

October 18, 2020 – Twentieth Sunday After Pentecost

We have, at your reading of this, arrived at long last at the congregational re-opening Sunday. As I am preparing this ahead of time, and as more and more things are being closed or shut down every few days, it is with a prayer that I write: May God's will be done in our attempts to re-open for in-person worship. I also know that many of you will be accessing this service from home instead of coming out to church, and that is JUST FINE. We are each given a spirit of discernment with good reason, and I completely trust in your ability to discern what will work best for you.

This (e-)mail service will be arriving to you before the in-person gathering. This week there is no audio link included for the sermon, but after we have had the in-person worship service, an email will be sent to you sharing the link of the in-person sermon. I struggled with how to do this, and I don't want those of you who worship at home on Sunday morning to have to wait until mid-afternoon for your service, so after some discussion with Bonnie and Lorre, I decided it is best to make sure you have a Sunday morning service at home too ☺

Next Sunday, you will have a Sunday morning service at home which includes an audio link of the sermon as it is written here. We will also make an audio recording of the in-person sermon from Sunday and that will be emailed out to you separately. I am doing this because preaching to a congregation is very different from preaching to a microphone – and if you want to hear the congregational preaching, not being in attendance should not stop you from accessing the recording of same. The word of God is indeed the living word, and unpacking it within the gathering always leads to nudges of Spirit that will change the way something is said, sometimes change the way examples are given, and overall change the experience from something I prepare in advance, to something Spirit enlivens in the moment. The in-person worship services will have live music, possibly soloists, and possibly slightly different hymnody than the email service will; this allows us to ensure the best quality recordings in the online delivery. Eventually we hope to live stream the service, either on YouTube, Facebook or some other streaming service. But for now, we are working with the gifts and energy levels available.

If you are thinking of attending worship in the weeks to come, please read through this page of notes carefully so you know what to expect when you come to church. More information may be sent out during the week, and complete information will also be sent out via Lamplighter. You will need to arrive early for the entry protocol, and come to the Church street accessible entrance, at which you will be asked four assessment questions by an outside Greeter. A face covering is required. These are the assessment questions, and a self-assessment is advisable at home:

1. Have you travelled outside of the province or country within the last 14 days?
2. Have you tested positive for COVID-19 within the last 14 days?
3. Have you been in contact with anyone that has exhibited symptoms or tested positive for COVID-19 virus in the past 14 days?
4. Do you have any of the following symptoms that are unusual for you: fever, new cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, chills, headache, new loss of taste or smell?

If you answer 'yes' to any of these questions, then you will be asked to return home. Otherwise, you will be allowed into the building, and an inside Greeter will check your temperature (if above 100°F or 37.8°C, you will be asked to return home) and ask you to sanitize your hands. You will be seated by an usher to ensure social distancing in the pew. Families will be seated together. Seating will be assigned from front to back in the sanctuary. All volunteer disciples also want to worship, so please arrive early to ensure seating can be completed in time for 10 am start of worship.

At my preparation of these worship notes, we are seeking to populate a roster for at least 4 Sundays of volunteer disciples in place, beginning on October 18th, so that we are prepared to continue with worship, if we are not placed in lockdown conditions again based on rising infection rates. If you

have not yet volunteered or been called on, but are interested in helping – please contact Hazel & Nyle (519-653-2901) or the church office (519-653-4721). A number of people are now trainers, and a one-on-one training session can be organized with you, as needed.

As always, if you need a phone call or distanced visits, please do reach out by email or phone: pastor@st-peters-cambridge.org or 519-653-4721 ... It is not my intention to neglect pastoral visitation ministry during this time, sometimes my shins just need a swift kick ☺

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

I want to offer a word of thanks for those of you who have allowed us to use your photos, or who have offered the use of your photos in the creation of our music videos. It truly adds to our worshipping community and makes worship more of a 'group effort'. It's not too late to get in on the fun! Providing permissions are given, you may include photos that include people, not just scenery. If you have some photos you might like to send along, please be in touch with me by email, lorre.calder@sympatico.ca . We can arrange how best to co-ordinate access to your photos. Full credit will of course be given.

—Lorre Calder

Please take a few moments of silence, prepare your heart,
centre yourself for worship.

Prelude: Land acknowledgement with Brad's creative composition ☺

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Zar8-GeUs>

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, in your home and in mine.

Prayer of the Day: Entrusting Creator: although all creation is yours, you entrust it to us, created in your image and likeness. In order to maintain some sense of order, we establish rules, systems and structures. But ultimately you are the author and finisher of everything. So it is, we come before you this day, observing the rules of our land: municipal, provincial and federal, yet seeking above all to be guided by the rule of your love, grace and mercy, in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Lesson: Isaiah 45:1-7

God's Message to his anointed,
to Cyrus, whom he took by the hand
To give the task of taming the nations,
of terrifying their kings—
He gave him free rein,
no restrictions:
"I'll go ahead of you,
clearing and paving the road.
I'll break down bronze city gates,
smash padlocks, kick down barred entrances.
I'll lead you to buried treasures,
secret caches of valuables—
Confirmations that it is, in fact, I, God,
the God of Israel, who calls you by your name.
It's because of my dear servant Jacob,
Israel my chosen,
That I've singled you out, called you by name,
and given you this privileged work.
And you don't even know me!

I am God, the only God there is.
 Besides me there are no real gods.
 I'm the one who armed you for this work,
 though you don't even know me,
 So that everyone, from east to west, will know
 that I have no god-rivals.
 I am God, the only God there is.
 I form light and create darkness,
 I make harmonies and create discords.
 I, God, do all these things. [The Message Translation]

Word of God, word of life. **C: Thanks be to God.** *

Reading Homework: 1 Thessalonians 1, Psalm 96

Gospel Acclamation: Il signore. Taizé; Bradley Moggach, piano, Debbie Lou Ludolph, vocal
Click Here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93PRP79QbIQ>

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The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 22:15-22

C: Glory to you O Christ.

Then the Pharisees went and conspired together plotting how to trap Him by [distorting] what He said. They sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are sincere and that You teach the way of God truthfully, without concerning Yourself about [what] anyone [thinks or says of Your teachings]; for You are impartial *and* do not seek anyone's favor [and You treat all people alike, regardless of status]. Tell us then, what do You think? Is it permissible [according to Jewish law and tradition] to pay a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, asked, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius [a day's wage]. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said, "[The Emperor Tiberius] Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then pay to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." When they heard this, they were caught off guard, and they left Him and went away. [The Amplified Translation]

This is the Gospel of our Lord: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon (by Pastor Janaki) (link for recording of sermon will follow Sunday service)

I remember hearing a story told once. It was about a competition between scientists and God. The story goes that, scientists, having gotten to the point of being convinced that they could do or make anything, challenged God to a little competition: to change a handful of dirt into something else. At the start of the competition, the first scientist held out the handful of dirt he intended to use to demonstrate his experiment, saying: "We begin this experiment with this handful of dirt ..." only to be interrupted by the booming voice of God, "If you really want to challenge me, use your own dirt! That handful you got there was made by me."

And this is so true: no matter what we take pride and joy in, at the end of the day, all of it belongs to God, and all of it came from God's handiwork. There is not one thing we can claim we did or made without God's involvement – for even for us to draw breath is God's handiwork.

But does knowing that even we ourselves are God's handiwork give us free reign over human authority? This is the question with which the Pharisees in today's reading try to trap Jesus. They essentially put it to Jesus, should authority be given to human beings (such as the Emperor Caesar) or should authority be given to God? A modern day example might be: should authority be given to Public Health? Or should

authority be given to individuals to worship together as and how they choose? Since one might argue that worship is God's territory, not Public Health territory!

This is a really good question, especially today as some of us gather today to worship in church, while others stay home for a variety of reasons:

- maybe because they prefer to minimize risk of exposure or do not feel comfortable yet to gather for worship...I find for myself there are many activities which I am now allowed to do by Public Health, but I choose not to do because my anxiety level over risk maybe overrides the benefit of the activity.
- Maybe some people have stayed away for medical reasons that cause them to be unable to wear masks; now we could have decided to set aside an area for unmasked folks to sit so they could join us in-person for worship – but to mitigate risk as it has been described by Public Health, we have opted for a “masks required” protocol.
- Maybe some people have stayed away because for reason of their work they are at higher risk (such as many of our teachers and ECE's: a shout out here to Gee, Jann and Bonnie, Julianne and the others from our congregation who are working in frontline settings)...they may have had to answer yes to one of the four evaluation questions you were asked at the door, as many frontline workers are exposed more than those of us who can limit our exposure.

Who has the ultimate authority in THIS gathering?

We come together to worship God, so it is a very relevant question to ask, in this setting who should have authority? Is it God? Or is it people? Is it Public Health? Is it our Risk Management Ministry Team? Is it Church Council? Is it Pastor?

I could pose this question in another way, using another more biblical context (since pandemics are not, technically, covered in the law or the gospel). One of the 10 commandments given to Moses is:

“Honor (respect, obey, care for) your father and your mother, so that your days may be prolonged in the land the Lord your God gives you.” [Amplified Translation].

Well, what if your mom or dad says: put your family and your job first. But the other commandments of God indicate we are to put God first ... well ... who wins? Do mom and dad win? Or does God win? And does it make a difference whether you are still living under their roof or not? Who do we obey?

Most of you here today are Canadian citizens and many of you were born here. I was sworn in as a citizen as an adult, and I took this oath at my swearing in ceremony:

“I swear (or affirm) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance To Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second Queen of Canada Her Heirs and Successors and that I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada and fulfil my duties as a Canadian citizen.”

Believe me when I say, I struggled long and hard with swearing this oath, because I was already baptized in Christ, and as an adult I took my own baptismal promises. I looked up that word from the citizenship oath: “allegiance” and it means loyalty or commitment of a subordinate to a superior or of an individual to a group or cause.

In all loyalties, there are levels. So my dog Parker for example is loyal to me, absolutely. But he is more loyal to my partner who gives him more treats ☺ And he has the utmost loyalty to his own nose, which when it picks up a scent, becomes the absolute boss of him, and nobody can distract him from where his nose is leading him. You see, Parker is a beagle and beagles are designed by their breeding to follow their noses to find and hold a hunting target.

Now if we use Parker and his design as an analogy for ourselves, we are designed first and foremost for relationship and unity with God. Created in God's own image, and we are told to love God first and foremost, above all others, with all our heart and mind and soul – with everything that we have.

Our love for God should be like a beagle's nose for a rabbit (or squirrel or raccoon – place your animal scent of choice here!) – that nose following a scent should be our focal point – no matter how good of a mom we have, no matter how many treats dad gives us! No matter how much thanksgiving turkey grandma sneaks us from the dinner table on Thanksgiving Monday!

Just like the beagle follows his nose, we are designed and created to follow God, to be so attracted and drawn to God that all other rules and authorities in our lives should be secondary.

That said, Parker lives in a very physical world in which there are many realities other than his sense of smell: he needs to be fed, he needs to drink water, he needs exercise and he needs companionship. When he was a puppy, we helped him to socialize so that now as a slightly more mature dog, he can play well with other dogs, he can walk on a leash which keeps him safe in a world full of speeding motor vehicles, and other dogs of various sizes who might not be so well mannered. When he goes to doggy camp, and the pack of dogs are walking off leash, he stays with the pack because there is an understanding within the group of dogs that there is an allegiance to the group. His dog sitter relies on that allegiance as a measure of safety to keep the whole group well.

Sometimes, the mechanisms put in place for group survival may not be the best for the whole group. In the case of Jesus' context, loyalty to Emperor Caesar was really more about building the Roman Empire's wealth than it was about providing a good and healthy life for all the citizens of the empire. Government systems usually begin with the best of intentions, but as human institutions they do fall prey to human vices: greed, power and ego being primary on this list. **And ... And**, they are the institutions that we have to create a society whose ideal intention is to deliver a good life for all.

It is with an understanding of the systems that lie within the created order that Jesus dances between the raindrops of the Pharisees questions: whose likeness is on the coins? Then give onto Caesar what is Caesar's **and** give onto God what is God's.

A Beagle's translation of this might read: Give unto mom what is mom's **and** give unto my nose what God created me to do!

Perhaps the key word in Jesus' response might be the "**and**":

- as we live in a time of knowing the goodness of God, **and** we live into a Kingdom come ...
- as we love God first, **and** we love each other as we love ourselves ...
- as we do what is identified as best for us as a society, **and** we hold true to our own instincts, trusting our discernment about how and what God calls us to do and be every day.

Jesus reminds us today that the Gospel is not an independent project; it always functions in consideration of a very mortal and collective reality. The Gospel always draws us to that ideal intention: the Kingdom of God and the image of God within each one of us.

So don't listen only to the news, or to Public Health, to our church protocols, or to municipal by-laws – but HEAR what Spirit is saying to you.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day: Arise, My Soul, Arise ELW 827

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i1V7AinwJHk>

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The main wording of the prayer below came from a Thanksgiving message sent out by the Interim Executive Director of the Cambridge Shelter Corporation, Anne Tinker, in an email to staff and volunteers. Anne's message was not worded as a prayer – but her words sounded prayerful and appropriate to me. It captured so well the many things we have to be thankful for, that, with some additional intercessions, edits and Anne's permission I share some of her words in our prayers today.

A Thanksgiving Prayer:

All-powerful God: You bless us in countless ways,
 Thereby showing your authority, your grace, your mercy and your boundless love.
 We are thankful for the many blessings you give us:
 We are thankful that we can turn on a tap and have clean water to drink, shower, or wash clothes, when so many in the world do not.
 We are thankful for food in our cupboards and in our refrigerators when so many go hungry.
 We are thankful that with a flick of a switch we have light or heat when so many have neither.
 We are thankful for roofs over our heads, warm beds to sleep in, and a place to call home when numbers of those experiencing homelessness are climbing everywhere.
 We are thankful to be part of an organization that works to serve others and to make our little corner of the world a better place.

Holy God:

Help us to remember to respond to your generosity mindful that we are created in your image and likeness.
 Help us to make love our pandemic of choice: make us vectors of infectious love.
 Where these times sow fear and insecurity, help us to sow faith, hope and joy.
 Make us your instruments of justice, grace and mercy.
 Rid us of judgmental attitudes and replenish our reservoirs of compassion.
 Help us to live safely; reveal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and in solidarity.
 We pray that you would also keep us in good spirits, as we feel the colder weather coming,
 And as we contend with the reality of rising infection rates ... please keep us in your care.
 We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
 thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread;
 and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us;
 and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
 For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. **AMEN.**

While you listen to the offertory hymn, continue your prayers and consider how you may be an offering in the coming week.

Offertory – Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow ELW 885

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTzPCCw2h6M&feature=youtu.be>

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Offering Prayer

God of goodness and growth,
 all creation is yours,
 and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
 Water and word, social distancing and hand-washing:
 these are signs of your abundant grace.
 Nourish us through these gifts,

that we might proclaim your steadfast love
in our communities and in the world,
through Jesus Christ, our strength and our song. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn: Christ Has Arisen, Alleluia ELW 364

Click here: <https://youtu.be/ulcq4PNckAo>

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Blessing:

May God bless us and keep us.
May the face of God shine upon us with grace and mercy.
May God look upon us with favor
and give us ✝ peace.
Amen.

Dismissal: Go in Peace, Go in Hope. ***Thanks be to God.***

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