

Holy Eucharist

October 15, 2023

Zoom link:

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

9

Meeting ID: 858 8794 6777

Passcode: 782611

Proper 23A: the 20th Sunday after Pentecost

Prelude

Opening Hymn

Hymnal 408

Sing praise to God who reigns above



1 Sing praise to God who reigns a - bove, the God of all cre -
2 What God's al - might - y power hath made, his gra - cious mer - cy
3 Let all who name Christ's ho - ly Name give God all praise and



a - tion, the God of power, the God of love, the God of
keep - eth; by morn - ing glow or eve - ning shade his watch - ful
glo - ry; let all who know his power pro - claim a - loud the



our sal - va - tion; with heal - ing balm my soul he fills, and
eye ne'er sleep - eth. With - in the king - dom of his might, lo!
won - drous sto - ry! Cast each false i - dol from its throne, the



ev - ery faith - less mur - mur stills: to God all praise and glo - ry.
All is just and all is right: to God all praise and glo - ry.
Lord is God, and he a - lone: to God all praise and glo - ry.

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!

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.

Lord, we pray that your grace may always precede and follow us, that we may continually be given to good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

All sit.

First Reading

Exodus 32:1-14

A Reading from the book of Exodus.

¹When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

²Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." ³So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" ⁵When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD." ⁶They rose early the next day, and offered burnt

offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

⁷The LORD said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; ⁸they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” ⁹The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. ¹⁰Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”

¹¹But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹²Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” ¹⁴And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23

to be prayed responsively

¹Hallelujah!

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, *
for his mercy endures for ever.

**²Who can declare the mighty acts of the LORD *
or show forth all his praise?**

³Happy are those who act with justice *
and always do what is right!

**⁴Remember me, O LORD, with the favor you have for your people, *
and visit me with your saving help;**

⁵That I may see the prosperity of your elect
and be glad with the gladness of your people, *
that I may glory with your inheritance.

**⁶We have sinned as our forebears did; *
we have done wrong and dealt wickedly.**

¹⁹Israel made a bull-calf at Horeb *
and worshiped a molten image;

**²⁰And so they exchanged their Glory *
for the image of an ox that feeds on grass.**

²¹They forgot God their Savior, *
who had done great things in Egypt,

**²²Wonderful deeds in the land of Ham, *
and fearful things at the Red Sea.**

²³So he would have destroyed them,

had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, *
to turn away his wrath from consuming them.

Second Reading

Philippians 4:1-9

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

¹My brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

²I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

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

All then stand as they are able.

Sequence Hymn

LEVAS 93

Give thanks to the Lord

The musical score is written for voice and piano. It consists of two systems of music. The first system has a treble and bass staff. The treble staff contains the melody, and the bass staff contains the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Give thanks to the Lord for He is so good, His mer-cy en-". The second system also has a treble and bass staff. The treble staff contains the melody, and the bass staff contains the piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "dures for - ev - er. (for - ev - er.) Give dures for - ev - er. (for -". Above the first measure of the second system is a first ending bracket labeled "1.", and above the last measure is a second ending bracket labeled "2.3.4.". The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/2.

Fine

ev - er.) 1. To Him a - lone who does might - y won - ders,
2. He made the sun to gov - ern the day - time,

D.C.

1. Who by His un - der - stand - ing made the hea - vens.
2. The moon and stars to gov - ern o'er the night - time.

Holy Gospel

Matthew 22:1-14

Gospeller The Holy Gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ according to Matthew.

People **Glory to you, Lord Christ.**

¹Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. ⁴Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ ⁵But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. ⁸Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ ¹⁰Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, ¹²and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. ¹³Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”



Gospeller The Gospel of the Lord.

People **Praise to you, Lord Christ.**

Sermon

Larry Odom-Groh

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 Sisters and brothers, children of God, rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let us humbly approach our God, saying, “Remember us with favor, O Lord; visit us with your saving help.”

Intercessor God our Savior, strengthen your Church to stand firm in your love. May we struggle not *with* one another, but instead struggle *beside* one another in the work of the gospel. Remember us with favor, O Lord; **visit us with your saving help.**

Silence is kept

God our Savior, you make happy those who act with justice. May the leaders and people of the nations dedicate themselves to pure and honorable dealings. Let your justice reign on this earth. Remember us with favor, O Lord; **visit us with your saving help.**

Silence is kept

God our Savior, you are good to us. You have blessed us with a rich creation and a beautiful planet for our home. May we cherish the gifts you have given us [especially_____]. Remember us with favor, O Lord; **visit us with your saving help.**

Silence is kept

Christ Jesus, 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, and 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. Remember us with favor, O Lord; **visit us with your saving help.**

Silence is kept

God our Savior, we rely on, and give thanks for, your divine wisdom, knowledge and understanding. We know that, because of your Holy Spirit's guidance, we can make the right decisions in line with your will and purpose for this parish. We ask for the Spirit of discernment, that we each may be enabled to make those decisions that will lead us to the serving of your church in this place. Remember us with favor, O Lord; **visit us with your saving help.**

Silence is kept

God our Savior, deliver our families and community from worry. Make us a people of prayer, a congregation who intercedes for our neighbors. Remember us with favor, O Lord; **visit us with your saving help.**

Silence is kept

God our Savior, you are always near. Assure the lonely; heal the sick; do mighty acts in the lives of the downcast [especially_____]. With thankful hearts, trusting in your mercy, we make our requests known to you.

Silence is kept

God our Savior, your mercy endures forever. May [_____ and all] those who have died glory in your inheritance and feast at your heavenly banquet for all eternity. Remember us with favor, O Lord; **visit us with your saving help.**

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 to God.

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

Silence may be kept.

Minister and People

**God of all mercy,
we confess that we have sinned against you,
opposing your will in our lives.
We have denied your goodness in each other,
in ourselves, and in the world you have created.
We repent of the evil that enslaves us,
the evil we have done,
and the evil done on our behalf.
Forgive, restore, and strengthen us
through our Savior Jesus Christ,
that we may abide in your love
and serve only your will. 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 Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. For everything in heaven and on earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom, and you are exalted as head over all. *1 Chronicles 29:11*

Representatives of the congregation bring the people's offerings of bread and wine, and money or other gifts, to the Presider.

The people stand while 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.**

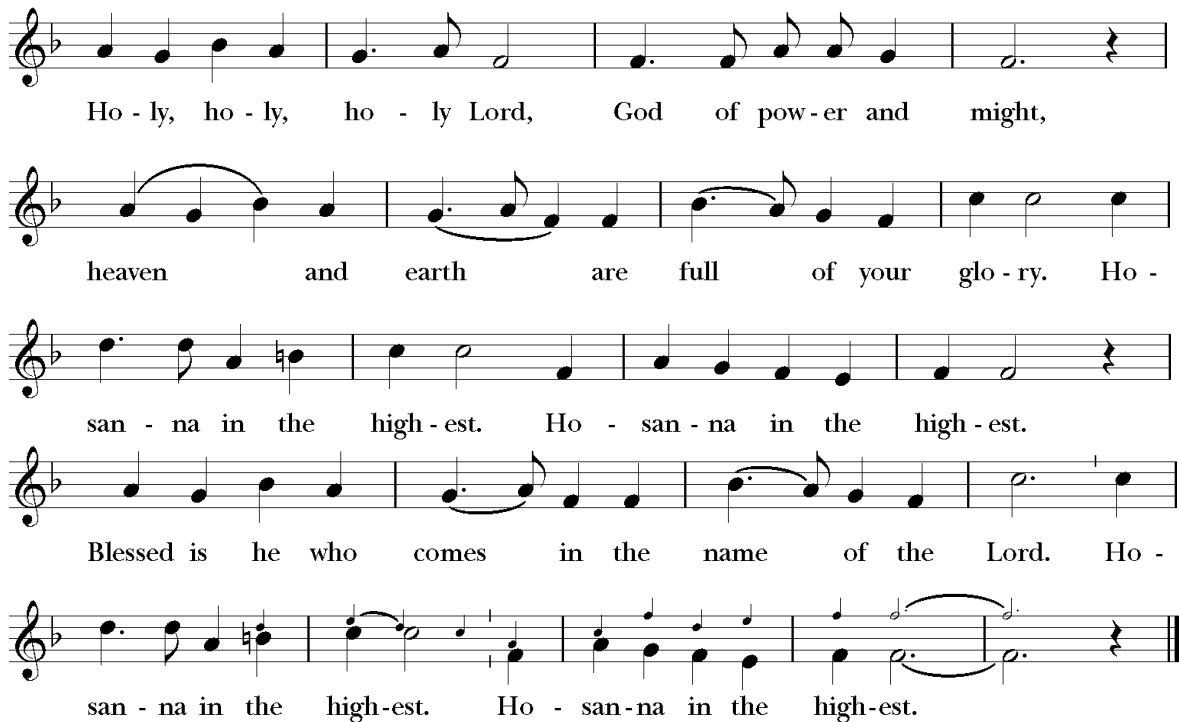
The Presider proceeds

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 sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name:

Sanctus



Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord, God of pow - er and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glo - ry. Ho -
san - na in the high - est. Ho - san - na in the high - est.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Ho -
san - na in the high - est. Ho - san - na in the high - est.

The people continue to stand, or kneel as they are able.

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.**

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.
Holy food for holy people.

All are welcome to receive Holy Communion.

When all have received, 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

May God give you
Grace never to sell yourself short:
Grace to risk something big for something good.
Grace to remember that the world
is too dangerous for anything but truth
and too small for anything but Love.

And the blessing of God Almighty, +
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you this day and
always. **Amen.**

Closing Hymn

The trees of the field

Chorus Book 169

Unison Em

You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace...

Em D7/F# G C/G G D/F# D

The mountains and the hills will break forth be -

B/D# NC. Em

fore you. There'll be shouts of joy and all the

Em Em/B B7

trees of the field Will clap, will

Em/B B7 Em D7 NC. G

clap their hands. And all the trees of the

field will clap their hands; The trees of the

field will clap their hands. The

trees of the field will clap their hands. While

you go out with joy.

Dismissal

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

People **Thanks be to God.**

Postlude

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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:

October 15 The Anglican Church of Melanesia

Diocese of Michigan Cycle of Prayer:

October 15 All Saints, Pontiac, Holy Cross, Novi; St Luke's, Santiago, DR

St Barnabas Cycle of Prayer: Alan, Kitty, Linda, Scott

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

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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 is great** for 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 TODAY, October 15**. Please contribute as generously as you can.

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Upcoming Commemorations

- Oct 15 Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley, Bishops, 1555, and
Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1556: The Oxford Martyrs
- 16 Ignatius of Antioch, Bishop and Martyr, c.115
- 17 Henry Martyn, Priest and Missionary, 1812
- 18 Luke the Evangelist
- 19 William Carey: Missionary to India, 1834

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Exodus 32:1-14

The Golden Calf account is one of those stories that anyone familiar with the Bible knows – or at least, claims to know! This near-ubiquitous familiarity may be due in part to the many pop culture references made to this story – or it may be due to the drama and striking imagery in the story itself. Whatever the cause, the Golden Calf is fixed in the minds of many modern readers as the emblematic example of idolatry. Moreover, the same evidently holds true for the Biblical authors, as this cautionary tale gets retold several times in the Bible.

While such familiarity is not a bad thing, if we approach this story believing that we know it already, we risk overlooking key insights. For example, do the Israelites really commit idolatry by worshipping the Golden Calf *instead* of God? After fashioning the calf, the people identify it as their “gods” who saved them from slavery, and Aaron proclaims that the next day will be a festival, not to the calf, but “to the Lord!” The Hebrew text clarifies these statements further. In the first place, the Israelites identify the calf using a form of the word *Elohim* – which literally means “gods,” but stands regularly as a type of title or pseudonym for God. Aaron’s proclamation is even

clearer: rather than using the pseudonym *Elohim*, Aaron refers to God explicitly as YHWH, leaving no doubt as to whose festival Israel will soon observe.

It doesn't seem that the Israelites worship the Golden Calf *instead* of God, as a replacement or usurper. Rather, the Israelites worship the Golden Calf *as though it were* God, thus conflating their creation with their Creator. In doing so, the Israelites remind us that idolatry is not always as easy to identify as a gleaming Golden Calf. Rather, idolatry often occurs as a case of mistaken identity, in which things that are *not* God are valued and revered *as though they were* God. It's all too easy to pursue our goals and desires as if they were the goals and desires of God. Perhaps this story can invite us to reevaluate our assumptions and reexamine the familiar contours of our faith. Such work is challenging but vital if we are to discern where we are truly serving God and where we are only serving our idols.

- Is there anything in your life that acts or has acted as a type of idol?
- How do you think the Israelites could have confused the Golden Calf for God?
- Why do you think God finally decided not to “bring disaster” on the Israelites?

Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23

Like Psalm 105 before it, Psalm 106 is a retelling of key Biblical events, with the primary difference that, while Psalm 105 marvels at God's work on behalf of Israel, Psalm 106 laments Israel's inability to worship God accordingly. As such, the psalm has a somber, sober tone, with the psalmist alternating between lines of praise and petition aimed at the Lord. The core theme of the Psalm appears in v. 6: “We have sinned as our forebears did; we have done wrong and dealt wickedly.” This follows from the previous verses, wherein the psalmist lauds God's mercy and forbearance while seeking God's saving help.

Yet the question remains: *How* have we sinned as our forebears did? As an explanation, the psalmist retells the Golden Calf story. The root of Israel's idolatry in that story, according to the Psalmist, was that “they forgot God their Savior” and God's “wonderful deeds.” This tendency to forget and stray from God is likely the same sin that the psalmist sees at work in their own time; hence, their motivation for retelling Israel's past transgressions, so that their people might remember and turn back to God. We also are susceptible to sin and prone to forget, and so the psalmist's message applies to our time, too. Prayer and ministry are easily forgotten amid our bustling lives, as are love of God and neighbor. In response, the psalmist urges us to remember God as best we can and to rejoice in the mercy and long-suffering love of the God who remembers us even if we do not remember God.

- Can you think of a time when it was hard to remember God? Why was that?
- Can you think of a time when it was easy to remember God? Why was that?
- Can you think of any daily practices that might help you better remember God?

Philippians 4:1-9

This reading begins the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul has tried his best to attend to the concerns and quiet the anxieties of the Christian community in Philippi. The only thing left to do is recapitulate his points, give thanks for his beloved friends, and bid them farewell. Yet, before Paul can get to that conclusion, he has one final conflict to address.

The conflict centers around Euodia and Syntyche, two highly respected leaders in Philippi who have fallen into conflict. The nature of their disagreement remains unknown, but the impact of their quarrel on their community was so great that it prompted Paul to respond. Thus, Paul urges the two “to be of the same mind in the Lord” – the same exhortation delivered to the community at large earlier in the letter (cf. Philippians 2:2). In effect, Paul wants the women to remember their commitment to the work of the gospel and pursue their shared purpose in love

and unity. The community has a role, too, and must help its leaders reconcile their differences for the sake of the Gospel.

It comes as no surprise that personal quarrels and disagreements can get in the way of a larger, shared goal – even in the church! Longstanding ministries can be undone by conflict over direction and leadership; programs can be shelved indefinitely for lack of agreement over funding and management; and sometimes, small conflicts between persons can spiral out, becoming so large that they threaten the health of the whole community. In all such cases, we have two options. We can serve only our own interests, making idols of our egos, or we can remember our baptismal commitments to God and to each another and strive together toward mutual reconciliation for the sake of the good work.

- Have you ever seen or experienced a significant conflict at church?
- Did you do anything to help resolve the conflict? If so, what did you do?
- How might you advise others facing similar conflicts in their congregations?

Matthew 22:1-14

It's possible that today's Gospel will make many people feel very uncomfortable. Part of that discomfort likely stems from more general discomfort with the violent images present in the text, while part might come from discomfort with its driving theme: Judgment. Judgment can be a sensitive topic, especially in religious spaces, in which so many people feel or have felt judged and condemned in one way or another. For some, mention of judgment opens old wounds and dredges up painful memories, while for others it activates anxieties about personal purity and worthiness. In short, talking about judgment can be challenging; and yet, despite the challenge, reflecting on today's parable means reflecting on judgment.

We can start by analyzing the parable. Who is doing the judging? Clearly, the king judges everyone around him, but who does the king represent? The apparent answer is God; after all, God is often described as sitting in judgment over the world. What about those being judged? The initial guests represent opponents of the Early Church as the gospel writer saw them, while the later guests represent anyone who responds positively to the gospel message. These later guests represent all Christians, and their bright wedding robes are the “[robes] of righteousness” gained from lives of love lived in harmony with Jesus' teachings (cf. Isaiah 61:10). Within this context, the man with no robe is like a Christian without love, and the judgment passed on him is a warning to live according to Jesus' teachings by loving God and loving neighbor.

All that said, knowing what the parable is about does little to mollify its more extreme elements. The king's judgments still bring death, destruction, and damnation, all of which pose the question: Is the kingdom of heaven really built on judgments such as these? Here it helps to reflect on the motivation behind the parable. The parable's original audience was the gospel writer's own community of early Christians. The original motivation behind the parable was probably not to terrorize or discourage that community, but to exhort and galvanize them. To that end, the parable has much in common with the other readings for today. It, too, is a cautionary tale meant to remind its readers and listeners of a vital truth. The vital truth in this parable is that following Jesus and living into his teachings requires significant determination and careful discernment: Determination, to continue loving even when loving is hard; and discernment, to determine whether we are living our lives in harmony with the gospel message, or whether we have gotten lost along the way and need to get back on track.

- How does reading or hearing this parable make you feel?
- Does this parable encourage you to practice Jesus' teachings? Why or why not?
- Do you think that others would be encouraged by this parable? Why or why not?

This study was written by Justin Smith

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Our Mission:

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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