

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 30, 2020

This was a complicated week, in many ways. I ask this morning for your prayers to continue for California, and that we pray together for all involved in the situation in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Pray for Jacob Blake, who will be paralyzed for life. Pray for those who live in fear, and don't know how to respond to their fear. Pray for all affected by Hurricane Laura. Pray for all living in fear or anxiety or loss in the midst of the pandemic. In the midst of it all, remember to give thanks for the blessings present in your own life. We also pray for the soul of Chadwick Boseman, taken from this life far too early. In a world filled with strife, he played his roles with elegance and class and offered a symbol of strength and unity for a generation.

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 knowns, 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, 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

Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.
Amen.

First Lesson

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of

Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.” But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

The Response

Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45c

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.
- 23 Israel came into Egypt, *
and Jacob became a sojourner in the land of Ham.
- 24 The Lord made his people exceedingly fruitful; *
he made them stronger than their enemies;
- 25 Whose heart he turned, so that they hated his people, *
and dealt unjustly with his servants.

26 He sent Moses his servant, *
and Aaron whom he had chosen.
45 Hallelujah!

The Epistle

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

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

The Gospel

Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

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. *Amen.*

This certainly does not sound like an ideal time to be a disciple, does it? Jesus has revealed to the disciples “that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

The mention of being raised on the third day almost gets lost in Peter's seemingly rapid rebuke to Jesus of “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” But Jesus wastes little time in response turning to Peter saying “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Jesus knows what is about to happen, and will accept no stumbling blocks to get there.

Take a moment to think about a time you have had to do something you really didn't want to do, but you knew it had to be done. I remember some papers I didn't want to work on in Seminary, and all of a sudden could think of an assortment of things that needed to get done around the house. All stumbling blocks do what actually needed to be done. (Kim always knew when I was working on a big paper because she would come home and find the house vacuumed and all the dishes done!) What are the stumbling blocks you put up for yourself? For that matter, what are the stumbling blocks in your relationship with the Lord? I still find many myself – ranging from hours in the day, or needing time to work on other important things.

Let's talk about context for a moment. Jesus knows what is about to happen – he knows it is going to be hard – but he also knows it is what needs to happen. Jesus then offers “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

I have been somewhat bewildered for a while at the way this phrase is used to justify suffering in our lives as Christians. This verse has been used to “justify” a range of suffering and has been applied to situations such as domestic abuse. In suffering, we are like/closer to Christ. Consider the context again – Jesus is going into a dark place now. We do *not* have to suffer to be Christian – we need to be willing to pick up our cross *when necessary* and follow him – this is not offered as a mandate, but addresses a specific situation.

I have trouble believing Jesus wants us to suffer to be a follower. If we believe that Jesus represents love, this is hard to imagine! Being a disciple or a follower of Christ does not mean we have to suffer any more than it makes everything easy. “Deny yourself” is not really the same thing as suffering, is it? We deny ourselves when we do not give in to the pressures that society applies for what we should have or what we are entitled to. And, in our current situation, we are given many opportunities to deny ourselves, but those opportunities are also for the benefit of the common good. Not a bad thing to do as Christians!

As I said, being a disciple or a follower does not mean you have to suffer any more than it makes everything easy. Christianity, like life, offers opportunity for great joy and well as those moments where

we need to pick up our cross and forge through. We, of course, have the advantage of knowing where the story is going – think for a moment of the joys of Easter. No cross to bear here, but our cups then overflow with the joy of life.

In today's reading from Exodus, God leads Moses and the people of Israel into the “good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey”. This comes after a time of slavery. Is it an easy journey? No, it isn't – a time filled with joy and crosses to bear for sure.

This is not an either/or proposition – life will offer both joy and suffering. What the Lord offers is a different *perception* of both as we walk with Jesus. Between suffering and joy, one is not better than the other – one does not out us closer to God than the other, but both give us that time to walk with Jesus and see it with those eyes.

The very words of this Gospel remind us that we do not walk alone when bearing our cross or walk in joy. When Jesus says “take up their cross and follow me,” we see that we do not walk alone in our bearing of pain and suffering. He walks with us, then and always.

Today's psalm tells us:

*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.*

And we do this in all things while bearing our cross or letting our hearts rejoice in seeking the Lord.

So, for today, let's bear our cross. Let's forge ahead, knowing that we do not walk alone. And, in doing so, let's rejoice in our hearts that we are both seeking and walking with the Lord.

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.

Take some time this week to pay in gratitude for the gifts in your life. My work at the day shelter is giving me ample time to see many who are stressed and are not making the best choices to handle their stress. Some are sleeping in the shelter and some are sleeping outside. Some feel very alone – no family, few friends, and finding it difficult to believe anyone cares. If you need assistance, ask – reach out and let us know how we can help. Reach out to each other, just to say hello, to let someone hear the voice of someone who cares. Hoping to see you again soon.

Yours in Christ,
Dave+