

Holy Eucharist

September 24, 2023

Zoom link:

<https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/85887946777?pwd=ei94MEdsMUh6clV6b2dUblFOQ3I2Zz0>

9

Meeting ID: 858 8794 6777

Passcode: 782611

Proper 20A: the 17th Sunday after Pentecost

Prelude

Opening Hymn

Hymnal 690

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

1 Guide me, O thou great Je - ho - vah, pil - grim through this
2 O - pen now the crys - tal foun - tain, whence the heal - ing
3 When I tread the verge of Jor - dan, bid my anx - ious

bar - ren land; I am weak, but thou art might - y;
stream doth flow; let the fire and cloud - y pil - lar
fears sub - side; death of death, and hell's de - struc - tion,

hold me with thy power - ful hand; bread of hea - ven,
lead me all my jour - ney through; strong de - liv - erer,
land me safe on Ca - naan's side; songs of prais - es,

bread of hea - ven, feed me now and ev - er -
 strong de - liv - erer, be thou still my strength and
 songs of prais - es, I will ev - er give to

more, feed me now and ev - er - more.
 shield, be thou still my strength and shield.
 thee, I will ev - er give to thee.

Presider Blessed be + God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

People **And blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever. Amen.**

The Presider begins the Collect for Purity

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 following is sung, all standing as they are able

Song of Praise

He is exalted

Chorus Book 7

He is ex - alt - ed, the King is ex - alt - ed on_ high. I will

praise Him. He is ex - alt - ed, for - ev - er ex - alt - ed and

I will praise His name!

He is the Lord. For - ev - er His truth shall

reign. Heav - en and earth re -

joice in His ho - ly name. He is ex - alt - ed, the

King is ex - alt - ed on high.

Collect of the Day

Presider The Lord be with you.
People And also with you.

Presider Let us pray.

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.**

All sit.

First Reading

Exodus 16:2-15

A Reading from the book of Exodus.

²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The 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.”

⁴Then 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. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” ⁶So 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, ⁷and 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?” ⁸And 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.”

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.’” ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹The LORD spoke to Moses and said, ¹²“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.’”

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When 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.”

Reade The Word of the Lord.

People **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45

to be prayed responsively

¹Give thanks to the LORD and call upon God’s Name; *
make known the deeds of the LORD among the peoples.

²Sing to God, sing praises, *
and speak of all the LORD's marvelous works.

³Glory in God's holy Name; *
 let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

⁴Search for the LORD and the strength of the Holy One; *
continually seek God's face.

⁵Remember the marvels the LORD has done, *
 the wonders and the judgments of God's mouth,

⁶O offspring of God's servant, Abraham. *
O children of Jacob his chosen.

³⁷The LORD led out the people with silver and gold; *
 in all their tribes there was not one that stumbled.

³⁸Egypt was glad of their going, *
because they were afraid of them.

³⁹God spread out a cloud for a covering *
 and a fire to give light in the night season.

⁴⁰They asked, and quails appeared, *
and the Holy One satisfied them with bread from heaven.

⁴¹God opened the rock, and water flowed, *
 so the river ran in the dry places.

⁴²For God remembered his holy word *
and Abraham his servant.

⁴³So the Holy One led forth the people with gladness, *
 the chosen ones with shouts of joy.

⁴⁴The LORD gave the people the lands of the nations, *
and they took the fruit of others' toil,

⁴⁵That they might keep the LORD's statutes *
 and observe the Holy One's laws.
Hallelujah!

Second Reading

Philippians 1:21-30

A Reading from Paul's letter to the Church in Philippi.

²¹To 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.

Reader The Word of the Lord.
People Thanks be to God.

All then stand as they are able.

Sequence Hymn

Hymnal 470

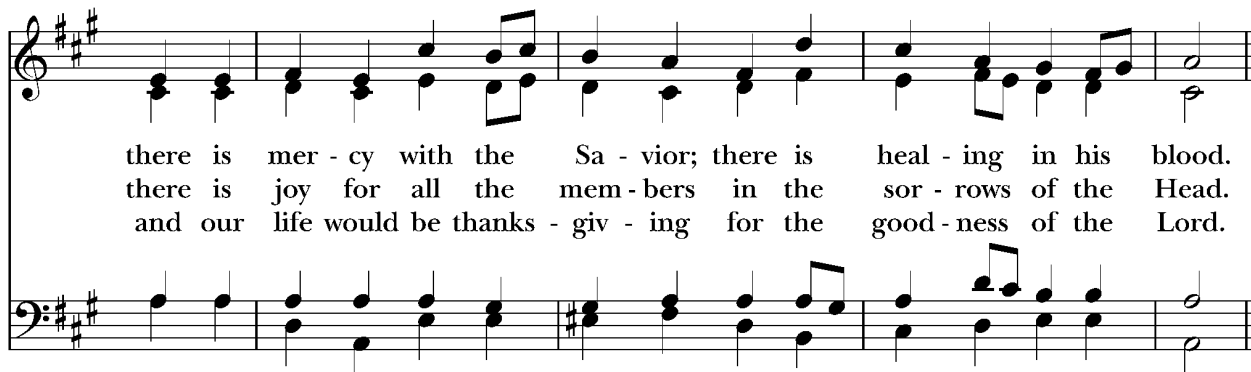
There's a wideness in God's mercy

The musical score is written in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. It consists of three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are as follows:

1 There's a wide-ness in God's mer - cy like the wide-ness of the sea;
2 There is no place where earth's sor - rows are more felt than up in heaven;
3 For the love of God is broad - er than the mea - sure of the mind;

there's a kind - ness in his jus - tice, which is more than lib - er - ty.
there is no place where earth's fail - ings have such kind - ly judg - ment given.
and the heart of the E - ter - nal is most won - der - ful - ly kind.

There is wel - come for the sin - ner, and more gra - ces for the good;
There is plen - ti - ful re - demp - tion in the blood that has been shed;
If our love were but more faith - ful, we should take him at his word;



there is mer - cy with the Sa - vior; there is heal - ing in his blood.
 there is joy for all the mem - bers in the sor - rows of the Head.
 and our life would be thanks - giv - ing for the good - ness of the Lord.

Holy Gospel

Matthew 20:1-16

Gospeller The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to Matthew.
People **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

[Jesus said,] 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.”



Gospeller The Gospel of the Lord.
People **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

Sermon

Rob Hampton

All then stand as they are able.

Nicene Creed

Presider Let us affirm the faith of the Church using the words of the Nicene Creed.

**We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.**

**We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.**

**For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],
who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.**

**We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. Amen.**

All remain standing as they are able.

Prayers of the People

Presider Brothers and sisters, children of God, turn for help to the Lord your strength and constantly seek God's presence. Let us pray to our generous God, saying, "Lead us with gladness, O God; cover us with shouts of joy!"

Intercessor Generous God, you have chosen us to do the work of your kingdom; you have called us to labor in your vineyard. With grateful hearts, we offer to you the best of what we have. Lead us with gladness, O God; **Cover us with shouts of joy!**

Silence is kept

Generous God, you hear the cry of the hungry. Give bread to all those who face starvation. Use us, as you will, to relieve suffering in our world. Lead us with gladness, O God; **Cover us with shouts of joy!**

Silence is kept

Generous God, you make rivers run in dry places. You have blessed this earth with bountiful resources. Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the world about us. Accept our thanks and praise for all the blessings you give abundantly to us [especially_____]. Lead us with gladness, O God; **Cover us with shouts of joy!**

Silence is kept

Generous God, there is enough kingdom work for everyone. Give us eyes to see the opportunities in our own neighborhood. Guide us that we may live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Lead us with gladness, O God; **Cover us with shouts of joy!**

Silence is kept

O Lord, you are ruler of all things in heaven and earth. Hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all a burning heart for our congregation, that all things necessary for our common life, and the embrace of the ministries with which you have gifted everyone. Bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church. Lead us with gladness, O God; **Cover us with shouts of joy!**

Silence is kept

Generous God, you hear the cries of the desperate. Marvelous are your works, O God. May the sick and suffering rejoice in you. May [_____ and all] the sick and the sorrowful call upon your name. Lead us with gladness, O God; **Cover us with shouts of joy!**

Silence is kept

Generous God, living is Christ and dying is gain. May [_____ and all] those who now rest from their labors find their comfort in you. Let light perpetual shine upon them. Lead us with gladness, O God; **Cover us with shouts of joy!**

Silence is kept

Presider For what other people and situations shall we pray today?

O Lord our God, accept the fervent prayers of your people; in the multitude of your mercies, look with compassion upon us and all who turn to you for help; for you are gracious, O lover of souls, and to you we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Confession of Sin

The Presider says to the people

Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

All remain standing, or kneel, as they are able.

Silence may be kept.

Minister and People

**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.**

A Priest stands and says

Almighty God have mercy on you, + forgive you all your sins through our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthen you in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

All then stand as they are able.

Peace

Presider The peace of Christ be always with you.

People **And also with you.**

Then the Ministers and the People may greet one another in the name of the Lord.

The People then are seated.

Announcements

Holy Communion

Presider O Lord our God, you are worthy to receive glory and honor and power; because you have created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being. *Revelation 4:11*

The people stand as they are able when the offerings are presented and placed on the Altar.

Offertory Hymn

Doxology

**Praise God, from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

The people remain standing as they are able

Great Thanksgiving

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

The Presider proceeds

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

For you are the source of light and life; you made us in your image, and called us to new life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who for ever proclaim the glory of your Name:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

The Presider continues

Holy and gracious Father: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin, and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all.

He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.

On the night he was handed over to suffering and death, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread; and when he had given thanks to you, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat: This is my Body, which is given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me."

After supper he took the cup of wine; and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and said, "Drink this, all of you: This is my Blood of the new Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this for the remembrance of me."

Therefore we proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died;
Christ is risen;
Christ will come again.**

The Presider continues

We celebrate the memorial of our redemption, O Father, in this sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. Recalling his death, resurrection, and ascension, we offer you these gifts. Sanctify them +by your Holy Spirit to be for your people the Body and Blood of your Son, the holy food and drink of new and unending life in him.

Sanctify us +also that we may faithfully receive this holy Sacrament, and serve you in unity, constancy, and peace; and at the last day bring us with all your saints into the joy of your eternal kingdom.

All this we ask through your Son Jesus Christ. By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and for ever. **AMEN.**

The Presider then continues

And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

**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.**

Breaking of the Bread

A period of silence is kept.

The Presider says

Alleluia. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us;
Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia.

The Gifts of God for the People of God.

All are welcome to receive Holy Communion.

Remaining seated, the following is sung after the table has been cleared.

Communion Hymn

Lord Jesus, think on me

Hymnal 641

1 Lord Je - sus, think on me, and purge a - way my sin;
2 Lord Je - sus, think on me, with care and woe op-pressed;

from harm - ful pas - sions set me free, and make me pure with - in.
let me thy lov - ing ser - vant be, and taste thy prom - ised rest.

The musical score is written for two voices (Soprano and Bass) and piano accompaniment. It is in the key of D major (two sharps) and 4/4 time. The melody is simple and hymn-like, with a clear harmonic structure. The lyrics are printed below the notes, with the first two lines of the hymn in a larger font. The score concludes with a double bar line.

The Presider then says

Let us pray.

Presider and People

**Eternal God, heavenly Father,
you have graciously accepted us as living members
of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ,
and you have fed us with spiritual food
in the Sacrament of his Body and Blood.
Send us now into the world in peace,
and grant us strength and courage
to love and serve you
with gladness and singleness of heart;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Blessing

A priest blesses the people, saying

My siblings in Christ, may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. **Amen.**

Closing Hymn

Tune: In Babilone

Called to labor in God's vineyard



1. Called to la - bor in God's vine - yard, Ea - ger to ac -
2. Called to la - bor in God's vine - yard, Not a - lone, but
3. Called to la - bor in God's vine - yard, Help us, Lord, in



cept the task, Us - ing ev - 'ry skill and tal - ent,
joined as one, Shar - ing com - mon goals and val - ues,
all we do. As the vines are heav - y - lad - en,



Do - ing all that God would ask, May we give our -
Striv - ing till the task is done, May we work with
Send more work - ers called by you. May our work bear



selves com-plete - ly To the work that is at hand,
one an - oth - er In a just and hon - est way,
fruit e - ter - nal And our fer - vor nev - er cease,



Of - fer - ing our will - ing serv - ice
Wheth - er hired at dawn or sun - set,
Till at last, the har - vest gath - ered,

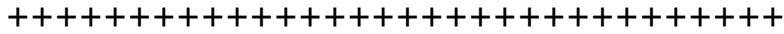


As the stew - ards of the land.
Not ex - pect - ing great - er pay.
We may rest and know your peace.

Dismissal

Minister And now, my brothers and sisters, I bid you go out as did St Barnabas, the
Encourager. Go out in peace to love and serve our Lord.
People **Thanks be to God.**

Postlude



This week in prayer

Please remember these persons and congregations in your prayers this week:

Our Bishops Bonnie, Michael, Justin, Moises (TEC); Elizabeth, Donald and Craig (ELCA)
and for all priests, deacons, Ministry Teams, and those in formation

Anglican Cycle of Prayer:

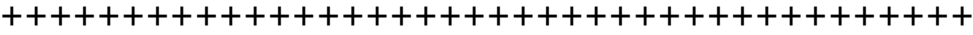
September 24 The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East

Diocese of Michigan Cycle of Prayer:

September 24 All Together Campus Ministry, Detroit, Spirit of Grace, West Bloomfield; St
Ann's, Mendoza, DR

St Barnabas Cycle of Prayer: Rick, Julie, Jim G, Mary G

and our continuing prayers for: Bob, Carlos, Jim M, Mardi, Robert, Selenah



Faith in Action continues to provide leadership in collecting donations of food to support households in need in the Chelsea and Dexter areas. ***The need for food has risen 54% since this past February.*** They remain in need of our support and help. You may bring your donations to FIA, or to [Nancy](#) who will see that they get there. **If you bring food directly to FIA**, please let Nancy know, so she can continue to keep our records of donation. If you write a check, please make it to *Faith In Action*. The **next Food Drive is October 15**. Please contribute as generously as you can.

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Upcoming Commemorations

- Sep 24 Anna Ellison Butler Alexander, Deaconess and Teacher, 1947
- 25 Sergius of Radonezh, Monastic, 1392
- 26 Lancelot Andrewes, Bishop, 1626; and, Wilson Carlile: Priest, 1942
- 27 Vincent de Paul: Religious, and Prophetic Witness, 1660; and,
Thomas Traherne: Priest, 1674
- 28 Richard Rolle, 1349, Walter Hilton, 1396,
and Margery Kempe, c. 1440, Mystics
- 29 Michael and All Angels
- 30 Jerome, Priest and Scholar, 420

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September 24, 2023 – Proper 20A, Pentecost 17

Exodus 16:2-15

At first glance, we might sympathize with the murmuring Israelites. After all, we need food to survive, and we have likely all been “hangry” once or twice. Yet the murmuring of the Israelites is not simply about their lack of food; it is also about their dissatisfaction with God. The

Israelites expected deliverance from oppression to look more like leisurely provision and less like subsistence living. Therefore, in a startling reversal, Israel turns from God to look back longingly at their former lives in Egypt.

Having thus turned from God, it is noteworthy that, as Aaron speaks to them, the Israelites turn back toward the wilderness, where they behold the glory of God. The Hebrew word *kavod*, translated “glory,” also denotes richness and abundance; and so, the glory of God, coming to the Israelites from the wilderness, is indeed accompanied by an abundant provision of quails and of the wondrous, grain-like substance called *manna*.

The message to the Israelites is clear: having delivered them, God will not leave them to die. God’s glory manifests to them as abundance and generosity – even in the midst of the wilderness, even after their turning away from God. The message for us is similar. Our lives are marked by loss, uncertainty, and change. As we journey through these passing things, we are reminded that God remains with us always and everywhere, even in those times and places when God’s presence seems particularly far from us. Our goal, with God’s help, is to endure these passing hardships and keep our faces turned toward God who loves us and sustains us, even if that means turning from our personal places of comfort to seek God in the wilderness of life.

Discussion Questions

- Have you felt the presence of God in a particularly difficult time?
- How did you experience God's presence and provision then? Now?
- What experiences of God help you in your journeys through life's wilderness?

Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45

When reading the Bible, it is common to encounter the same story told in a different way – sometimes in stark contrast to a previous telling found in another book! The story of the manna from heaven, first related in Exodus 16, is thus encountered again in Psalm 105, where several key details of the story are either changed or omitted entirely.

The psalmist downplays the murmuring of the Israelites: “They asked, and quails appeared, and he satisfied them with bread from heaven.” The phrase “they asked” feels rather far removed from the opposition and tension of the Exodus narrative! Yet Psalm 105 was likely composed sometime around the end of the Babylonian Exile, so it makes sense that the psalmist would choose to downplay the negative in celebration of God's strong deliverance. Likewise, our own stories can morph and shift according to our mood and setting. A negative experience can later be seen as positive, and vice versa. The trick is to acknowledge when and why our stories might change, and to ask ourselves – are we telling our stories faithfully and knowingly, or are we bending the story to serve our interests?

Discussion Questions

- Is there a story that is important to you or to your church?
- What about that story stands out to you, or means the most to you?
- Would someone else tell that story differently? Would you? If so, how?

Philippians 1:21-30

Paul believes that he will survive his present ordeal to see the Philippians again, but will that belief become a reality? That much remains unknown; and so, waiting to see whether he will live or die, the Philippians are caught in anxiety and uncertainty – a potential wilderness of the soul. What advice can Paul give to lead them through that wilderness?

Paul exhorts the Philippians to live “in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.” In fact, the Greek text more literally means “live as citizens,” a phrase typically oriented toward Roman citizenship. Yet Paul does not mean Roman citizenry, but citizenry in the Kingdom of God. With this, Paul offers a subtle reminder to the Philippians that they are sojourners in this world – citizens of a Kingdom that they long for but do not yet see completely. Whatever happens to Paul, they know what to do: continue living as citizens of that Kingdom.

This is Paul's advice to us as well, though we may never face imprisonment for our faith as he did. We know what it feels like to live in a state of anxious uncertainty, waiting to discover how things will unfold. Will we make it through the wilderness of our own experience? Yes, says Paul, because we also are citizens of God's Kingdom, and we know that the light of resurrection and restoration lies just beyond the darkness of the tomb. Clinging to that faith, we can survive and strive together, whatever might come our way.

Discussion Questions

- Is there a time when you experienced anxiety and uncertainty?
- Did your faith help you through that time? If so, how? If not, why not?

- What advice would you give to a parishioner feeling anxious and uncertain?

Matthew 20:1-16-20

Justice and generosity are major themes in today’s Gospel. In the parable, a landowner hires laborers to work his vineyard. At day’s end, the workers are paid. All is well until the first laborers realize that they have been paid the same amount as those hired later. The landowner’s response is baffling: he can do what he wants with what he owns, so the laborers should not be envious of his generosity. That may be true, but is it just? The laborers think not, but what if the landowner had acted justly according to the laborers? Those hired later (idle only because no one else had hired them) would have earned a lesser sum, presumably through no fault of their own. Is that justice? The parable suggests not.

The primary characteristic of the landowner is not justice *per se*, but generosity – the landlord is generous, and that generosity feels unjust to some. But what if the landowner’s generosity is justice? What if that generosity, shared with everyone, is a symbol of a new way of life – a way of love, even – and an invitation to walk that way? What if the laborers, quite unknowingly, have bought into a system that is itself unjust; a system which enacts oppression in the name of fairness and too often conflates our worth with our work?

If that is true, and if we take the landowner to be God (as the parable seems to imply), then perhaps God’s justice is rather like this extreme form of generosity that stubbornly resists the perpetuation of unjust systems. Perhaps it is our unjust world, built on the want of more and the fear of less, which has taught us that unwarranted generosity is unjust. This is likely little consolation for the offended laborers, or for those offended by this parable today; but perhaps, if we substitute “gracious” for “generous,” the picture will become clearer. God’s justice is God’s generosity, which is God’s grace – and it is that grace, given freely and equally to all without warrant or claim, which defines God’s Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

Discussion Questions

- Do you think the landowner acted justly or unjustly? Why?
- Do you agree that God’s generosity defines God’s justice? Why or why not?
- What does the phrase, “The last will be first and the first will be last,” mean to you?

This Bible study was written by Justin Smith

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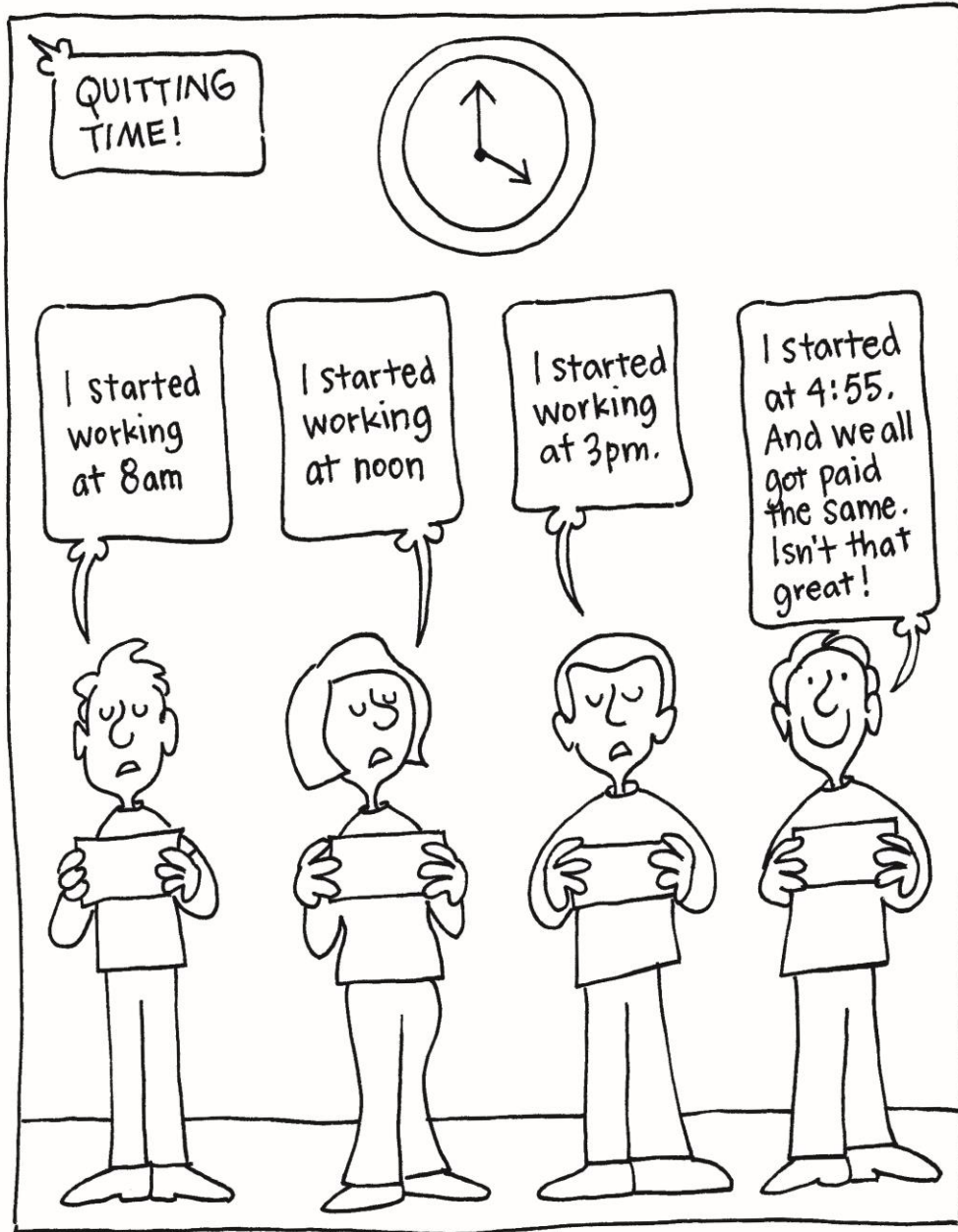
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Eucharistic prayer from Wells, Samuel and Abigail Kocher. *Eucharistic prayers*. Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2016, pp.274-275.

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We seek to grow as diverse disciples of Jesus Christ,
and to serve Jesus by serving others in the world,
guided by the values of Ancient Rites, Open Minds, and Affirming Hearts.



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