

Sunday, September 24, 2017
16th Sunday after Pentecost

INTRODUCTION

Matthew narrates one of Jesus' controversial parables, in which Jesus says the reign of God is like workers who get paid the same no matter when they start. When God changes his mind about punishing Nineveh for their evil ways, Jonah is angry. Yet God is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love. In baptism we receive the grace of God that is freely given to all. As Luther wrote, in the presence of God's mercy we are all beggars.

PRELUDE

"Adagio"

Georg Muffat

*GATHERING SONG

"When Morning Gilds the Sky"

ELW 853

When morning gilds the skies,
my heart awaking cries:
may Jesus Christ be praised!
When evening shadows fall,
this rings my curfew call:
may Jesus Christ be praised!

When mirth for music longs,
this is my song of songs:
may Jesus Christ be praised!
God's holy house of prayer
has none that can compare
with "Jesus Christ be praised!"

No lovelier antiphon
in all high heav'n is known
than "Jesus Christ be praised!"
There to the eternal Word
the eternal psalm is heard:
oh, Jesus Christ be praised!

Let all of humankind
in this their concord find:
may Jesus Christ be praised!
Let all the earth around
ring joyous with the sound:
may Jesus Christ be praised!

Sing, sun and stars of space,
sing, all who see his face,

sing, "Jesus Christ be praised!"
God's whole creation o'er,
today and evermore
shall Jesus Christ be praised!

***GREETING**

☞ *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

☞ **And also with you.**

***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

☞ *Almighty and eternal God,*

☞ **you show perpetual lovingkindness to us your servants. Because we cannot rely on our own abilities, grant us your merciful judgment, and train us to embody the generosity of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen!**

ANTHEM

"Lord, Lead Me, Lord"
Chancel Choir

Gilbert Martin

FIRST READING

Jonah 3:10-4:11

After Jonah's short sermon in 3:4, the Ninevites all repented and God decided to spare the city. Jonah objected to this and became even more angry when God ordered a worm to destroy a plant that was providing shade. The book ends with a question that challenges any who are not ready to forgive: You, Jonah, are all worked up about a bush, but should not I be concerned about a hundred and twenty thousand Ninevites who do not know the difference between their right and left hands?

¹⁰When God saw what [the people of Ninevah] did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

^{4:1}But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. ²He prayed to the LORD and said, "O LORD! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. ³And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." ⁴And the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" ⁵Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

⁶The LORD God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. ⁷But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. ⁸When the sun rose, God prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

⁹But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes,

angry enough to die.” ¹⁰Then the LORD said, “You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. ¹¹And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?”

Reflection

This is, I think, my favorite book in the Old Testament. It's short—a short story with a psalm in the middle of it. The “popular” image is of Jonah and the whale—which is a whale of a great fish story! If you haven't read it lately (perhaps since it last came up as a reading), read the entire “book” of Jonah. Our text doesn't talk about the fish (not a whale), but it has the end of the story. If the idea of reading the whole “book” is too much for you, just read from the beginning of chapter 3. What did God call Jonah to do? (3:1-2—see 1:1-2 also) What did Jonah do then? (3:3-4) How did the people of Nineveh receive Jonah's message? (verses 5-9) Jonah is an extremely unusual prophet, in that his message was believed by the people he was preaching against. What was God's response? (3:10) Was Jonah pleased? (4:1) Why? (4:2-3) What did God do in response to Jonah's whining? (4:4-6) This story also has an acted parable in it—see 4:6-8. In case Jonah didn't get it (which he didn't, because he was too angry), God explained the parable. What was the explanation? (4:9-11) Jonah 4:11 is, I think, my favorite verse in the Bible. If it is the gospel for Nineveh, then it is surely the gospel for us, who also many times do not know our right hand from our left. And for all of creation! As you read this text, think about times when you might be angry because God does not destroy your enemies. How can this text influence the way we live our lives?

PSALM 145:1-8

¹I will exalt you, my | God and king,
and bless your name forev- | er and ever.

²**Every day | will I bless you**
and praise your name forev- | er and ever.

³Great is the LORD and greatly | to be praised!
There is no end | to your greatness.

⁴**One generation shall praise your works | to another**
and shall de- | clare your power.

⁵I will speak of the glorious splendor | of your majesty
and all your | marvelous works.

⁶**They shall tell of the might of your | wondrous acts,**
and I will re- | count your greatness.

⁷They shall publish the remembrance of | your great goodness;
they shall sing joyfully | of your righteousness.

⁸**The LORD is gracious and full | of compassion,**
slow to anger and abounding in | steadfast love.

Reflection

This psalm calls on us to bless God's name. In this psalm, bless and praise mean the same thing. Why are we to praise God “greatly”? (verses 1-3) We also praise God by talking about God's “wondrous works.” (verse 4) As you reflect on the faith of those who came before you, how did their praise of God teach you to bless God? How do you share your faith in the God of

“abundant goodness”? (verses 4-7) *What is your experience of God’s grace, mercy, and steadfast love?* (verse 8)

SECOND READING

Philippians 1:21-30

Paul writes to the Philippians from prison. Though he is uncertain about the outcome of his imprisonment, he is committed to the ministry of the gospel and calls on the Philippians to live lives that reflect and enhance the gospel mission.

²¹For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. ²³I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; ²⁴but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. ²⁵Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

²⁷Only, 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, ²⁸and 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. ²⁹For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well—³⁰since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Reflection

How would Paul’s confession that “living is Christ and dying is gain” affect your living and dying (when you get to that time)? (verses 21-24) What is Paul’s motive in wanting to live? (verses 25-26) If we are to live for each other, what will our life look like? (verses 27-28) Why might someone want to intimidate you if you live a gospel life? How are we Christians able to live “standing firm...and...in no way intimidated...”? Does it surprise you that God has given us the privilege of “not only...believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well”? In what ways have you suffered for Christ? How has that been a privilege (if indeed you see it as a privilege)? If you can’t see it in yourself, look around you at other Christians. I think of Martin Luther, of Martin Luther King, Jr., of Mother Teresa.... Who do you see suffering for Christ, either in history, or living now? How does their example influence you?

***GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

“Celtic Alleluia”

Alleluia, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia.

***GOSPEL**

Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus tells a parable about God’s generosity, challenging the common assumption that God rewards people according to what they have earned or deserve.

[Jesus said to the disciples:] ¹“The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ²After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. ³When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the

marketplace; ⁴and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. ⁵When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. ⁶And 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?’ ⁷They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ ⁸When 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.’ ⁹When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. ¹⁰Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. ¹¹And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, ¹²saying, ‘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.’ ¹³But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage?’ ¹⁴Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. ¹⁵Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ ¹⁶So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

Reflection

This text is a parable Jesus told to teach the disciples about “the first will be last, and the last will be first.” (See Matthew 19:30, the preceding verse.) The kingdom of heaven is like a farmer who needs laborers for his vineyard. So he hires day laborers who are available when he needs them. How many times does he hire laborers? (verses 3-6) What happens when he gives them their wages? (verses 8-13) What is the expectation of the first hired? (verse 11) What is the answer of the farmer? (verses 13-15) Is God “fair” in how we are treated? Was God fair in how Jonah was treated? Why do some people expect to be treated better than others? Because that’s the way the world is? (I think of men/women--of course, masters/servants, white/black, rich/poor) If it is good news to the poor that God treats them with generosity and kindness, is it bad news for the rich? What do you think? Do you want to live in the kingdom of heaven, where all are treated with mercy and lovingkindness, rather than some being treated as privileged? Why or why not?

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE

Kris Langdon

SERMON

“Will God Be Just”

Rev. Roger Lenander

SONG OF THE DAY

“Drawn to the Light”

ELW 593

**People who walk in darkness have sought
a light in the heart of the darkest night.
Just when we thought all would be lost,
we were drawn to the light of God.**

Refrain

**Dawn is in sight! Gone is the night,
drawn to the light and the morning.
Glorious and bright, oh, what a sight
to be drawn to the light of God.**

**How can we tell a heaven from hell
if ev'ryone dwells in the dark of night?**

Morning dispels, gently compels,
and we're drawn to the light of God. *Refrain*

Where is the sun? Oh, there will be none!
The Lamb is the one who is shining bright,
bids us to come! Life has begun
when we're drawn to the light of God. *Refrain*

***APOSTLES' CREED**

☑ I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen!

***PRAYER SONG** *"Let My Prayer Be a Fragrant Offering"*

Let my prayer be a fragrant offering,
as incense to you arise.
Let my prayer be a fragrant offering,
my hands lifted up in praise.

***PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Open to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all of God's creation.

A brief silence.

Let us pray for the church and its ministry. Unite us in one Spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Come, take the bread, come, drink the wine,
come, share the Lord.
No one is a stranger here,
everyone belongs;
finding our forgiveness here,
we in turn forgive all wrongs.

He joins us here, he breaks the bread,
the Lord who pours the cup is risen from the dead;
the one we love the most is now our gracious host:
Come, take the bread, come, drink the wine,
Come, share the Lord.

***OFFERTORY RESPONSE**

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One,
give thanks because he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.
Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One,
give thanks because he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.
Give thanks!

***OFFERING PRAYER**

P *God of life,*
C you give us these gifts of the earth, these resources of our life and our labor. Take them, offered in great thanksgiving, and use them to set a table that will heal the whole creation; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Light. Amen!

***DIALOGUE**

P *The Lord be with you.*
C And also with you.
P *Lift up your hearts.*
C We lift them to the Lord.
P *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*
C It is right to give our thanks and praise.

***PREFACE**

P *It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through our Savior Jesus Christ. Fulfilling the promise of the resurrection, you pour out the fire of your Spirit, uniting in one*

body people of every nation and tongue. And so, with Mary Magdalene and Peter and all the witnesses of the resurrection, with earth and sea and all their creatures, and with angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

***HOLY, HOLY, HOLY**

**Holy, Holy, Holy
Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna, hosanna,
hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna, hosanna,
hosanna in the highest.**

***THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

P *In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

*Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

***LORD'S PRAYER**

P *Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.*

C **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!

***INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

P *Speak to us, O Lord, in the breaking of the bread, and make us one with you.*

***BLESSING**

P *The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.*

C Amen!

***PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

P *Holy and compassionate God,*

C **in bread and wine you give us gifts that form us to be humble and courageous. May your words come to life in our serving and in our witness, that we might speak a living voice of healing and justice to all the world, through Jesus Christ, our rock and our redeemer. Amen!**

***BENEDICTION**

P *God, creator of all things, speaking reformation into being;
Jesus Christ, savior of the world, raising the dead;
Holy Spirit, living voice, calling and enlightening the church:
Almighty God, Father, ✠ Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you now and forever.*

C Amen!

***SENDING SONG**

“My Life Is In You”

**My life is in You Lord
My strength is in You Lord
My hope is in You Lord
In You it's in You
My life is in You Lord
My strength is in You Lord
My hope is in You Lord
In You it's in You**

**I will praise You
With all of my life
I will praise You
With all of my strength
With all of my life
With all of my strength
All of my hope is in You**

**My life is in You Lord
My strength is in You Lord
My hope is in You Lord
In You it's in You
My life is in You Lord
My strength is in You Lord
My hope is in You Lord
In You it's in You
In You**

***DISMISSAL**

L *Go in peace. Sound the good news.*

G **Thanks be to God!**