

Worship for September 5, 2021

Opening responses:

Peace on each one who comes in need,
PEACE ON EACH ONE WHO COMES IN JOY.
Peace on each one who offers prayers,
PEACE ON EACH ONE WHO OFFERS SONG.
Peace of the Maker, Peace of the Son,
PEACE OF THE SPIRIT, THE TRIUNE ONE.

Collect:

Stir up, O Lord, the wills of your faithful people,
that richly bearing the fruit of good works,
we may be richly rewarded; through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever. Amen

The Word of God:

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

22:1 A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.

22:2 The rich and the poor have this in common: the LORD is the maker of them all.

22:8 Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail.

22:9 Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

22:22 Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate;

22:23 for the LORD pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them.

Psalm 125

125:1 Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

125:2 As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore.

125:3 For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, so that the righteous might not stretch out their hands to do wrong.

125:4 Do good, O LORD, to those who are good, and to those who are upright in their hearts.

125:5 But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways the LORD will lead away with evildoers. Peace be upon Israel!

James 2:1-10, (11-13), 14-17

2:1 My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?

2:2 For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in,

2:3 and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet,"

2:4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

2:5 Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?

2:6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court?

2:7 Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

2:8 You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

2:9 But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

2:10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.

2:11 For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

2:12 So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty.

2:13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

2:14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?

2:15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food,

2:16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?

2:17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Mark 7:24-37

7:24 From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,

7:25 but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.

7:26 Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

7:27 He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

7:28 But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."

7:29 Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go--the demon has left your daughter."

7:30 So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

7:31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.

7:32 They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him.

7:33 He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue.

7:34 Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened."

7:35 And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

7:36 Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

7:37 They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

Sermon: Poverty, Justice and the Ability to See and Hear

All of our scriptures challenge our responses to those in greatest need. These are not words condemning wealth but rather in the midst of all that we have; how do we build relationships with others. When I worked at All Saints Sherbourne, a downtown drop in for the poor and homeless; I met a man who owned a nearby insurance company. John would bring his guitar and we would sing and pray with whomever wanted to gather. He shared a story that perfectly exemplifies true faith in action. John and his brother decided to set up their own insurance company. The beginning of the business was precarious and they both had families to provide for security. He was at a workshop helping new business owners. The facilitator asked everyone to share their dreams for the future. Around the circle people spoke of wanting to secure homes, cars, boats and travel. When it came to John, he said his dream was to know every homeless person's name whom he would meet downtown and near his office. John not only became successful in his business, he kept his commitment to his dream. Not only did he share his wealth, he built significant relationships with the poor in his midst. His street friends accompanied him to business lunches with executives in restaurants usually reserved for the wealthy.

And as reflected in the letter of James;

For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes comes in, and you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, Have a seat here please, while to the one who is poor you say, stand there or sit at my feet, have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

The focus of a person of faith is to look to building justice for all people, to see the value in all humanity. As the Beloved of God, we are not measured by our riches. Poor and rich share a common relationship. We ought never to crush one another. I grew up hearing people refer to the poor as lazy and unwilling to work and their poverty was a choice. Now I am not a child and I am more than aware that poverty is not a choice but rather a construct of those turning a blind eye or refusing to hear deeper truths. Proverbs states clearly that God pleads the cause of the poor and despoils those who would crush the poor.

The Psalm speaks of looking for the righteous way. Through doing good and building relationships, then and only then can Peace come to Israel. Righteousness, or right living is always about seeking to do God's intention. God calls all humanity Beloved and as people of faith, we can share no less. Just as we heard in last week's scripture, the Psalmist points to being upright in our hearts, not solely keeping the law.

To continue with the letter of James, it is clear that he has witnessed many people in positions of power showing partiality. The leaders care more to impress those of wealth and position and turn away from seeing or hearing the poor. You can go your whole life keeping the law but if we fail to love our neighbour it is as if we have totally failed. Justice and Poverty is the pathway that God constantly leads us along; we cannot turn away from either

injustices or the poor. The next time you are walking along a street and meet someone asking for help; please just start with introducing yourself and asking their name. You will have more of a chance to know what to do if you meet on an even level. And when we look at larger government policies, we need to remember that the definition of tax payer is not nearly as important of fellow citizens. With the wealth of our nation it is shameful that anyone should be hungry or homeless.

I love this passage from the Gospel of Mark; it comes across as the only time in scripture that Jesus seems to make a mistake. Now maybe he makes that mistake as a lesson to others around him who would have ignored or rebuked the woman. Jesus says he cannot show partiality to her because she is not of his faith. His children of Israel must have their needs met so as not to waste it on the dogs. The courageous woman challenges Jesus by saying that even the dogs eat the crumbs the children spill. Jesus acknowledges her words and her daughter is healed. How remarkable that this story of a foreign woman should be remembered and placed in the Gospel.

In the Prophet Isaiah there is a curse spoken about when people harden their hearts. A hardened heart keeps a person from hearing and understanding and from seeing and perceiving. The fact that Jesus does a healing that makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak is in my view Jesus lifting the curse. If we open our hearts, we can hear and see in ways that will transform the injustices and poverty of our world. We need to seek courage like the Syrophenecian woman to access the true bread of life. Ephphatha; open our hearts that in hearing we might truly understand and in seeing that we can truly perceive what it means to be righteous and just.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Prayer:

O God, for your love for us, warm and brooding,
which has brought us to birth and opened our eyes
to the wonder and beauty of creation,
WE GIVE YOU THANKS.

For your love for us, wild and freeing,
which has awakened us to the energy of creation:
to the sap that flows,
the blood that pulses,
the heart that sings.
WE GIVE YOU THANKS.

For your love for us, compassionate and patient,
which has carried us through our pain,
wept beside us in our sin,
and waited with us in our confusion.
WE GIVE YOU THANKS.

For your love for us, strong and challenging,
which has called us to risk for you,
asked for the best in us,
and shown us how to serve.
WE GIVE YOU THANKS.

O God we come to celebrate
that your Holy Spirit is present deep within us,
and at the heart of all life.
Forgive us when we forget your gift of love
made known to us in Jesus,
and draw us into your presence. Amen

Prayer:

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: Carla and Renate
- Those who continue to mourn the death of a spouse
- Those who are living through instability and facing challenges
- For 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 communities devastated by fires and hurricanes
- For the continuing challenges presented by Covid 19 and the Variants

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