

Holy Eucharist

October 22, 2023

Zoom link:

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

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Meeting ID: 858 8794 6777

Passcode: 782611

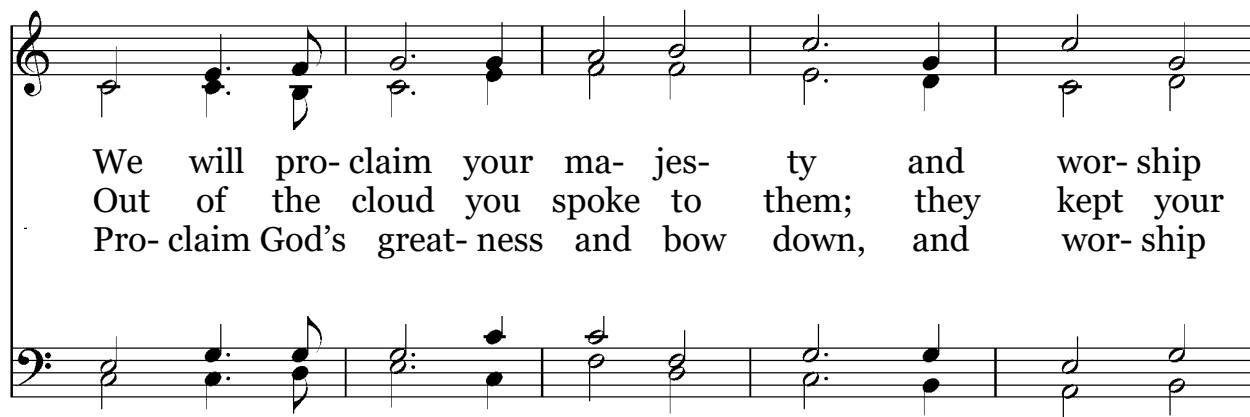
Proper 24A: the 21st Sunday after Pentecost

Prelude

Opening Hymn

Tune: *Truro*

We will proclaim your majesty (Psalm 99)



We will pro-claim your ma-jes-ty and wor-ship
Out of the cloud you spoke to them; they kept your
Pro-claim God's great-ness and bow down, and wor-ship



you, the Ho-ly Lord; for Mo-ses, Aa-ron,
law and your de-crees. O Lord, you an-swered
on God's ho-ly hill; you are the Lord, our

Sam- uel, too, once called on you and heard your word.
 and for- gave, yet pun- ished all their e- vil deeds.
 sove- reign God, the Ho- ly One, our Sa- vior still.

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
We will glorify

Chorus Book 23

1. We will glo - ri - fy the King of Kings; We will
 2. Lord Je - ho - vah reigns in maj - es - ty; We will
 3. He is Lord of heav - en, Lord of earth; He is
 4. Hal - le - lu - jah to the King of Kings; Hal - le -

glo - ri - fy the Lamb. We will glo - ri - fy the
 bow be - fore His throne. We will wor - ship Him in
 Lord of all who live. He is Lord a - bove the
 lu - jah to the Lamb. Hal - le - lu - jah to the

Lord of Lords, Who is the great I AM.
 righ-teous-ness; We will wor-ship Him a-lone.
 u-ni-verse; All praise to Him we give.
 Lord of Lords, Who is the great I AM.

Collect of the Day

Presider The Lord be with you.
People **And also with you.**
Presider Let us pray.

Almighty and everlasting God, in Christ you have revealed your glory among the nations: Preserve the works of your mercy, that your Church throughout the world may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of your Name; 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 33:12-23

A reading from the book of Exodus.

¹²Moses said to the LORD, “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people’; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ ¹³Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” ¹⁴He said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” ¹⁵And he said to him, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. ¹⁶For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.”

¹⁷The LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” ¹⁸Moses said, “Show me your glory, I pray.” ¹⁹And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, ‘The LORD’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” ²¹And the LORD continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; ²²and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; ²³then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

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

Psalm 99

to be prayed responsively

- ¹The LORD is King;
let the people tremble. *
The Holy One is enthroned upon the cherubim;
let the earth shake.
- ²**The LORD is great in Zion; ***
God is high above all peoples.
- ³Let them confess the Holy Name, which is great and awesome; *
God is the Holy One.
- ⁴**“O mighty Ruler, lover of justice,
you have established equity; ***
you have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob.”
- ⁵Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God
and fall down before God’s footstool; *
God is the Holy One.
- ⁶**Moses and Aaron among the priests,
and Samuel among those who call upon God’s Name, ***
they called upon the LORD, and the Holy One answered them.
- ⁷God spoke to them out of the pillar of cloud; *
they kept God’s testimonies and the decree that God gave them.
- ⁸**O LORD our God, you answered them indeed; ***
**you were a God who forgave them,
yet punished them for their evil deeds.**
- ⁹Proclaim the greatness of the LORD our God
and worship upon the holy hill; *
for the LORD our God is the Holy One.

Second Reading

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Thessalonians.

- ¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace.
- ²We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly
³remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness
of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has
chosen you, ⁵because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power
and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved
to be among you for your sake. ⁶And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of
persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you became an
example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For the word of the Lord has sounded
forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become
known, so that we have no need to speak about it. ⁹For the people of those regions report about
us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a
living and true God, ¹⁰and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus,
who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.

Reader The Word of the Lord.

People **Thanks be to God.**

All stand as they are able.

Sequence Hymn

Tune: *Beach Spring*

Is it lawful to pay taxes?

Is it law-ful to pay tax-es when they prop up Cae-sar's rule?"
"Find a tax coin in your trea-sure; see the im-age that it bears.
Still, we al-so hear your teach-ing: "Give to God what God is due."

So some peo-ple asked of Je-sus, want-ing him to seem a fool.
Give to Cae-sar what is Cae-sar's. (Give to rul-ers what is theirs.)"
May no ru-ler—ov-er-reach-ing—try to take the place of you.

The musical score consists of two systems. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff with treble and bass clefs). The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/8. The lyrics are printed below the vocal line.

Say- ing "no" would be se- di- tion; say- ing "yes" would be a sin.
 Yet he pressed on with his mes- sage; "Give to God what is God's own."
 May we list- en to your mes- sage, may we ho- nor what is yours;

Je- sus changed the con- ver- sa- tion, call- ing them to look with- in.
 We who bear our Ma- ker's im- age wor- ship God and God a- lone.
 May we, liv- ing in your im- age, seek your king- dom that en- dures.

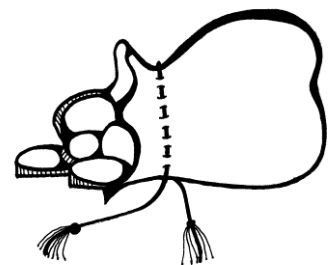
Holy Gospel

Matthew 22:15-22

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

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

¹⁵The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap [Jesus] in what he said. ¹⁶So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. ¹⁷Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. ²⁰Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" ²¹They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.



Gospeller The Gospel of the Lord.

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

Sermon

Bill Stech

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, grace to you and peace. Let us pray to the Holy One, saying, “Be gracious to us, O God; show us your mercy.”

Intercessor We always give thanks to you, O God, for the Church, constantly remembering before you its work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Inspire us by the Holy Spirit. Be gracious to us, O God; **show us your mercy.**

Silence is kept

Almighty God, make us more like your Son, Jesus, who did not regard people with partiality. May we love justice. May we be gracious with all people. Be gracious to us, O God; **show us your mercy.**

Silence is kept

God our King, the earth shakes in your presence. All that is belongs not to us, but to you. May we be good stewards of all you have created. Be gracious to us, O God; **show us your mercy.**

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. Be gracious to us, O God; **show us your mercy.**

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. Be gracious to us, O God; **show us your mercy.**

Silence is kept

Holy One, we give you thanks and praise for all the good gifts you so abundantly provide for us [especially_____].

Silence is kept

Holy One, you answer those who call upon you. Hear the voices of the weak and wronged. May this city know and experience your presence. Be gracious to us, O God; **show us your mercy.**

Silence is kept

Great Lord, give your people rest. Cover [_____ and all] the sick and sorrowful with your healing hand. May the lonely and forgotten find favor in your sight. Be gracious to us, O God; **show us your mercy.**

Silence is kept

Living God, you have rescued the dying and dead from the coming wrath through the death and resurrection of your Christ. We remember [_____]. May our voices blend with theirs as they proclaim your greatness and worship around your throne forever. Be gracious to us, O God; **show us your mercy.**

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

Jesus said, "The first commandment is this: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is the only Lord. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." *Mark 12:29-31*

Let us confess our sins to God.

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 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

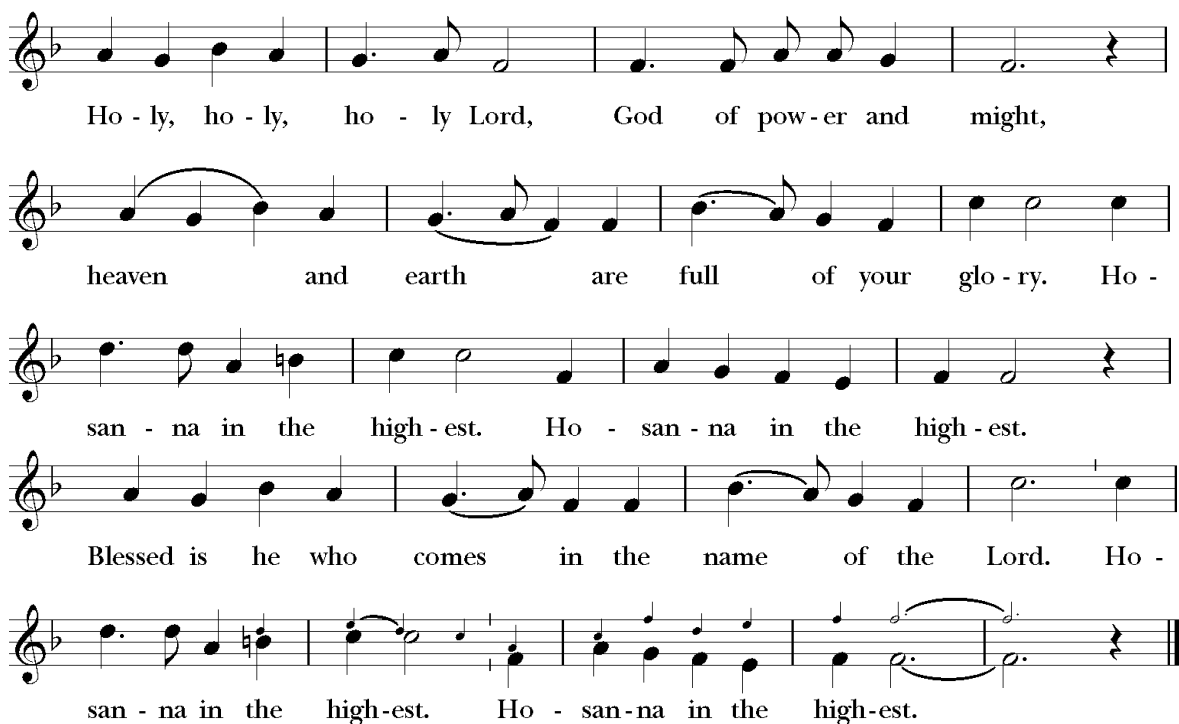
We praise and thank you, God of Abraham and Moses, because you have made your creation out of nothing, you have come among us in liberation and covenant, and in your Son's dying and rising you have opened up your life to share your holiness with us.

In your tender mercy you have broken upon us the dawn from on high and shown us your glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

You cover us with your loving hand that we may dare to stand in your presence, and you tell us your name that we may see into your heart.

And so we come before you with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, to sing the hymn of your unending praise.

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

Merciful God, you have given us the law as the covenant between your ways and ours, and in Jesus you have renewed that covenant by giving us the fulfillment of that law.

In this meal, you show us how much you long for us to be your companions, and how constant is your presence among us.

Send down your + Holy Spirit upon us now, that we might become the body of Christ that you give us to eat. Give us your very self in + these gifts of bread and wine, and make them for us the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ;

who, at supper with his disciples, took bread, gave you thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to them, saying, Take, eat: this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.

After supper he took the cup. Again he gave you thanks, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "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. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me"

Great is the mystery of faith.

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

God of inescapable love, you call upon us to give to you the things that are yours. As we realize with joy that all things are yours, turn every action of our lives into ways of worshiping you. Unite us with the communion of your saints, past, present, and eternal, turning all into alleluia, turning justice into kindness and trust, turning fear into hope, hunger into fulfillment, isolation into companionship, and suffering into love, until the day comes when we and all your people see you face to face, ever one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **AMEN.**

The Presider then continues

As our Savior Christ has taught us, we now pray,

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. 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.

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

Communion Hymn

Hymnal 655

O Jesus, I have promised

The musical score is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment line. The lyrics are: "1 O Je - sus, I have prom - ised to serve you to the end; re - main for - ev - er near me, my Mas - ter and my Friend: I shall not fear the bat - tle if you are by my side, nor wan - der from the path - way if you will be my guide." The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, time signatures, and dynamic markings.

1 O Je - sus, I have prom - ised to serve you to the end; re -
main for - ev - er near me, my Mas - ter and my Friend: I
shall not fear the bat - tle if you are by my side, nor
wan - der from the path - way if you will be my guide.

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

LEVAS 109

What a friend we have in Jesus

1. What a friend we have in Je - sus, All our sins and griefs to bear!
2. Have we tri - als and temp - ta - tions? Is there trou-ble an - y - where?
3. Are we weak and heav - y lad - en, Cum-bered with a load of care?

The image shows the musical notation for the hymn 'What a friend we have in Jesus'. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the bass line is written in the bass clef. The lyrics are printed below the treble staff, with three verses. The first verse is '1. What a friend we have in Je - sus, All our sins and griefs to bear!'. The second verse is '2. Have we tri - als and temp - ta - tions? Is there trou-ble an - y - where?'. The third verse is '3. Are we weak and heav - y lad - en, Cum-bered with a load of care?'. The musical notation includes various note values, rests, and bar lines.



1. What a priv - i - lege to car - ry Ev - 'ry-thing to God in prayer!
 2. We should nev - er be dis - cour - aged, Take it to the Lord in prayer.
 3. Pre - cious Sav - ior, still our ref - uge, Take it to the Lord in prayer.



1. Oh, what peace we of - ten for - feit, Oh, what need-less pain we bear,
 2. Can we find a friend so faith - ful who will all our sor - rows share?
 3. Do thy friends de-spise, for - sake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer.



1. All be - cause we do not car - ry Ev - 'ry-thing to God in prayer!
 2. Je - sus knows our ev - 'ry weak - ness, Take it to the Lord in prayer.
 3. In his arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt find a sol - ace there.



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 22 La Iglesia Anglicana de Mexico

Diocese of Michigan Cycle of Prayer:

October 22 St Barnabas, Chelsea; Church of the Redeemer, Barahona; St John the Evangelist, Piedra Blanca, DR

St Barnabas Cycle of Prayer: Jerry, Amy, Nannette

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 November 19**. Please contribute as generously as you can.

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Upcoming Commemorations

- Oct 23 James of Jerusalem, Brother of our Lord Jesus Christ
- 24 Hiram Hisanori Kano, 1986
- 25 Dorcas (Tabitha) of Joppa
- 26 Alfred, King, 899
- 28 Simon and Jude, Apostles

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October 22, 2023 Proper 24A

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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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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