

Worship for August 29, 2021

Opening:

The world belongs to God, the earth and all its people.
How good it is, how wonderful, to live together in unity.
Love and faith come together, justice and peace join hands.
If Christ's disciples keep silent, these stones would shout aloud.
Open our lips, O God, And our mouths shall proclaim your praise.

Collect:

Author and Giver of all good things, graft in our hearts the love of your name, increase in us true religion, nourish us in all goodness, and of your great mercy keep us in the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Readings of the Day:

Song of Solomon 2:8-13

2:8 The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

2:9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice.

2:10 My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;

2:11 for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

2:12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

2:13 The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Psalms 45:1-2, 6-9

45:1 My heart overflows with a goodly theme; I address my verses to the king; my tongue is like the pen of a ready scribe.

45:2 You are the most handsome of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever.

45:6 Your throne, O God, endures forever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity;

45:7 you love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions;

45:8 your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia. From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad;

45:9 daughters of kings are among your ladies of honor; at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir.

Psalm 15

15:1 O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

15:2 Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart;

15:3 who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;

15:4 in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the LORD; who stand by their oath even to their hurt;

15:5 who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.

James 1:17-27

1:17 Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

1:18 In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

1:19 You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger;

1:20 for your anger does not produce God's righteousness.

1:21 Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.

1:22 But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.

1:23 For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror;

1:24 for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like.

1:25 But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act--they will be blessed in their doing.

1:26 If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless.

1:27 Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

7:1 Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him,

7:2 they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them.

7:3 (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders;

7:4 and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.)

7:5 So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"

7:6 He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me;

7:7 in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'

7:8 You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

7:14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand:

7:15 there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

7:21 For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder,

7:22 adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly.

7:23 All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Sermon:

I recently celebrated my birthday and was the recipient of gifts; some tangible and others of time and words. There was a time in my life that I had difficulty saying thank you for gifts or compliments. It wasn't that I was not grateful, but rather because I felt unworthy. We all struggle our whole lives getting our inside to match our outside and to be able to fully celebrate the wholeness of love that God wishes for all humanity. All our lessons today are about gifts and invitations. Hopefully we will not let any feelings of unworthiness block us from receiving the love meant for us.

I appreciate when the Song of Solomon comes up in the lectionary. We can keep our images of God so staid and distant. Not here; the words are erotic and deep. There is no indication that this is one person loving another. We only hear of the beloved and the complete joy and depth of companionship and love. The Song of Solomon is being used at a wedding this weekend and it is always a common selection by those choosing to marry. But this passage is speaking to an even greater intimacy. This is God calling us beloved; God's love is equated to the deepest love we can feel. This is not an image of an all powerful God ready to judge and rebuke. This is a God who desires that humanity know how deeply they are loved. How will we receive this gift of love from God? Will we feel unworthy and explain the words away as love poetry? Or maybe we could realize that God is giving us a gift meant to transform us inside-out. If we feel our worth from God's love how could we possibly choose anything less for those around us? How could such a deeply loved humanity ever want to choose hate.

The gifts from God in the Psalm are also abundant and transforming. God's throne endures forever not as a scepter of power but a rule of equity, love and righteousness. The gift from God is grace to strive for a higher way of living; not because we are worthy but because we are blessed. The richness from God is not power or wealth, but the fragrance that can change how we look outside to others and the world. How can we possibly seek healing and reconciliation for racism, sexism, residential school abuses or any injustice if we don't use God's gift of deep loving. We will never fully arrive at perfected love in our lifetime but that should not stop us from being faithful in trying to live inside, out with love.

The letter of James reiterates that any gift worthy of giving comes from God. The fruit we seek to share comes as the first fruits from God. We are being guided to love listening over shouts of hate; to hear and do; to embrace humility and have a meekness that reflects how deeply God has blessed us. In the time of this letter orphans and widows were not protected by the law. The letter urges people to live outside of literal and lawful expectation and embrace others with the depth God loves us. How many rules that Christians lord over other people actually display God's own deep and abiding love for all humanity.

Jesus is challenging the misuse of law in the Gospel of Mark. The Pharisees; that is, the leaders of the church are only too energetic to clarify the law. Jesus does not care that their lips can spout the rules but cares more about their hearts. There is a difference between God's covenant and human tradition. God's love is a gift to be taken within and returned as a blessing to the world. Some may not agree with me and that is perfectly alright as I am as human as another; but I have to admit being deeply upset when scripture is quoted to condemn another person; Leviticus used to judge sexuality and Paul's letters adjusted to put

women in their place. Who are we to love the sinner and hate the sin when we are all sinners and God only wants to treat all of us as beloved. Condemning others comes from something deeply broken within us. Our insides; our hearts are meant for listening, understanding and loving. We will always fall short of perfection but that need not stop us from being bold in faith.

Last week Barbara talked about the gift of the presence of Christ when we share the bread and wine in communion with each other. God intends for our insides to match our outsides and gives us holy food to transform us. We can bring the first fruits of love, courage and integrity because we have been even more deeply loved by God. Accept the gift, offer the first fruits and transform the world inside-out!

Thanks be to God-Amen

Affirmation:

With the whole church we affirm that we are made in God's image, befriended by Christ, empowered by the Spirit.

With people everywhere we affirm God's goodness at the heart of humanity, planted more deeply than all that is wrong.

With all creation we affirm the miracle and wonder of life, the unfolding purposes of God, forever at work in ourselves and the world.

Prayers:

We bring to God
someone whom we have met or remembered today
and for whom we want to pray;

- For those facing the challenges of chronic illness
- Those who continue to mourn the death of a spouse
- Those who are living through instability and facing challenges
- For those celebrating birthdays: Arnold McCurdy
- For those celebrating Weddings: Cathay Newhouse and Marc Bondarenko-August 28, 2021

We bring to God,
someone who is hurting and needs our prayer

We bring to God
a troubled situation in our world

- Victims of Residential Schools and actions of reconciliation and healing
- The Hungry and Homeless and actions for a living income and secure housing
- For the continuing challenges presented by Covid 19 and the Variants
- For the people of Afghanistan and especially the women at risk

We bring to God,
someone whom we find hard to forgive or trust

We bring ourselves to God,

that we might grow in generosity of spirit,
clarity of mind,
and the warmth of affection.

Closing responses:

O Trinity of Love,
You have been with us at the world's beginning,
BE WITH US TILL THE WORLD'S END.

You have been with us at our life's shaping,
BE WITH US AT OUR LIFE'S END.

You have been with us at the sun's rising,
BE WITH US TILL THE DAY'S END.

AMEN.

Blessing:

This is the day that God has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.
We will not offer to God offerings that cost us nothing.
Go in peace to love and to serve; we will seek peace and pursue it.
In the name of the Trinity of Love,
God in Community, Holy and one. Amen