

September 27, 2020 – Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

A Blessed Sunday morning to you, and welcome to our 30th online worship service ☺ Last Sunday weather allowed for a delightful gathering on the lawn. If the weather is favourable this Sunday please do come out: 10:00 to 11:00 am, bring your lawn chair. We will end our lawn visiting by 11:00 am to allow for training of those volunteer disciples who are stepping up to help with COVID safety protocol roles for when we resume in-person worship.

September has been a month of saying goodbyes, and in the past week, our dear sister in Christ, Marilyn Staffa died at Hilltop, where she had been the regular recipient of home communion worship and our annual Christmas Carol singing host at that location. I think all the confirmation classes in my time have sang with Marilyn, and I do remember on one of those occasions she prayed for her suffering to end. So it is with a mix of sadness and thanksgiving that we laid her remains to rest on Friday with her family. Her funeral service used the same scriptures as Uncle Otto's service, which we studied last Sunday, so I will return to the lectionary for today's worship service. Please do keep Marilyn's family in your prayers.

At my preparation of these worship notes, we have successfully completed the training of trainers for re-opening, and by the time you read this we should have just one more training session left to go. Before we re-open, we need to have 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 specifically, 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. Volunteer disciples are to gain access through the Church Street accessible entrance only.

We hope to have a “soft re-opening”, by invitation only, for council and lay-leaders, on October 4th. The purpose of this soft reopening is to identify and work out any glitches in our safe entry, seating, worship and exit protocols for our Sunday worship. We are giving ourselves a fortnight after that to work out glitches before we hope to welcome the congregation back for worship on Sunday October 18th. Please keep this schedule in your prayers, asking for guidance according to God's will. More details on our re-opening protocols and requirements will be included in the Lamplighter which Lorre and I are striving to get ready for you, for publication as soon as possible. It will also offer options for in-person adult study opportunities, and in-person home communion where you get to be the altar guild ☺ So lots of excitement coming at you very shortly!

One of the items we need to supply for the COVID safe cleaning requirements are throw-away “rags” or wiping cloths. They will be dampened with COVID-safe solution, and used to sanitize, both by our custodial contractor and by our volunteer disciples. Most of us have old sheets, linens and towels which could be re-purposed for this use. We are asking that you donate any spare sheets, linens and towels that could be used in this way, freshly laundered, to our church. Drop off may be done at front porches at these locations: 23 Shade Street in Galt and 746 Regent Street in Preston. We will cut them into the appropriate sizes, so that we have a ready stock handy. If you are looking for an outing, maybe check out the thrift stores near you for items we could use, and consider purchasing some to share with church as a donation. They don't need to be brand new, just clean.

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 kick ☺

Finally, pay attention to the melodies and words in our hymns this week – we are underscoring the lesson with the musical offering in a unique way ☺ Thank you Brad & Lorre – you made it possible! Please shoot me a note if you see what we have done!

- 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! 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: Holy God, You are with us in every situation, in every battle, in every challenge. Sometimes you are the source of courage and bravery to persevere. Sometimes you are the voice of consolation and comfort when we encounter failure or despair. Sometimes you are the mysterious source of provisioning and strength we did not expect. What remains constant is your presence: as loving parent, as human Jesus, and in Spirit. We give our thanks for your ever-presence in our lives, and ask for your lead in everything we do, through Jesus our Redeemer and Way-Maker. Amen.

The Lesson: Philippians 2:1-13

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

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

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

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

Reading Homework: Psalm 25 & Ezekiel 18

Gospel Acclamation: Come to Me All Pilgrims Thirsty ELW 777

Click Here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4XJVkWcHTyA&feature=youtu.be>

Text: Delores Dufner; Music: The Sacred Harp, Philadelphia, 1844; arr Selected Hymns 1985

Contributors: Lutheran Book of Worship; Tune: © 1978, Augsburg Fortress

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The Holy Scriptures according to Matthew 21:23-32

C: Glory to you O Lord.

Then he was back in the Temple, teaching. The high priests and leaders of the people came up and demanded, "Show us your credentials. Who authorized you to teach here?"

Jesus responded, "First let me ask you a question. You answer my question and I'll answer yours. About the baptism of John—who authorized it: heaven or humans?"

They were on the spot and knew it. They pulled back into a huddle and whispered, "If we say 'heaven,' he'll ask us why we didn't believe him; if we say 'humans,' we're up against it with the people because they all hold John up as a prophet." **They decided to concede that round to Jesus. "We don't know,"** they answered."

Jesus said, "Then neither will I answer your question"

"Tell me what you think of this story: A man had two sons. He went up to the first and said, 'Son, go out for the day and work in the vineyard.'

"The son answered, 'I don't want to.' Later on he thought better of it and went.

"The father gave the same command to the second son. He answered, 'Sure, glad to.' But he never went.

"Which of the two sons did what the father asked?"

They said, "The first."

Jesus said, "Yes, and I tell you that crooks and whores are going to precede you into God's kingdom. John came to you showing you the right road. You turned up your noses at him, but the crooks and whores believed him. Even when you saw their changed lives, you didn't care enough to change and believe him. [The Message Translation]

Word of God, Word of Life: **Thanks be to God.**

Sermon (by Pastor Janaki)

Click here: https://youtu.be/FEK1_4oiMpE to access the audio of the sermon, or imagine Pastor Janaki's voice here:

I remember various times at the beach, both here and back home in Jamaica, when the waves crashing on the shoreline would trap me with their energy, knocking me down or pulling me back as I tried to exit the water. Frequently in the past many months, life has felt that way for me, and perhaps for you as well, like you gain a little ground and then the contextual realities of all things COVID and life in general knock you back down or pull you under again ☺ If that experience sounds familiar to you, then Matthew 21 is a good chapter for us to be going through together.

If you just take the section we are using today, it very innocently begins "Then he was back in the Temple, teaching." Making it sound very la-di-da, just another ho hum day, back in the temple teaching (whistle whistle whistle). I suspect if you asked any school-teacher who has been in the classroom these past two weeks, there is yet to be a ho hum day where things feel normal in sight!

The back story to Jesus getting back in the temple to teach is (from Matthew 21), first and foremost, Jesus' triumphal (if one can call riding into town on a donkey triumphal) entry into Jerusalem ... when the people throw down their cloaks and garments and even cut down branches to line his way into the city. This is what we celebrate with such fanfare (or what we were used to celebrating with such fanfare) on Palm Sunday with our processional and palm frond waving. Certainly not ho hum!

Then, Jesus arrives at the Temple, finds that it has basically become a capitalist establishment, converting worship into a monetary transactional exercise and he flips out! He turns over the trade tables in the Temple, and of course gets heck from the religious leaders. The scriptures say he got so fed up, he hightailed it to Bethany, where he spent the night.

Consider this the first wave washing over Jesus, trying to drag him down.

Then, he returns the next day ... maybe still kinda annoyed from the day before, and now hungry on top of it, what the young people call “hangry” and he comes to a fig tree. Fresh figs, if you have ever had them, are so delectable and nourishing ... I imagine Jesus, seeing the fig tree from far off, going “mmmmm, I sure could eat me some figs right about now” ... he gets to the fig tree and not a fig on it! Jesus curses the fig tree, and right in front of the disciples’ eyes the fig tree withers up! When they show their surprise, Jesus reminds them “if you embrace this kingdom life and don’t doubt God, you’ll not only do minor feats like I did to the fig tree, but also triumph over huge obstacles.”

All this is the backdrop to “Then, he was back in the Temple, teaching.” Here, his authority to teach is challenged by the leaders of the Temple. Jesus throws them a retort that they are unable to answer – because the question is a double bind. Jesus, in asking them about John’s authority for conducting baptism challenges them. If they say John did not have the authority, they will lose the favour of the congregation for John was widely accepted to have divine authority. But if they say he did have authority, they will lose regard as the next natural question would be: then why didn’t you submit yourself before John for baptism – their ego-centric nature becomes naked to the world. So they confess (probably under their breath) that they don’t know, Jesus says well then, I’m not answering you either. The battle is won.

Jesus then shares the story of two sons, to underscore a point: saying we will do something (like follow Jesus, love God, love each other) and not doing it is worse than saying we won’t do it, but then doing it anyway. He is throwing a thinly veiled accusation at the religious leaders who challenge him: saying what you do and not doing it is worse than being an open sinner who yet does the things that demonstrate your belief in God.

The story of the two sons might seem trivial, but the very earliest beginnings of the Biblical narrative have the tradition of two sons: Cain and Able, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Aaron and Moses, David and his brothers ... coming all the way through to the Gospel of Luke with the story of the prodigal son. The tradition of brotherhood in the Bible is heavy not dominantly with brotherly love and loyalty, but with envy, betrayal, murder or attempted murder, power struggles and occasionally (as with Joseph and his brothers) a narrative of redemption and reconciliation. Far and large, brothers in the bible are not mighty good to each other, although Biblical law would prescribe brotherly love and loyalty.

When we read the story or hear the story today, it might seem odd that in the middle of being challenged in the temple, Jesus drops this random story about two brothers. But in the much longer context of the Jewish narrative (and remember Jesus was Jewish, not “Christian” per se), stories of brothers resonate with other stories of brothers ... and so this story not only identifies with that long tradition, but locates the religious leaders as the ones who say they will do something and fail. It also implicitly locates Jesus as one who, though he may seem like a misfit, IS actually heralding the unfolding kingdom of God.

You see!

It is much more complicated than it looks on the surface when you have all this context!

This reading from Matthew 21:23-32 is the first of a series of challenges thrown at Jesus ... challenges which he responds to by demonstrating his wisdom at the expense of those who are normally in authority – the leaders of the Temple. One commentary says, “If Jesus were to lose any of these challenges, his occupation of the temple would cease, his challenge to the authorities in Jerusalem would end, and the

leaders would regain control of the temple. If they win any of these challenges, there is no need to crucify him.”¹

Some competition it is – where winning results in crucifixion ... but this is what Jesus came to do ... to die for us, and to show us a way to live this life of compassionate self-emptying and faith witness. Jesus did not come to give us a mortally comfortable and cushy life. The rest of chapter 21 and chapter 22 Jesus continues under a series of assaults, very educated and scholarly assaults from the temple leaders: knowledgeable in religious law. Jesus prevails with clever responses and stories in all situations. The divine authority present in Jesus’ personhood shines through.

So, I want to draw your attention again to the image of a person caught in that tidal rush at the beach ... constantly being pulled back into the water, constantly being knocked down but getting up again to make another effort at emerging. In today’s Gospel reading, we catch a glimpse of Jesus in just that scenario ... the waters of religious tradition trying to drag him under ... the authority of God equipping him to prevail in every single instance until finally, by his death and crucifixion, he emerges from the mire, to resurrection and ultimately an ascension that demonstrates to us that the authority of God is above all earthly forces: like Pharisees and Saducees, like religious leaders, and perhaps church closures and re-openings ... the authority of God is above all earthly forces like hurricanes, fires, floods, and pesky pandemics – even when, and perhaps ESPECIALLY when we feel like we are constantly being dragged under.

The story may change ... the challenge may change ... but the authority of God is like a constant theme song, playing under varying lyrics, ever calling us home, ever rescuing us from despair, ever showing us a resplendent love like no other.

Thanks be to God ☺ Amen.

Hymn of the Day: Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters ELW 445 (Beach Spring)

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VRxVTHUewU>

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Beach Spring, Music: The Sacred Harp, Philadelphia, 1844; arr Selected Hymns 1985

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The main prayer below was accessed through the Xavier University website, at:

<https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/coronavirus-prayers> and written by Sister Christine Koelhoeffer, IHM. The final two petitions were added based on our context for this Sunday.

A Coronavirus Prayer:

Loving God, Your desire is for our wholeness and well being.

We hold in tenderness and prayer the collective suffering of our world at this time.

We grieve precious lives lost and vulnerable lives threatened.

We ache for ourselves and our neighbors, standing before an uncertain future.

We pray: may love, not fear, go viral.

Inspire our leaders to discern and choose wisely, aligned with the common good.

Help us to practice social distancing and reveal to us new and creative ways to come together in spirit and in solidarity.

Call us to profound trust in your faithful presence,

You, the God who does not abandon.

We add to these prayers our prayers for the all those who have now returned to school,
And for those who have lost beloved family members in the past weeks:

¹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=4575

May your Spirit walk alongside them to comfort them.
 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 – God Who Made the Earth and Heaven ELW 564

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYwWAswMKV4>

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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: Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service ELW 712 (Beach Spring)

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kt5vfXUwA8M>

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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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