that establish the infrastructure that supports and sustains life. The same is true in our spiritual life and the life of the Church.

The season we are entering is called Ordinary Time. Ordinary time gives us the opportunity to put down deeper roots – to demonstrate in our daily living the special gifts given to us during the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost.

In his epistle to the Romans, Saint Paul gives us an example of the importance of Ordinary Time... “we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God... and also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us...” Hope is the gift of Ordinary Time – and there's nothing ordinary about hope!

Prayer:

Almighty God, by Your grace, keep me steadfast in faith and worship, and help me to see You in every season of life and in the life hereafter; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 3 Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 55:10-13 - You could read this passage, verses 10-13, in chapter 55 first, making it clear that God's word will do what it is supposed to do; bring life and abundance. It will not return empty. What does that look like? God's word goes out from his prophets and texts of Scripture offering invitations to buy what they can't afford. It makes promises of covenants, agreements between God and his people. When his word produces abundance and fruit, his people see that he will pardon and that "his ways, not our ways, his plans not our plans" and "as high as heavens are above the earth, so are his ways above our ways."

If you read Isaiah 55 this way, you see the transformational power God's word has for you and me.

1 Corinthians 15:51-58 - Paul uses mysterious language to describe what will happen to us at the resurrection. There are trumpets, transformations, immortality and the defeat of death. Many of these images are evoked in Hebrew Apocalyptic literature. It is easy for us to assume they are only things of heaven and of what will happen, but that is Paul's point. They will happen, and it really matters here and now.

Because the resurrection will be a mysterious transformation in which the mortal becomes immortal and perishable becomes imperishable, he has these encouragements. "... be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

He encourages the Corinthians to be a constant fixture in the work they do, in the lives, they impact because, to quote Russel Crowe in *Gladiator*, "What we do life echoes in eternity."

The way we love, live, work, play, think, act, speak, and create beauty all reflect eternity. Our lives become sign posts, pointing the way for thirsty travelers to oasis and rest. Or work has eternal consequences because God chooses to work in and through us to accomplish his purposes. Because of these and other present, not yet realities, we must be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Luke 6:39-49 - Jesus uses parables as a powerful tool to get the point across. It is so powerful in fact that we still tell them over 2000 years later! In the passage we are looking at, he says three pretty simple things. He says, don't be a hypocrite, trees are known by their fruit and doing what I say produces security in an insecure world.

He could have said those things the way I just did there. It's likely they would not be remembered. However, the parable has a way of staying with us. They are memorable and straightforward. They stick. Using everyday things, they make important points. Jesus wants to change hearts, minds, and lives. Hypocrisy is unacceptable because blind people can't lead the blind. Both will fall. When you judge others without considering yourself, you are like the "blind leading the blind." That phrase is repeated countless times each day around the world.

Trees are known by their fruit. People are no different. If you look at what their lives produce, you will be able to tell what they are like. If you ignore these things (and many others Jesus taught), you will be like a house built on sand and, you will fall in times of testing. Telling them in clever, everyday ways, allows us to remember them and that makes them easier to put into our lives.

A Living Gospel

Many people go through life with the big questions unanswered. Why am I here? What is my purpose? Does my life matter? At the end of their breath, these issues and others, are left dangling like a dried leaf on an Autumn tree.

Christians have the answers to these questions, but sometimes we lose sight. We have to return to the Scriptures to gain perspective and what we experience. Life has a way of skewing our vision and making us blind to what God is doing. God's Word, when read, studied and embraced, produces life and hope. Further, we have a sense of certainty and security in what God says. His word, put into practice places deep anchors and foundations in the shaky ground of our lives.

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Proper 3 Sunday after Pentecost (*continued*)

... When trials come, our friends and neighbors look at us for hope. They want what we have. They wonder how we can have joy in all circumstances. Embracing God's Word gives us certainty in this life and the next. When we live this way, those around us are affected, both in this life and the next.

Our lives have significance and meaning beyond ourselves. They are the way in which the Good News of Jesus Christ goes into the world. It is God's plan to transform us with his Grace and Mercy and thereby offer hope to our loved ones and even our enemies.

Those large questions in life are not only answered but fulfilled. When God's word comes to us and has its way in us, even eternity is impacted.

Prayer:

Life-giving God, heal our lives, that we may acknowledge your wonderful deeds and offer you thanks from generation to generation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 4 Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 8:22-23-41-43 - Solomon follows through on his plan to build the Temple after his father, King David, didn't receive the honor. At the pinnacle of the project, the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred place of the Temple.

He prays that the Temple would function as a reminder of Israel's God and His willingness to hear the cries of people who call upon him. Those outside the faith will no doubt have heard of God's work and the incredible ways in which he has moved on behalf of Israel and call out to him. Solomon asks that, when it happens, God would hear and answer their cries.

Why would he want that? The Temple exists so that people would know God the way the Israelites know him. The point of having a dwelling place for God is to give people a place to come and receive from him. The Temple was to be a beacon and gathering place for Jews first, but also for the Gentile.

Galatians 1:1-12 - Galatia is a region in what is today, central Turkey. It was Turkish, under Roman rule with Jews and Greeks present. Paul would have known the area well as his home town was just to the East of the area. He wrote this letter to the churches in the area.

During most of his ministry, Paul had to fight a two-front battle for hearts and minds. On the one hand, the Jews and Jewish Christians. On the other hand, Gentiles, and Gentile Christians. These groups were not overly fond of one another and had to overcome enormous barriers to becoming one in Christ. It was common for people to come behind Paul and twist his teaching or refute it all together. This resulted in the uprooting of many young in the faith. Primarily, they attacked his credibility and teaching.

In his opening statement, Paul makes a couple of things clear.

- Paul is an Apostle. A claim made by one who was taught by Jesus himself.
- His message is the true Gospel. It has to do with grace, and if anyone preaches anything different, they should be cursed.

This is the message he received and believed. It came to him on the road to Damascus, and its message will not suffer dilution by anyone or anything. It has the power to bring together both Jews and Gentiles, heal, forgive and transform lives like Paul's. Turning away from it, for any reason, makes it less than what it is; The Good News.

Luke 7:1-10 - No one was happy to have Rome ruling in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. They were an unwelcome occupying army. The soldiers, without a war to fight, frequently became "policeman-like." Locals would know certain soldiers and vice versa. They could be known for their kindness or more often than not, for their cruelty.

In this story, Luke records Jesus' interaction with a well-liked Centurion, who had even gone so far as to build a local synagogue. In many eyes, this made him worthy of receiving a miracle Jesus could perform.

As the story goes, the Centurion's servant was sick and "at the point of death." The elders tried to convince Jesus of his worthiness, but the Centurion displays faith in a way that people still talk about 2000 years later! Understanding authority and Chain of Command, the Centurion states Jesus doesn't need to come to his home (he recognizes he isn't worthy to have Jesus visit) but he only needs to "give the command" for healing, and it will happen. Jesus marvels as this, and when the elders return to the Centurion, they find the servant healed.

This man, who is from the wrong place, works for the wrong company and has the wrong last name has faith that is rewarded in healing. His faith didn't come through Judaism (although he appears to have been sympathetic), but through hearing stories and believing. (continues...)

Proper 4 Sunday after Pentecost (*continued*)

We often trust in evidence to believe. This man didn't and despite his heritage, provides a faith-filled example for us to follow when we call upon Jesus.

A Living Gospel

We frequently worship in communities that look just like us. Whether predominately white, black, Hispanic, Asian, middle-class, young or old, democrat or republican, each of us gravitates towards those who look, think and act like us.

It can come as quite a surprise when we find faith in those different than we are. You can see this in the Scriptures as the Gospel spreads in the book of acts and the various communities are born, sometimes without much teaching from one of the Apostles.

It was always God's intention that his people, those who have faith in him, would be a beacon for the world around them. From Israel and her neighbors to you and me living our lives today, God has a heart for the 'others.' The Gospel is too big for just one people group! The Good News that Jesus is Lord is for all people, at all times in every place. He is Lord over every aspect of life and beyond as he defeated sin and death.

We should not be surprised then when we find faith in those different from us. Maybe they speak, dance, look and worship differently, but belief in Jesus as Lord is faith in Jesus!

We can have confidence knowing the Gospel is bigger than us and what we are like. It crosses culture and time. It penetrates the greatest minds and coldest hearts, and as we embrace his Grace and Mercy for us, we can be that city set on a hill, proclaiming our faith and his greatness to a world in desperate need.

Prayer:

Loving God, open our ears to hear your word and draw us closer to you, that the whole world may be one with you as you are one with us in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 5 Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 17:8-16 - God's commands are often difficult. To ask a widow to use her last meal to bake the prophet a cake could seem to be self-serving. To trust the word of the prophet, and obey his request was equally challenging. For Elijah and the widow, their act of obedience to the command of God resulted in provision.

Galatians 1:11-24 - Prior to Paul's conversion, he was a zealous and hostile promoter of Judaism, and a persecutor of the Church. His dramatic experience of grace so changed Paul, rather than persecute Christians, he committed his life to love and serve others.

While it is true that God revealed His Son through the great apostle's teaching... it is equally significant that God revealed His Son in the transformed life lived by the apostle. And God still intends to reveal Jesus—in us.

Luke 7:11-17 - A large crowd followed Jesus as he was traveling from Capernaum to the city of Nain (about 25 miles). There was also a crowd following a woman whose only son had died, on their way to the burial ground. One crowd was rejoicing in the teachings and blessings of the Lord. The other crowd is mourning the death of an only son who was the widow's only resource.

The sorrow was not overlooked. Jesus, moved with compassion, brings life to the son... and joy to the widow and crowd.

Where Are You Going?

Today's readings are filled with movement... action... journeys. God tells Elijah, "Go to Zarephath and live there..." Paul, in his letter to the church in Galatians, writes of not returning to the center of his old life, but journeying instead into Arabia, Syria, and Cilicia. Jesus Himself was traveling to a town called Nain. And in each situation, their journeys created opportunities for God to intersect with and transform the lives of those they encountered.

Where are you going today? Whether it's to your place of business, the grocery store, or to school, there are people waiting to meet God through you. Journey with Jesus today. By his grace, spiritual hunger will be fed, the Gospel will be seen, and new life will be felt!

Prayer:

Merciful God, help me to delight in Your will and walk in Your ways, helping others see you in my journey; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 6 Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 21:1-10 - King Ahab wants the adjoining property (owned by Naboth) to his palace. He's willing to offer a fair price. So why, does Naboth refuse?

The vineyard was an ancestral holding, and according to Moses' Law it could not be sold (see Lev. 25). Naboth was convinced: No price is sufficient to justify disobedience to God's command.

Galatians 2:15-21 - Paul explains that justification is not only legal, but also experiential. God works through the Holy Spirit to actually make those who believe righteous men and women. Because we are united with Christ, in God's sight we are so connected to Jesus that His death is our death. Because of His resurrection, we have access to God's own power for holy living.

Luke 7:36- 8:3 - In the parable, the behavior of the two debtors toward the moneylender is analogous to the behavior of Simon and the sinful woman's toward Jesus. Simon had not offered water to wash the feet of Jesus, offer a kiss, or put oil on his head (all common practices of hospitality in those days).

In announcing the woman's sins were forgiven, Jesus simply stated what was already true. The woman's love proved she had been forgiven. Love does not come first: It is a response to God's working in our lives.

Cries of the Heart

What does your heart long for? For Naboth, it was to honor God and His law. For Paul, it was for the church of Galatia to know that justification comes through faith in Christ alone and not our own works. For the woman who anointed Jesus' feet, it was forgiveness. But what about God's heart – what does He long for?

Today's readings reveal the cry of God's heart. The Creator of the world mourned and avenged the death of his servant Naboth. In so doing, He reveals how precious we are to Him. In Galatians, God so closely identifies us with His Son, that Jesus' death becomes our own. And in Luke, Jesus reveals God's overwhelming desire to forgive our sin and reconcile us to Himself in peace.

Today, as you listen to the cries of your own heart, take time to listen to the heart of God. Hear Him loving you... longing for you... inviting you to be at peace in His presence.

Prayer – God of love, help me to perfectly love You, proclaiming Your grace and compassion in thought, word, and deed; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 7 Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 19:1-4 (5-7) 8-15a - Jezebel is unmoved by the slaying of the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. She threatens Elijah's life, and inexplicably, Elijah is terrified and flees. This reading reveals God's response to His troubled prophet and is a tremendous encouragement for those who suffer depression or despair.

God gives Elijah strength to flee (vv. 5-8), speaks gently (vv. 9-13), listens to Elijah's doubts and fears (v. 14), and gives him a task to accomplish.

Galatians 3:23-29 - The position of "son" in the Roman world was special. A son was accountable to the father, with privileges of direct access to him and his resources. In saying that believers are "sons" in the family of God, Paul makes all other relationships insignificant. There is now no advantage in being a Jew rather than a Gentile, a man versus woman, or free man or slave.

Luke 8:26-39 - At times, even gracious acts of God are difficult to accept.

After encountering a storm on the lake, Jesus encounters a man possessed by demons. He has sympathy for him and frees him from the demons, who enter a herd of pigs that proceed to run off of a cliff. The people around were alarmed and frightened by what had happened, and urge Jesus to leave their community.

Jesus urges the delivered man to stay at home; because people are often inclined to listen to a man they know who has experienced the compassion of Christ.

Meeting Jesus

Even great people of faith are sometimes frightened, overwhelmed, or discouraged. Elijah was weary from the battle. Afraid for his life, he flees into the wilderness, begging God to die. Yet God feeds Elijah from His own table, renewing His strength and enabling Him to hear the voice of God.

And so it goes with our own lives. We fear... flee... fail. But God calls us to His Table. He feeds us with the Body and Blood of His own Son. And He strengthens us to hear His voice, leading... guiding... encouraging. At the Table, we meet Jesus. The voices of doubt and confusion are silenced and we are made whole in the presence of Christ.

Prayer – *Holy God, you sustain and renew my life through the life of your Son. Help me to love and reverence your Holy Name; through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 8 Sunday after Pentecost

1 Kings 19:15-16, 19-21 - God reached discouraged Elijah in a “still small voice.” God’s work is not always accomplished in dramatic fashion (as on Mt. Carmel). It would be the Word of God, quietly working in the hearts of people, which would accomplish lasting results for the nation.

It is not for us to dictate to God what methods He should use. It is our duty to trust and obey.

Galatians 5:1,13-25 - Some fear freedom. They are anxious that people will take the removal of restraints as a license to sin. Christ has freed us from the Law, not because God no longer cares about righteousness, but because we have been changed – in Christ – into righteous persons.

Freedom is abused when it becomes an excuse to indulge our sinful nature.

Luke 9:51-62 -The hostility between Jews and Samaritans was intense. Jesus’ party was refused shelter because he was headed toward Jerusalem. How do we react to hostility? Jesus rebukes the disciples’ suggestion that they act militantly.

To be a follower of Jesus requires our personal sacrifice (vv. 57-58) and singular focus (vv. 59-62).

A Community of Faith

Today’s readings remind us that we do not journey alone. God sets us in a community of faith to help us learn, grow, and encourage others to become more like Christ. Elijah anointed leaders and mentored Elisha as a prophet. Paul reminds us we are to become slaves to one another, “loving your neighbor as yourself.” And Jesus traveled with His disciples, living out faith in front of them.

Who are your traveling companions? What are you teaching them? What are they teaching you? As we walk with each other, we are challenged... tested... even chastised. But we are also encouraged... strengthened... loved. Ours is a community of faith, encouraging others to join us as, together, we journey with Jesus.

Prayer – Almighty God, you have placed me in an eternal Church made up of apostles, prophets, and saints. Give me the grace of unity with You and Your Church to proclaim Your Son to a watching world; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 9 Sunday after Pentecost

2 Kings 5:1-14 - Naaman's resentment of having to dip in the dirty Jordan River reveals his arrogance and pride.

It is quite human to want a God who marches to our tune, rather than be willing to submit and follow His desire. Yet, without submission to God's command, we inevitably are left to our own demise.

Galatians 6: (1-6) 7-16 - Paul's exhortation reminds us that as a follower of Christ, we bear a responsibility to and for each other (vv. 1-5), as well as those who serve full time among them (v. 6). We're also reminded that the choice we make, whether to please the passions of our sin nature or to please the Spirit, will have direct impact on our lives now, and in eternity (vv. 7-10).

He stresses that the importance is not whether one is circumcised or uncircumcised, but that we are a new creation in Christ (vv. 11-16)

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20 - Jesus' ministry has taken him from Galilee into Judea. He is sorrowful over the cities where He has preached and been rejected (vv. 13-16). Although his messengers (those he had sent ahead of Him) rejoiced over the fact that even demons were subject to them, Jesus' joy is centered in those who have chosen to believe in and follow Him.

Wade In the Water

Admit it. We want more – we want it bigger and better. We focus on what's flashy and showy. We're not afraid to stand up and stand out in the crowd. And we're certainly not afraid to tell it like it is. Today's readings remind us that nothing is new under the sun. And for all our modern advances, we're a lot more like Naaman than we care to admit.

To become clean, Naaman would have done anything, no matter how hard, difficult, or painful. Anything, that is, except humble himself... do what he was told... listen and obey. Naaman wanted to be noticed. He wanted to be cleansed because of who he was and his importance. Capable of ruling armies, Naaman was incapable of ruling his own ego.

To experience God's healing, Naaman had to choose between the headiness of his position, power, and authority and being humbled. He had to lay aside his visions of great signs and wonders accompanying his healing. He had to choose to practice obedience in even routine matters of where to travel and where and how to wash.

What do you choose? Are you willing to be humble – and humbled? Are you willing to change the way you do everyday life? Are you willing to leave your ego at the riverside and wade in to the hidden currents alive with God's healing and refreshing?

Prayer – Gracious God, you humbled yourself by coming to this earth to give me life. Help me to humble myself so that I may fully experience your life in this world and the world to come; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

*Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C

Proper 10 Sunday after Pentecost

Deuteronomy 30:9-1 - Moses has previously described the nature of covenant relationship with God (chapter 29) and reminded them that should they decide to accept the covenant, they will be the people of the true God (29:9-15). As long as Israel remains faithful to God, or when future generations turn back to Him after they stray... God will restore and bless them (30:1-10).

Like Israel, we too must continually choose between God and emptiness; blessing and disaster; life and death. What's your choice?

Colossians 1:1-14 - False teachers in the region of Colossae acknowledged the eminence of Christ (that He was a great man), but they failed to recognize the preeminence of Jesus (that He is supreme). They taught of a mystical "fullness" that their followers would gain.

Paul, however, stresses the preeminence of Christ and teaches that every believer in Christ can be filled with knowledge of God's will and power to walk in a way that pleases God. Because Christ is Supreme, we can bear fruit, understand His Word, know His glorious power, and experience all of this daily.

Luke 10:25-37 - The story of the Good Samaritan reminds us that love for God and neighbor requires unlimited commitment to meeting needs. Seeking to justify himself, the lawyer asks the question: "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus defines "neighbor" as any person in need... even if he is a member of a race that is a traditional enemy!

Doing the Next Thing In Front of You

Like the Israelites in Deuteronomy, we often make doing the will of God harder than it is – something beyond our grasp. We want someone else to go up to heaven and bring it down to us. In this way, we can somehow avoid personal responsibility. Like the lawyer speaking to Jesus, we look for ways to justify our lack of action and obedience.

But today's readings remind us "the word is near... in our mouths and hearts for us to observe." And the words of Christ cut through our excuses, calling us to love whoever is in need. Living out the will of God is often defined in how we do the next thing in front of us... make the next right choice... love the next person we meet. It is in our choices of how we respond to daily situations that faith is melded and molded – and the love of Christ is revealed.

Prayer – Almighty God, too often I fail you in what I've done and what I've left undone, not loving you with my whole heart, or my neighbor as myself. Give me your grace to perfectly love both you and my neighbor; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

*Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C

Proper 11 Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 18:1-10a - It was considered a good deed in biblical times to feed and house strangers. Abraham knew nothing about these visitors... their nationality, destination or mission. They had arrived unannounced and at the most inopportune time of day. Yet Abraham rolled out the proverbial red carpet for them. He ran to them, eager to extend a welcome. His courtesy was instinctive. Little wonder, then, that the apostle used this incident to encourage Christians to give themselves to hospitality (Heb 13:2).

Colossians 1:15-28 - The Jesus Paul describes is the One in whom we find redemption and forgiveness; the visible manifestation of the invisible God... the heir of all creation (v. 15). As the creative force in all creation, Jesus not only made all things but His power holds all things together (vv. 16-17) He is the source of reconciliation for all humankind (vv. 18-20).

For Paul, to share the great mystery of the Gospel: that this glorious Christ now takes up residence in the believer and is Himself the hope of all the glorious things that await you and me here, and in eternity, is worth accepting any personal suffering that may occur.

Luke 10:38-42 - Someone summarized the story of Martha and Mary this way: “Just a casserole, Martha... not a smorgasbord.” Love for God is expressed best in listening and responding to Jesus’ words, not in busily doing “for” Him.

Held

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, offers some of the most comforting words found in all of Scripture when he reminds us “...in him all things hold together.” In what is visible and invisible, meek and mighty, Christ is the source that binds together even the tiniest of details. Nothing escapes him – nothing is beyond him.

And yet daily life can often cause us to feel as if we’re coming apart at the seams. We lose sight of what’s important. Martha certainly felt that way. Jesus was coming! To her house! To eat at her table! It called for the best food available. The best china. The finest linens. Jesus was perfect – their time together had to be perfect, too. But in her desire for perfection, Martha missed relationship. Jesus didn’t desire her attempts at perfection. He wanted her time... heart... love.

In our “doings” for God, we often overlook “being” with God. Our desire to give God our best devolves into perfectionism and we come undone. We become frustrated, angry, disappointed. Sound familiar? Take a cue from Mary and sit quietly at the feet of Jesus. In His words – His love – find yourself “held together” and healed.

Prayer – *Merciful Father, in weakness and ignorance I too often reach for what is good rather than what is best. In your mercy, hold me together, allowing me to know the joy of your salvation; through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 12 Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 18:20-32 - Abraham is sincerely concerned for the innocent. His prayer is predicated with the conviction that the Judge of all the earth would certainly do what was right and that God would not slay the righteous with the wicked. His intercession was successful. He got all for which he asked. As a matter of fact, Abraham quit asking before God stopped giving. If Lot had won his own family plus only two neighbors, God would have spared Sodom.

Colossians 2:6-15 (16-19) - At the time of Paul's writings to believers in Colossae, Gnostics (those who taught that matter is evil and true freedom is found in knowledge) claimed access to a superior knowledge. Paul countered this teaching by admonishing followers of Christ to remain rooted in the Lord (vv. 6-7). He then lists a series of warnings: Spiritual reality is not to be found in "deceptive philosophy," but in union with Christ – in whom all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form (vv. 8-15).

Luke 11:1-13 - Jesus teaches that prayer grows out of personal relationship (vv. 1-4), requires persistence (vv. 5-8), and can be offered in complete confidence in God's love (vv. 9-13).

Holding Bread

In the days and months following World War II thousands of children found themselves living in orphanages throughout Europe. Although these children now had shelter and enough to eat, they would wake in the night, terrified of not having enough. Inconsolable in their fear, the workers at the orphanages struggled to help and comfort these children.

Finally, the workers began putting the children to bed with a piece of bread. This bread was not to eat; it was bread to hold. When the children would awake in the night, their "holding bread" was a tangible reminder that there would be enough for the day ahead – enough to eat, enough shelter, enough love, enough hope to begin again. Over time, their fears subsided and the children learned to trust once again.

We are a lot like those children. In the midst of evil, how can we be sure of God's justice? In the face of our sinfulness, how can we be sure of God's loving forgiveness? And in the midst of life's hardship, how can we be sure of provision?

In the Eucharist, God gives us "holding bread." We hold the bread in our hands and remember His body, broken for us so we may know healing. We drink the cup and remember His blood shed for us so we may know salvation. And we pray as Christ taught, "Give us this day, our daily bread," remembering that in Him, there is enough.

Prayer – Almighty God, in you I am protected, strengthened, and made holy. Through your grace, help me to see in all things temporal what is eternal, so I may share in your everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

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Proper 13 Sunday after Pentecost

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14; 2:18-23 - Existentialism (a 20th-century philosophical movement) expresses what King Solomon (the writer of Ecclesiastes) discovered many years before: It's hard to find any intrinsic meaning or purpose in this universe! All is vanity!

Like Solomon, even the wealthiest and most successful men and women of today, in their quiet moments, feel what Solomon felt: A void in life that only God can fill.

Colossians 3:1-11 - Paul's letter to the Colossians confronts the philosophy of Gnosticism, a teaching that matter is evil and that true freedom can only be experienced through "gnosis" (knowledge). Paul stresses that God has entered the material world, and in a real human body, won our salvation.

He stresses that we are "raised with Christ" (vv. 1-4) and we are to "put to death" the sins prevalent in our sin nature (vv. 5-8), and to "put on" a new "self," renewed in God's image (vv. 9-11). How we live in our body does make a difference. True spirituality is living a human life – on this earth – in union with God.

Luke 12:13-21 - One of the expectations of Rabbis ("teachers") was to adjudicate matters of dispute in accordance with rabbinical law. Jesus refuses to be involved in the quarrel. However, he offers a parable to stress a reality: A legal judgment does not have the ability to resolve greed or anger in one's heart.

What's Your Net Worth?

We do it more than we realize. Without even considering it, we measure a person's worth – our worth – by the numbers in a checking account. The size of someone's investment portfolio determines the amount of time we invest into him or her. We look at a profit and loss statement and assign value to someone based on the numbers at the bottom of the page.

Today's readings point out that the bottom line isn't always the bottom line. King Solomon and Jesus both remind us that for all our toil and labor, we leave this world with empty hands. What joy awaits us when we choose to invest into what's truly important – truly eternal. As the demands of life pull at you for time and attention, ask yourself this: "Does this investment contribute to my spiritual net worth? Is what I'm doing today yielding rewards in God's economy?"

Prayer – Merciful God, open my eyes to see the eternal value in my daily decisions and discussions, guiding and governing my thoughts and actions; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 14 Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 15:1-6 - Abraham is seen as a man of faith, not because his trust never wavered, but because the object of his trust (God) never wavers. Recognizing his childless condition, and the importance of having an heir, he assumes that it will occur through Eliezer... a slave born in his household.

However, God tells Abram that his heir will not be a slave, but a son coming from Abram's own body. He points Abram to the stars to demonstrate how innumerable his offspring will be. The word by which God created the stars would also guarantee Abram's seed.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 - Faith obeys God even when the promise is not seen. Abraham's faith is demonstrated in a lifetime of nomadic living—and seeing his son and grandson live that same kind of life. They all looked beyond present circumstances to a future shaped by God's promise.

Told to sacrifice his son Isaac, Abraham remained convinced that God would keep His promise, and concluded God would raise his son from the dead if necessary. Abraham believed the vision God gave of the future would come true—as he continued to obey God

Luke 12:32-40 - The operative command in this passage of Scripture is: "Be ready!" Jesus warned that the world is rushing toward judgment day. As a result, believers are admonished to serve God actively, and unbelievers are encouraged to make peace with God before it's too late.

Are You Expecting?

Ask an expectant mother to describe the life growing inside her and you'll be amazed at the description of beauty and hope she shares. The child she describes is one she sees not with her physical eyes but with the eyes of faith. Although her child has not yet been born, she sees through eyes of faith first steps... first day of school... first date... first grandchild.

This is the kind of faith in which God invites us to share. He asks us to see beyond today – beyond our lifetime – and look into eternity. When standing at the grave, it is faith that allows us to see a resurrection. As we face the reality of a pink slip, faith enables us to see God's continuing provision.

What are you expecting? What is the vision God has given you? Who is it that God is calling you to become? It is faith that helps bring clarity to the vision. And it is faith that makes that vision a reality!

Prayer – Gracious Lord, as your Spirit enables me to live according to Your will, empower me to also see my life through Your eyes; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 15 Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 23:23-29 - Most of us are familiar with the advertisement of Las Vegas: “What happens in Vegas – stays in Vegas.” The implication is that we’re safe to compromise our behavior because no one will know.

The false prophets of Jeremiah’s day made the assumption that God isn’t aware of what they’re doing, but they couldn’t be more wrong! Theologians call the knowledge that God has of all things—past, present, and future—omniscience. God does see us. Everywhere. And always.

Hebrews 11:29 – 12:2 - Having faith does not guarantee earthly success. Even though faith may win great victories, my act of faith only serves to guarantee that I will please God and ultimately be rewarded by Him (vv. 29-38)

The great heroes of faith (vv 39-40) had relatively little knowledge of God. We who know Jesus should all the more be motivated to complete what they have begun by living a life of faith today.

Luke 12:49-56 - Jesus reminded his followers that his coming would inevitably mean division. And it did. One of the great reasons the Romans hated Christianity is that it tore families in two. To follow Christ requires a decision and commitment that is often in conflict with the world.

The essence of Christianity is this: Loyalty to Christ demands precedence over the dearest loyalties of this earth.

Peek-A-Boo, God Sees You

We often hear the phrase, “Remember, God is watching you!” For the false prophets of Jeremiah’s day, these would not be comforting words! Our deeds – in public and in secret – are fully known to God. There is no place hidden from the Creator.

For those living in faith, these same words have infinite comfort. Our deeds – in public and in secret – are fully known to God. There is no place hidden from the Creator. When our faith is tested, God sees. When we are suffering, God sees. When following Christ costs us family and friendships, God sees.

Whatever you face today, God sees. If you feel lost and abandoned, forgotten or forsaken, God sees. His eyes are focused on you – His hands reaching for you. Look to Jesus – the author and finisher of faith – and find His loving gaze fixed on you.

Prayer – Holy God, give me grace to see and follow you, knowing you never lose sight of me; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 16 Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 58:9b-14 - True worship – the kind of worship that pleases God – requires our sincere effort to promote morality and to assist the poor and oppressed. The disenfranchised have always been close to God’s heart... and they should be close to ours as well.

Hebrews 12:18-29 - Faith calls for us to live with others in holiness and peace (vv. 14–17). The first covenant was given to a frightened mob, who stood before an earthly mountain that trembled and shook. Our covenant, was given by Jesus who opens heaven itself (vv. 18–24). God now intends to shake not just a mountain but the earth and heavens as well, and we alone will inherit the unshakable kingdom of our God (vv. 25–27). We are to strive to live holy lives, fervent in worship of our amazing Lord. (vv. 28–29).¹

Luke 13:10-17 - Jesus heals a woman on the Sabbath. Rather than observing the compassion of God toward this woman, the synagogue ruler criticizes Jesus for breaking a rule (doing work on the Sabbath because it wasn’t deemed an emergency).

Jesus answers his critic and reminds him that he treats animals better than humans when it comes to the Sabbath. This woman is a daughter of Abraham who has suffered long enough — and the Sabbath is the ideal day to set her free!

It Hits You Where You Live

At the core of today’s readings lies a challenge, a decision, in how to live. The prophet Isaiah calls us to stop blaming and speaking evil, instead feeding the hungry and helping the hurting. He calls the people to become repairers of what is broken. In his letter to the Hebrews, Paul urges Christians to live in holiness, worshipping with reverence and awe. And in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus brings these examples to life, reaching out with compassion to heal a woman broken and bent with illness and suffering.

Notice the examples given in today’s readings. The decisions are ones made in our day-to-day living. Do we come across someone hungry? If so, feed him or her. Do we find ourselves speaking negatively about someone? It becomes our choice to stop; instead, speaking words of healing and life. As we’re driving to work, do we see the beauty of God’s creation and worship? As we cook dinner, are we aware of God’s provision and worship?

Becoming a repairer of what is broken – becoming an agent of God’s healing – is rarely about an epic battle or watershed moment. Healing occurs as we become aware of His presence all around us, worshipping our Creator, surrendering even our daily decisions to God’s will.

Prayer – Lord God, make me an instrument of Your healing, revealing Your power and glory to the watching world; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

¹ Lawrence O. Richards, *The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 866.

Proper 17 Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 2:4-13 - With language familiar to court law, God challenges Israel for finding any fault with Him. Lacking gratitude for what God had already done, and intent on pursuing their own desires – including the worship of Baal (a false god), they failed to see even the goodness of the fertile land.

Jeremiah singles out their leaders for condemnation because he understood the influence of those in positions of leadership.

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16 - The author stresses the importance of teaching and example in the lives of leaders (v.7). It is not sufficient to have right doctrine (orthodoxy) if we fail to practice what we teach (orthopraxy).

Luke 14:1, 7-14 - Places of honor at banquets were those closest to the host (v.11). The spiritual principle is clear. Don't push for glory. Let God honor you. Jesus offers us an application in which we can be guaranteed honor: Invite the poor, lame, and those less fortunate than ourselves. You see, God is concerned for the poor. We should also demonstrate that love.

Happy Endings

Franklin Covey tells us to “begin with the end in mind.” Today’s readings encourage us to do the same. In Paul’s letter to the Hebrews, he reminds Christians to “remember your leaders... consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.” Jesus also offers a pathway to achieving honor.

Paradoxically, greatness is only seen and achieved through humility. Examining the lives of those who have “finished strong” in the faith reveals flawed humans – individuals who have made mistakes. But for those with teachable hearts and humble spirits, God uses failures to teach and refine. If we are truly learning, we are then quick to extend a hand of grace to those who are in a state of brokenness.

With each lesson, we are invited to “move up higher” until we ultimately find ourselves in the very presence of our Lord – the place of true honor.

Prayer – Gracious Father, create in me a clean heart that loves you more dearly, hearing and obeying your command to love and serve in Your Name; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 18 Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 18:1-11 - By observing the potter at work, Jeremiah was reminded about the sovereignty of God. Like the potter who determines the shape the clay will take, God as Creator has that same authority over every nation and every person. However, Jeremiah also saw that God's sovereignty is tempered by his mercy and patience. As the potter carefully reworks the clay to achieve the desired result, so God does not give up when we fail him.

Philemon 1-21 - Paul appeals to Philemon on the basis that even repentant runaway slaves are useful in God's economy. Some things are inherently right. Treating a brother fairly and mercifully falls into that category. No Christian has the right to abuse another human being. Paul did not ask that Onesimus be released, rather he urged Philemon to respond to his Christian commitments and do what God expected.

Luke 14:25-33 - These seemingly "hard words" were spoken by Jesus on his way to the cross. Many of his followers envisioned that Jesus was on his way to power and prominence. Typical with the vividness of Eastern language, Jesus emphasizes what it really means to follow him. Those devoted to Jesus must be willing to love with a loyalty greater than the dearest things in life.

Peek-A-Boo!

Peek-a-boo; I see you! It's one of the earliest games children learn to play. A mom will put her hand over her baby's eyes, saying, "Peek-a-boo." She quickly pulls her hand away and smiles while saying, "I see you!" This game is actually an important learning opportunity for her baby. The child learns that even when he can't see his mother, she is still present. It's a game that builds trust and confidence.

We play the same sort of "game" with God. At times, our life feels like the Potter's wheel. We find ourselves – our world – spinning 'round and 'round. On the wheel, we become dizzy, disoriented, discouraged. In the midst of the whirling, we catch glimpses of God. I see Him – wait! He's gone. Oops! He's there again, but, oh! – now I can't see Him. How tempting it is to jump off the wheel! How we long to stop the spinning and regain our bearings.

It takes a lot of discipline to remain humbled and on the wheel. It takes great faith to believe that even when life is spinning, God is in control, shaping and fashioning our lives into His perfect image. In times when God is difficult to see, it requires great trust to remember, "Peek-a-boo; God sees you!"

Prayer – Loving God, help me to be humble, trusting you with my whole heart, to complete the good work which You have begun in me; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

HOLY CROSS

This devotion is available in audio format only

Proper 19 Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 4:11-12; 22-28 - A person's conscience can become so seared that even when caught he or she insists that they have done no wrong. God's people had become so adept in doing evil that doing good was foreign to them. Like a heartbroken parent, God grieves for his people who encounter disastrous results because of their life-style choices. However, although it is painful for God, He allows everyone the freedom to choose their way.

If the grace of God can make a missionary out of a murderer, then it can make a success out of you!

1 Timothy 1:12-17 - Timothy thought he was too young and lacked qualifications to be a minister. Paul uses himself as an example for Timothy – and for us. His reflection of his past indicated he was a blasphemer and murderer. However, because of the grace and mercy of God... Paul became a missionary for the cause of Christ.

Luke 15:1-10 - These three parables reveal the joy of finding something that was lost. The shepherd rejoices that the lost sheep is found. The widow is full of joy because the lost coin has been found. The father celebrates because his son (whom he thought was dead) has returned. Being lost is being misplaced. Being found is being replaced to where we rightfully belong. No wonder heaven rejoices when one lost soul is found!

Do You Smell That?

A young man was walking his dog in the park. Up hills and through wooded paths they wandered. As they walked, the young man noticed how other owners had not picked up after their dogs. He saw where dogs had been allowed to dig at the earth, leaving holes that posed a tripping danger. The farther he walked and the more he saw, the angrier he grew. Soon, he was determined to do something about this and trudged resolutely in search of a park official.

Just as he spied the park ranger, he began to notice a foul odor. Puzzled, he looked around for further evidence of others' irresponsibility. Then he looked down. In his own anger, he had missed his own dog's "mess" – and stepped in it.

Today's readings are reminders that each of us "steps in it" from time to time. In spite of our desire to follow Christ, we become like the sheep that wandered away... the coin that is misplaced... the Israelites that lack understanding. Like Timothy, we need reminding that no matter how big our sin, God's grace and mercy is greater – seeking us out and "replacing" us in God's favor! In turn, we are able to humbly encourage each other, knowing we are all sinners in need of God's forgiveness and restoration.

Prayer – *Merciful Father, through Your Holy Spirit that inspires and enables me to seek You, direct and incline my heart toward your righteousness; through Jesus Christ, Amen.*

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 20 Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1 - Rather than gloat at the vindication of his ministry, Jeremiah is heartbroken at the suffering of his fellow countrymen. Love for God and love for others sometimes are in tension. But loving God doesn't mean we must stop caring for others, even when their tragedies are a consequence of their own sins.

1 Timothy 2:1-7 - Paul emphasizes the universality of the gospel. He reminds Timothy (and us) that prayer is to be made for all men; God is the Savior who wishes all men to be saved; and that Jesus gave his life a ransom for all. As Walter Lock writes: "God's will to save is as wide as his will to create."

The great heroes of faith (vv 39-40) had relatively little knowledge of God. We who know Jesus should all the more be motivated to complete what they have begun by living a life of faith today.

Luke 16:1-13 - The Bible views wealth like other special gifts, as a resource to be used in serving God and others. The whole parable reminds us that nothing we possess is truly "ours," but belongs to God. He has entrusted it to us, and we are his stewards, commissioned to use what we have in His service.

What's In Your Hand?

It's amazing what an open, extended hand can accomplish. In this posture, our hands can reach... touch... help... heal. Open hands are easy to fill. In them, God can place special gifts. In turn, open hands can share those gifts with those around us.

Too often, we find our hands closed. We tightly grip what we've been given – only to discover a too tight grip damages or destroys what we've desperately grasped. Unable to reach or connect with others, closed hands keep us in isolation.

Today's readings remind us that God's gifts are for all people in all the world. Jesus opens nail-scarred hands to embrace all who seek Him; He asks us to do the same. Open your hands. Receive the gifts God has for you. Then keep your hands open and watch how God multiplies those gifts, blessing the lives of many.

Prayer – Gracious Lord, open my heart and hands to receive Your eternal gifts, sharing them here on this earth with those around me; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 21 Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15 - Family land was considered to be a sacred inheritance. It was important to keep it from passing into the hands of someone else (1 Kings 21:3). Jeremiah's act of obedience preceded illumination. It required great faith to purchase land when silver could have been used to purchase scarce food. In addition, to purchase property when the Babylonians were poised to overrun the land was not a prudent decision. However, Jeremiah's symbolic act expressed confidence that life would return to normal, and title deeds would once again be valid... a remarkable statement of hope for the future!

1 Timothy 6:6-19 - Some argue that Paul is suggesting that money is evil. This is not accurate. He stresses that the love of money opens the door for all sorts of complications and problems in our life. When we desire anything other than, or more than, wanting to do God's will, a terrible conflict is created.

It is only when we abandon our desire for riches that we can be truly free. Wealth – like every other gift – is from God. Riches can be used for good, as can any other resource. The attraction of money always seeks to distract us from our commitment to do God's will.

Luke 16:19-31 - In the 1st century, and in rabbinical Judaism, giving to the destitute was considered a great good deed, meritorious in God's eyes (cf. Matt. 6:1-4). In this parable, the rich man discovers that wealth cannot help him in death. What we do with our resources while we have them is what matters most. His desire to spare his living relatives from peril is noble, but not practical. The truth is... without honest repentance, people will not listen; even if Moses or the prophets were to warn them.

Scale of Economy

A stable job. Retirement accounts. Savings. Property Values. In the past few years, we've seen how all these measures of economic security can evaporate. As we've ridden the roller coaster of the Great Recession, we've seen how quickly circumstances can change. Though painful, these changes often reveal true wealth and the value of a person's character.

In today's readings, we're reminded that financial resources are a gift from God meant to further His Kingdom – in our lives and the lives of those around us. We are blessed to be a blessing! When we view our resources through this lens, we begin to live generously. This generosity creates a spiritual wealth of eternal riches measured by God's scale. But it also creates a physical generosity that impacts the lives of those around us.

When we live our lives by the scale of God's economy, we make investments of hope that yield an eternal return of purpose and provision – in our lives and the lives of those we touch!

Prayer – Almighty God, give me Your grace to live generously, storing up eternal treasures in Your heavenly Kingdom; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

*Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C

Proper 22 Sunday after Pentecost

Lamentations 1:1-6 - A funeral poem served a purpose in the literature of most ancient Middle Eastern cultures. Jeremiah's lament begins with a somber and dark mourning of the fall of Jerusalem. These poems acknowledge the fact that the Exile is God's doing, a judgment brought about by Judah's "many sins" (Deut. 28:36, 44, 63-68).

2 Timothy 1:1-14 - Paul used military language to help Timothy and his people see the seriousness of the problem (1 Tim. 1:3). Charge means "to give strict orders from a superior officer." Paul used this word (sometimes translated "commandment" and "command" in KJV) eight times in his two letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3, 5, 18; 4:11; 5:7; 6:13, 17; 2 Tim. 4:1). He was conveying this idea: "Timothy, you are not only a pastor of the church in a difficult city. You are also a Christian soldier under orders from the King. Now pass these orders along to the soldiers in your church!"

Luke 17:5-10 - Our Lord's image of the mustard seed conveys the idea of life and growth. The mustard seed is very small, but it has life in it and, therefore, it can grow and produce fruit (Mark 4:30-32). If our faith is a living faith (James 2:14-26), it will grow and enable us to obey God's commands. "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass" (Ps. 37:5). Forgiveness is a test of both our faith and our love.

The Hands and Feet of Jesus

Today's readings are full of suffering. Jerusalem is fallen and in ruins. Paul points to his imprisonment and invites Timothy to join him in suffering. Jesus speaks to his disciples of hard labor without any recognition or respite.

As followers of Christ, we often speak of being the hands and feet of Jesus. But think about those hands and feet. They are marked with suffering. Those feet walked the path toward a cross. Those hands and feet were nailed to that cross. Becoming the hands and feet of Jesus means we share in His suffering.

As believers, suffering is not our goal. But in our pursuit of Christ, we should not be surprised when we find ourselves in seasons of difficulty or affliction. Jesus fully entered into the pain of our humanity in order to redeem it – and us. To share His gift with others, we do the same, revealing our Wounded Healer to a hurting world.

Prayer – Almighty God, pour out in and through me the abundance of your mercy, forgiving and restoring me to wholeness; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

*Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C

Proper 23 Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7 - The exiles had lost everything but their lives and a few possessions that they were able to carry with them to Babylon. Living in a foreign culture and separated from their temple and its services, Jeremiah admonishes them to accept their situation as though it were from the hand of God. He encourages them to be productive: build houses, plant gardens, take wives and have children and grand children. In astonishing fashion, Jeremiah encourages the exiles to seek the welfare of the city where God has sent them!

2 Timothy 2:8-15 - The word “study” (2 Tim. 2:15) has nothing to do with books and teachers. It means: “to be diligent, be zealous. The emphasis is that the workman needs to be diligent in his labors so that he will not be ashamed when his work is inspected.

Luke 17:11-19 - You would have expected all ten men to run to Jesus and thank Him for a new start in life, but only one did so—and he was not even a Jew. How grateful the men should have been for the providence of God that brought Jesus into their area, for the love that caused Him to pay attention to them and their need, and for the grace and power of God that brought about their healing. They should have formed an impromptu men’s chorus, and sung Psalm 103 together!

Grow Where You’re Planted

Notice the contrast in today’s readings. Jeremiah is speaking to people who have lost everything – their homes, their culture, their temple, and their land. Jesus is addressing men who have gained everything – reintroduction into society, restoration with their loved ones, and the ability to begin life anew. And yet the admonition to both groups is the same: Go... establish yourself... be productive members of society.

Regardless of our circumstances, God calls us to do the same. We are to grow where we are planted, establishing a root system of faith that produces fruit. We can learn from Paul’s advice to Timothy in being diligent in producing lives that are worthy of examination. Investing ourselves into our families and communities brings the Kingdom of God nearer to earth.

Prayer – Loving God, in my present circumstances, let your grace go before and behind me, strengthening me to good works in Your name; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 24 Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 31:27-34 - After Babylon's conquest, Judah lay in ruins. War, disease, and famine had decimated the population. Jeremiah sees that the uprooting, tearing down, overthrowing and destruction of Judah were according to God's purpose. However, Jeremiah makes clear that the LORD will also rebuild and replant.

Adversity and hardship are often seen as the punishment of God. However, rather than a harsh God who measures out retribution because of anger, God mercifully seeks those who have turned away in order to restore with blessing and promise.

2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 - The "godly" life Paul encourages is one of active commitment to what is right. This means it's impossible to remain silent about evils and injustice in our society. Paul says every Scripture is the product of the Spirit's work. As a result, it is adequate to protect us from false teaching and to strengthen us for persecution. Paul reminds us not to be surprised when people aren't interested in truth. People want to hear what they want to hear. Regardless we are to remain faithful in proclaiming Scripture.

Luke 18:1-8 - This story teaches that while human beings may have utter indifference to others' suffering, God is not uncaring. God cares for His "chosen ones." We can keep on praying with confidence during the waiting period, confident that God will measure out justice... quickly.

Day In, Day Out

We teach children to brush their teeth at an early age. If we love them, we turn a deaf ear to their arguments about their teeth looking fine and not needing to be brushed before bed. As adults, we know the daily habit of brushing will instill a lifelong pattern that will keep them healthy.

Today's readings are about developing habits that keep us spiritually sound. We pray continually, knowing our just Father is listening to our cries. We study God's law, trusting His commands will keep our feet "from every evil way" as the Psalmist wrote. And we remain "persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable" as Paul counseled Timothy.

In times of trouble and adversity, these habits keep us close to God. When life turns into a cacophony of catastrophe, these rhythms maintain the heartbeat of life and faith. When we cannot see God's purpose or plan, His words – written in our heart – remind us that we are His people and He is eager to bring about His perfect will and justice in our lives.

Prayer – Holy God, preserve Your works of mercy in my life, helping me remain steadfast in serving You; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 25 Sunday after Pentecost

Jeremiah 14:7-10, 19-22 - Jeremiah makes a threefold appeal to God for mercy. First, for the sake of God's name, that is, his nature, that He would not "despise" Zion (cf. Numbers 14:13-19). Second, Jeremiah appeals to God that He would not dishonor his glorious throne. Jerusalem was generally understood to be the throne of God (Jer. 3:17, Ezek. 43:7). Finally, Jeremiah appeals to God to keep His covenant promise, even though the people of Judah had failed to keep their promise.

When we fail to keep our promise to God, we can appeal to His merciful nature, His authority (He is King), and rely upon His faithfulness... He always keeps His promise, whether we do, or not.

2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18 - Paul is facing his last moments on earth. His mandate to proclaim the gospel had not been without challenge. What was it that enabled him to fight a good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith? His anticipation of the appearing of Christ far outweighed the problems and challenges of this life. Consistently, Paul had witnessed the faithfulness of God, and he is confident that God will remain faithful (vv. 17-18)

Luke 18:9-14 - The purposes of the Parable of the Prayers of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector were to show that one cannot trust in ones self for righteousness and should not view others with contempt (v. 9). The Pharisee sought to use others as a standard for his own measurement of righteous standing before God. The tax collector rightfully sees God as the standard for measurement, and sees the impossible task of being able to measure up. He appeals to the mercy of God.

Those who humble themselves before God receive forgiveness. Those who remain prideful are brought low

What's In Your Wallet?

A well-known television commercial promoting a credit card asks the question, "What's in your wallet?" The credit card company's intended message is clear: holding their credit card implies a guarantee of security. Today's readings might well ask a similar question: "What's in your heart?"

For Jeremiah, it was his conviction of God's love and mercy that prompted him to plead the case of wayward Israel. For Paul, it was his hope of seeing Christ fully revealed that enabled him to face his impending death.

But it is Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and tax collector that speaks to the power of the heart. Both men prayed, yet only one was reconciled with God. The Pharisee's pride kept him from God; the tax collector's humility brought him into God's presence.

When our hearts are convinced of God's merciful love, when we have the hope of seeing Him revealed, we can't help but be humbled in His presence – secure in this life and the life to come.

Prayer – Almighty God, open my eyes to see Your mercy and increase Your gifts of love and faith in me; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 26 Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 1:10-18 - Dramatically, Isaiah compares Israel's leadership to that of Sodom and Gomorrah (vs. 10).

Though Jerusalem survived and Sodom did not, the similarities of the rulers of both nations is made clear.

Both were guilty of oppressing the weak and embracing unacceptable worship.

True worship of the Living God is more than ceremonial performance. The implications of a changed life are witnessed in behavior that administers mercy to the vulnerable.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12 - Paul and his colleagues habitually prayed for the Thessalonians. Their spiritual welfare was always on the apostles' hearts, and they were sincerely thankful for their faithfulness to the gospel message, even though they suffered for their stance. Paul appeals to them to lead lives in keeping with their destiny. Christians do not live worthily in order to obtain salvation but because they have been granted salvation.

The apostle prays that God will bring to full expression every good purpose of theirs to glorify God, and that every act motivated by their faith will be in God. Both motives and actions have their source in God (Phil. 2:13); thus they are accomplished by His power.

Luke 19:1-10 - Jesus' words, "Today salvation has come to this house," did not imply that the act of giving to the poor had saved Zacchaeus, but that his change in lifestyle was a result of his right relationship with God.

Zacchaeus, a son of Abraham by birth, had a right to enter the kingdom because of his connection with Jesus. That was Jesus' mission—to seek and to save those who are lost (cf. Lk.15:5, 9, 24).

Do You Hear What I'm Living?

Actions speak louder than words. Today's readings demonstrate this age-old wisdom. Isaiah's rebuke shows that ceremony does not replace a life of worship. Paul's words to the Thessalonians highlight their growing faith as evidenced by their increasing love for others. And Jesus' words to Zacchaeus point out his changed heart as demonstrated through his newfound generosity.

When we live lives of faith and worship, the Gospel is proclaimed – without us ever saying a word. In today's discouraged and disillusioned world, think about the power of a living Gospel. Imagine how a life lived in joyful service brings Light to a dark and hopeless world.

Living the Gospel speaks louder than any words we can say. Observed in us, the Gospel proclaims Christ better than any bumper sticker we can place on our car. When we live out our faith, Christ is seen... felt... heard... known.

Prayer – Merciful God, give grace that enables me to walk humbly before You, serving in love and obtaining Your heavenly promises; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*

Proper 27 Sunday after Pentecost

Job 19:23-27a - How does one resolve the question: Why do bad things happen to innocent people? It's a frequent question that is spoken in times of catastrophe. When life doesn't make sense, the only question that seems appropriate is "Why"?

Job seems to return to the strange logic of faith, choosing to turn away from the God of the present (who seems to be so absent) to trust in the God of the future. He believes that his Redeemer – when this life is over – will vindicate his innocence.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17 - How does one live fruitfully when everything around them seems to produce hardship? Paul the Apostle had taught the Thessalonians about the return of Christ. These believers had also been instructed about the "Day of the Lord," a common phrase in both the Old and New Testaments identifying a span of time during which God would personally intervene in history to accomplish a specific aspect of His plan. Many tried to interpret their own personal situation as the "Day of the Lord," which they tried to connect with the return of Christ.

Paul admonishes them to do three things: 1) - Stand firm (don't be swept away with speculative assumptions), 2) – Hold on to the teachings he had given them (Holy Scripture is always a true compass), and ... 3) – To remember that the Lord "who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, [would] encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word" (vv. 16-17).

Luke 20:27-38 - The Sadducees were an aristocratic religious group. Their question on resurrection was not so much as to elicit information (the Sadducees had already determined there was no such thing as the resurrection), as it was to make Jesus look foolish. Pointing as an illustration from the Levirate marriage (Deuteronomy 25:5-10), the Sadducees want to know: Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?

Jesus contrasts this present Age with the Age to come, reminding us there will be no marriage in the resurrection and that – like angels – we too will be clothed with immortality. Second, Jesus turns to Moses as an example to support the resurrection, reminding the Sadducees that God is God of the patriarchs (Exodus 3:6. If God is God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ... then He is the God of the living, not the dead.

The Weave of Life

Tapestries tell a story. Thread by thread, beautiful scenes are depicted with stunning detail. But look at the backside of a tapestry and it's a different story. Threads run every which way with no seeming pattern or congruity of color.

Today's readings remind us that much of life is similar to looking at the backside of a tapestry. A tangle of unanswered questions and injustices can leave us in knots. Faith enables us to see the Weaver working on the other side of eternity, creating detailed beauty. On the day of resurrection, we step around the loom and see clearly the intricate details of life exquisitely woven together in a scene that reveals the glory of God.

Prayer – Gracious God, as you make me an heir of eternal life, help me to see You working to reveal Your glory in my life; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

*Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C

Proper 28 Sunday after Pentecost

Isaiah 65:17-25 - The description seems to combine elements of the millennial kingdom of the Messiah and the prophesied new heavens and new earth. However students of prophecy sort these elements out, it is clear from Isaiah's warm and comforting description of God that a real transformation of man's state and nature lies ahead. Sin's curse is lifted, lifespan is extended, and peace is brought even to the animal kingdom. All that is wrong on earth will be set right.

When you read prophecies of doom—an atomic holocaust, a greenhouse effect that will melt the ice caps and cause the oceans to overflow our cities, a new Ice Age that will destroy life on earth—do not fear. Isaiah describes the real destiny of earth here.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 - Paul admonishes those in the church to be industrious. A number of people had become idle, relying upon the generosity of others to support them. True charity is honorable, but those who are able to work should do so. Furthermore, Paul identifies that idleness tends to produce irresponsibility and may entice others to become idle.

Though one may tire in doing what is right, he should never tire of doing what is right. In addressing the diligent as brothers and the idle as such people (v. 12), Paul implies that those who disobeyed this word from God were separating themselves by their behavior.

Luke 21:5-19 - Jesus told His disciples three things that would start to occur before the destruction of the temple, by Titus and the Roman army in A.D. 70, and one that would occur later.

1. Others would claim to be Messiah (v. 8). He does not want us to be deceived.
2. Wars and insurrections will occur (vv. 9-10), but we are not to be afraid.
3. Third, Jesus added that earthquakes, famines, and pestilences will become more frequent (v. 11), all which will precede the return of the Lord to the earth.

Additionally, Jesus taught that persecution of believers (imprisonment, betrayal, and hatred) would be common, and there would be opposition and rejection by others because of our faith (vv.12-17).

While we cannot control what happens, we can be assured that God's faithfulness will be with us: "But not a hair of your head will perish" (v.18)

The Kingdom at Hand

We sometimes catch ourselves saying, "This is just a little bit of heaven on earth." We seldom stop to ask ourselves what has created this glimpse of heaven. As Christians, we enter God's Kingdom – and it enters us – through the gift of Jesus Christ and His Body and Blood. We then take the kingdom of God in us to the world.

Paul's urging to the Thessalonians is a reminder of the importance of our work. Through our effort, the invisible glory of God becomes visible and knowable. In this light, our work becomes more than making a living – it reveals the life to come and the kingdom of God breaking onto the earth now, through God's people.

Prayer – Blessed Lord, through Your Word, reveal to me eternal life, and through me, let Your unending life become visible; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

*Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C

Reign of Christ - Proper 29

Jeremiah 23:1-6 - Jeremiah summarizes the unrighteous kings as being like shepherds who were destroying and scattering God's sheep. Though they deserved punishment, if God removed them, who would He appoint to re-gather the flock? Jeremiah answers...

First, God would gather the dispersed remnant and bring them back. He would assume responsibility for Israel's re-gathering. Second, God would raise up new shepherds over them to tend and care for the people the way God intended.

Though the branch of David had been cut off, God promises to raise up another King who would be a righteous Branch, that is, another member of the Davidic line. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of this prediction. As King, He will reign wisely and will do what is just and right.

Colossians 1:11-20 - The tendency of too many people is that they want to quit too soon. It is God's energy that empowers us (v. 11). We usually think of God's power being revealed in great feats of daring (i.e. the Israelites crossing the Red Sea). Paul stresses that real power is revealed in our character: patience, long-suffering, joyfulness, and thanksgiving.

He reminds us that our source of power is Christ the Creator... 1) Who existed before creation, 2) Who in Him all things exist, 3) Who holds all things together, 4) Who is the head of the church, and 5) Who is the fullness of God that reconciles to Himself all things.

Luke 23:33-43 - Luke's purpose shows that Jesus was the forgiving Messiah even as He died.

Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who were killing Him (v. 34), and He forgave one of the men sentenced to die with Him (v. 43). Even in death Jesus had power to make people right with God. And yet the rulers ... sneered (v. 35) the soldiers ... mocked (vv. 36-37), and one of the criminals crucified with Him insulted Him (v. 39).

Thankful

In the midst of the lingering Great Recession and a world filled with conflict and uncertainty, thankfulness often seems like an oxymoron. Yet today's readings give us reason for gratitude and thanksgiving. God has sent a Good Shepherd to gather the lost and injured. Through His beloved Son, He forgives, rescues, and strengthens us.

Through Christ, we find joy even as "the earth be moved and the mountains be toppled into the depths of the sea." Today's readings remind us that God Himself holds us together. In light of this we can proclaim with the Psalmist, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." More than enough reason to be thankful!

Prayer – Almighty God, give me eyes of faith to see You restoring all things through the power of Your Holy Spirit and a thankful heart, acknowledging Your unending grace and mercy; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Readings are from the NRSV and the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C*