

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 20, 2020

I was struck by a great sadness with the news of the passing of Ruth Bader Ginsberg. A strong woman, who fought for much she believed in, she is well worth all of our admiration and respect. To quote Michael Curry, our Presiding Bishop, "Because of her the ancient words of the prophet Micah to do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God have found fulfillment. May we follow in her footprints." May her memory be a blessing to all whose lives she touched.

Blessed be God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
And blessed be God's kingdom, now and forever. Amen.

Let's pray this together.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord be with you.
And also with you.

Let us now pray together the collect of the day.

The Collect

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly; and even now, while we are placed among things that are passing away, to hold fast to those that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

First Lesson

Exodus 16:2-15

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days." So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you

complain against us?” And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.”

Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.’” And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

The Response

Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45

Confitemini Domino

- 1 Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name; *
make known his deeds among the peoples.
- 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him, *
and speak of all his marvelous works.
- 3 Glory in his holy Name; *
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
- 4 Search for the Lord and his strength; *
continually seek his face.
- 5 Remember the marvels he has done, *
his wonders and the judgments of his mouth,
- 6 O offspring of Abraham his servant, *
O children of Jacob his chosen.
- 37 He led out his people with silver and gold; *
in all their tribes there was not one that stumbled.
- 38 Egypt was glad of their going, *
because they were afraid of them.
- 39 He spread out a cloud for a covering *
and a fire to give light in the night season.
- 40 They asked, and quails appeared, *
and he satisfied them with bread from heaven.
- 41 He opened the rock, and water flowed, *
so the river ran in the dry places.
42. For God remembered his holy word *
and Abraham his servant.

43 So he led forth his people with gladness, *
his chosen with shouts of joy.
44 He gave his people the lands of the nations, *
and they took the fruit of others' toil,
45 That they might keep his statutes *
and observe his laws.
Hallelujah!

The Epistle

Philippians 1:21-30

To me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well-- since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew.
Glory to you Lord Christ.

The Gospel

Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and

go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

Praise to you Lord Christ.

A Reflection

May the words written and the prayer of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

It just doesn't seem fair, does it? The workers that were hired late in the day got the same pay as the ones who had worked the full day! To quote the Gospel, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat."

I'd be annoyed, wouldn't you? After all their work, this happens. The ones who were hired first believed they would receive a higher wage, but the landowner reminds them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?" So their expectation and feeling of entitlement are perhaps unjustified. The landowner elaborates further, offering, "Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

I can all but hear the workers grumbling still as the landowner offers the closing perspective, "So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

This statement alone shakes much of what our culture teaches us all. We strive to be first, always. The second isn't quite as good – we don't measure up as well. First is best, in all things. But Jesus instructs us saying the kingdom of heaven is like this and concludes the parable with "the last will be first and the first will be last."

"But it's not fair!" many will say and hold onto with all their strength. But let's think together about times we strive to be first. The list is endless. Wanting the highest salary – at the perfect job, too. Striving for the "perfect" weight. Wanting to date the best person. Remember in school, wanting the highest grades, not to be the smartest, but to have a better grade than the kid at the next desk. Because, after all, *everything* is a competition!

Don't misunderstand me – this is not about bettering yourself, something helpful to us all! This is about bettering yourself just so you are first – just so you are "better" than your neighbor. This leads to entitlement – "of course I am entitled to this. I was first, after all!" When we are entitled or feel we are entitled, our vision is clouded to the world around us. We cannot see what is happening or maintain a clear perspective on each other.

All of those things we may strive to be "first" in our probe to be social constructs. The world telling us what is best and where we need to strive to be first. What is the best salary? How thin is thin enough?

The best work is the best salary, of course, but is it really?

All these things we strive to be first in do not only not entitle us to any more of anything – they also seldom match God's desire for us as a people. What if we strive to be first in having the largest heart? Or perhaps first in being generous? How about the first to appreciate the first to say thank you? Working with more energy for the things that God teaches we need. Striving in this manner will not get us any closer to being first or entitled to anything more than we have, but it will clear our vision to see and give thanks, for what we do have. Maybe, just maybe, if we give up on the entitlement around the idea of being “first” we can realize we already are! Or perhaps, in the eyes of God, this is all an irrelevant pursuit. There is no first or last in God's eyes – we are all welcome at the table without question or concern.

How about this, instead of striving to be first, we strive to be first in giving thanks? Then, we, like in today's Psalm, “Give thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name; make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him, and speak of all his marvelous works. Glory in his holy Name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. Search for the Lord and his strength; continually seek his face. Remember the marvels he has done, his wonders and the judgments of his mouth.”

I find that, in thinking about all these gifts we are blessed by, I'm OK with not being first.

Amen.

Let us now confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

Praying together:

*Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.*

Let us end by praying as our Lord Jesus Christ taught us – Pray this as you will, out loud or to yourself – just know that God hears you.

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,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

We will continue with the prayer of Spiritual Communion. This prayer was written by St. Alphonsus de Liguori. This prayer is now often used when the church is in a place of fasting from Communion, and I have heard this used in many of the on-line services being offered. We will be using this prayer in place of Communion when we regather in the future.

Jesus, I believe that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. I love you above all things, and long for you in my soul. Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. As though you have already come, I embrace you and unite myself entirely to you; never permit me to be separated from you. Amen.

As I said last Sunday, we have a Vestry meeting coming up where we will be discussing re-gathering in church again. I would really like to hear your opinion on this matter. Everyone's opinion matters on this issue. Are you ready to come back to church? Do you feel safe doing so? Please let me or someone on the Vestry know what you think, so we can consider everyone's opinion. We will share our collective conclusions after the meeting.

Know that I pray for all of you in this time of separation from each other.

Yours in Christ,
Dave+