

YOU'RE HIRED!
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, PROPER 9
JULY 9, 2017
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CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, DUNEDIN, FL

COLLECT OF THE DAY

You are great, O God, and greatly to be praised. You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you. Grant that we may believe in you, call upon you, know you, and serve you, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

ZECHARIAH 9:9–12

Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion. Sing aloud, Daughter Jerusalem. Look, your king will come to you. He is righteous and victorious. He is humble and riding on an ass, on a colt, the offspring of a donkey.

He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the warhorse from Jerusalem. The bow used in battle will be cut off; he will speak peace to the nations. His rule will stretch from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Moreover, by the blood of your covenant, I will release your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, prisoners of hope. Moreover, declare today that I will return double to you.

PSALM 145:8–15

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and of great kindness.

The Lord is loving to everyone and his compassion is over all his works.

All your works praise you, O Lord, and your faithful servants bless you.

They make known the glory of your kingdom and speak of your power;

That the peoples may know of your power and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; your dominion endures throughout all ages.

The Lord is faithful in all his words and merciful in all his deeds.

The Lord upholds all those who fall; he lifts up those who are bowed down.

ROMANS 8:12–25

So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it isn't an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness. If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live. All who are led by God's Spirit are God's sons and daughters. You didn't receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, "Abba, Father." The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God's children. But if we are children, we are also heirs. We are God's heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him.

I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us. The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters. Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice—it was the choice of the one who subjected it—but in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children. We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

MATTHEW 11:16–19,25–30

[Jesus said,] "To what will I compare this generation? It is like a child sitting in the marketplaces calling out to others, 'We played the flute for you and you didn't dance. We sang a funeral song and you didn't mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' Yet the Human One came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved to be right by her works."

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you've hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have shown them to babies. Indeed, Father, this brings you happiness."

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My Father has handed all things over to me. No one knows the Son except the Father. And nobody knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal him."

Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I'm gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light."

Song of the Day: *God of Grace and God of Glory*

Maybe you, or someone you know, has received a letter that went something like this:

Thank you for your interest in working for this company.

You have impressive skills and abilities. However, at this time they do not meet our needs.

We wish you luck in your search.

You put yourself out there, but . . . you're just not good enough.

It happens, not just with employers, but also colleges and online dating sites.

Don't laugh – I've done more than one wedding of people who met online with something like eHarmony; it's a new scene out there.

Something similar can happen with people already in our lives.

One day, well over 20 years ago, long before I was ordained, I was talking to a girlfriend.

She was ready to leave her husband. She said he wasn't meeting her needs.

Now, some people are indeed incompatible, and shouldn't stay married.

I get that. But I didn't think that was it with her.

I was slack jawed for a minute, shocked at this news.

Then I said something that could have come only from the Holy Spirit, because I'd never thought these words before, let alone said them.

I said, "If what you think you need is a glass of water,

and the what the person you're with has to offer is the ability to play the violin,

then, no, you won't get water from them. If all you can focus on is the water, though, you'll miss the beautiful gift they CAN give you.

Maybe you can get the water somewhere else,

and also learn to appreciate who that person is just as they are."

My friend said nothing at that moment. I don't think what I said was what she'd been looking for.

I don't know even if what I said made any difference, but

over 20 years later, they are still married, and pretty happy, especially now that they are grandparents.

She has learned to let her husband be himself, not demand he be someone else.

I think that's something almost all healthy long-term relationships have in common: we can take our mask off, and be who we are.

Over the years, both people learn to accept who the other really is.

However, in the best relationships, it's not about acceptance only,

but also encouragement of the other person's gifts,

and, at the very best, even calling the better out of the good – as the song goes, helping me be more than I can be.

When I started seminary in 1995, Gus was very suspicious of organized religion; in fact, I'm not sure that has changed much.

He was even pretty skeptical about God, though he did decide to get baptized in 2002.

But I'm not here to tell his faith story – that's for him to do or not do.

What I want to say is that, despite his skepticism and reservations,

if seminary is what I needed to do to be who I am, then he was behind me all the way.

I wouldn't be standing here today otherwise.

Gus didn't just "let" me be whom God was calling me to be, though;
 he was my biggest fan, actively helping me through some rough times,
 even though he didn't understand why I'd want to do this fool thing.

I'm not sure he understands that even now.

All these same dynamics can be true not only in human relationships, but divine ones.

Whether we admit it to ourselves or not, St. Augustine, who our opening collect quoted,
 was right: our hearts are restless until they rest in God.

Our very souls long to be accepted by God,
 to take off our competitive masks of perfection and find a home,
 to rest from all the demands and expectations that others put on us.

This yearning is nearly universal among all people of faith who seek God:

to be, like the prodigal son, welcomed home;

to be shown compassion by a merciful Lord, as our psalm exults

Jesus names this, doesn't he, in the last line of the Gospel reading,

when he says, *Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads,
 and I will give you rest. Put on my yoke, and learn from me.*

I'm gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves.

My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light.

I've seen grown men cry when hearing this, because life can be so very hard.

What I want to know, though, is this: will we return the favor? Will we let God be who God is?

Obviously, most Christians would consider it absurd to say to God's face:

Thank you for your interest in being my personal deity.

You have impressive skills and abilities. However, at this time they do not meet my needs.

We wish you luck in your search to find someone to worship you.

Yet, over the millennia humans have developed definite ideas

about what a God who is worth the title should be like. I hear opinions about this all the time:

If God is just, he will ensure our nation wins this war over those godless heathens.

If God were good, he'd stop all the evil in the world.

If God were powerful, he'd cure my child of cancer.

For God to be worthy of my praise, he needs to make me rich.

For God to be of any use to me, he'd find me a parking place

at Countryside Mall at Christmas.

And, my favorite: If God is perfect, then everything that happens is God's will,
 including disasters, disease, slavery, and holocausts.

So, I'm not responsible for addressing it, God is.

Generally, humans can do one of three things with regard to finding God.

First, we start with what we need, and write job description for a god,

deciding what divine grace, glory, justice, goodness and power should be.

Then we create our own deity based on our own needs and preferences.

For example, for most of human history, people have demanded a god
 who is the strongest, the mightiest, invincible:

Superman, Batman, indeed, the entire Justice League rolled into one.

This process is also as old as religion, and it is called idolatry.

But, because this god isn't real, this god will always disappoint us.

Second, we can assess god, whatever our notions of that god are,

to see if a god is useful to us in any way, or whether we can do it ourselves.

This is what so many intellectual, scientific types have done.

They have determined they don't need a god to explain the universe.

Human intellect and will enough to figure life out.

This is even worse than idolatry; it is the height of human pride and hubris.

There is a cost to both of these approaches. It isn't that when we die we'll be sent to hell.

It's that, while we are still alive we will not find fullness of life, not only of mercy and rest, but of the creative and joyful living that comes only from walking with, being yoked with, a living Lord who leads us into becoming more than we can be.

Which gets us to the third choice, which, is to let God be God, to let God speak for Godself, to let God be the one who defines what the divine life looks like.

The thing is, when we really do this,

we will find that divine grace, glory, power, goodness and justice may not look like we humans have usually wanted it to look.

In the gospel reading, Jesus says people couldn't see God at work because it wasn't what folks expected.

If God played a merry tune, humanity said, "Oh, no you don't! Religion is *serious business!*"

So, then, if God played a funeral dirge, people said, "Yuck, religion is a wet blanket."

Just so, John the Baptist fasted as a prophet, and they said he was crazy;

Jesus ate and drank, and they said he was a frivolous party animal.

People demanding a glass of water can't even see the violinist.

So, what is our God really like?

What are divine grace, glory, power, goodness and justice all about?

It's the work of a lifetime to explore this fully, but our lessons start us off.

Zechariah says that this god isn't a vengeful warrior, but one who is humble,

who ends our warring madness, who speaks peace to the nations and ends oppression.

Paul teaches that a life lived in selfishness, on taking care of number one,

will not bring us fuller life, but a living death.

And Jesus says being able to see and know God isn't a matter of being the most brilliant one,

someone who has all the expertise ABOUT God,

but being someone who has the humility to know, like a child knows,

that we *can't* do life By. Our. Selves.

That we need to care for each other, we need God's care,

and that God yearns for us as much as we yearn for God.

When Zechariah and Jesus talk about humility, they are not talking about being weak doormats.

They are talking about not being so prideful and full of ourselves

that there is no room for anyone or anything else.

When Jesus says to us, "Come to me," he is saying that there is room for us, the real us,

each of us, without the mask. We are safe there. And he is glad we're there,

because God made us to belong to God.

The great question for humanity is whether we have room for God, the real God,

God without a mask or a cape or a magic wand,

who embodies a grace, glory, power, goodness and justice

by upholding those who fall, and lifting up those who are bowed down.

Those who have room for this real God are prisoners, not of fear, but hope –

an active yet patient hope for true, profound freedom, not just for ourselves,

but for all God's children, for all of God's creation.

And that brings me to my last point: what can we do to learn from Christ?

We need only to look around our lives.

Whom have we judged as not meeting our expectations?

Who are the violinists in our world?

It may be someone in our home, at our work, or even in the news.

It may be one person, or an entire group of people.

What would it take for us to welcome them, have mercy on them,

the same way we yearn for Christ to welcome and have mercy on us?

What would it take for us all to learn to see
that *everyone* we meet is struggling hard and carrying a heavy load, is in need of rest?
What would it take for us all to learn to see that everyone we meet
incarnates some precious gift?

When we can learn all that by walking yoked with our living Lord,
we learn what divine grace, glory, power, goodness and justice are really about.
It's not easy for us to do, but given how boneheaded humans can be,
I suppose it's not easy for God, either.
However, it's the best job in the world, and God will hire all who apply.

Let's seal this sermon by praying again together the Collect of the Day:

You are great, O God, and greatly to be praised.

*You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless
until they rest in you.*

*Grant that we may believe in you, call upon you, know you,
and serve you, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.*