



Sunday Devotion

June 28, 2020
Find a quiet place by
yourself or with
another and come to
God.

HYMN SING #829 My Faith Looks Up to Thee

1. My faith looks up to thee,
thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine! Now hear me while I pray;
take all my guilt away;
O let me from this day be wholly thine!

3. While life's dark maze I tread
and griefs around me spread,
be thou my guide; bid darkness turn to day;
wipe sorrow's tears away;
Nor let me ever stray from thee aside.

#722 Lord Speak To Me That I May Speak

1. Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
in living echoes of your tone.
As you have sought, so let me seek
your erring children, lost and lone.

5. O use me, Lord, use even me,
Just as you will, and when, and where
until your blessed face I see,
Your rest, your joy, your glory share.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Welcome into this worship, for Christ has welcomed you.

When you welcome another, you welcome God.

Whenever you extend hospitality to a stranger, you extend hospitality to God.

Welcome, Creator God, into my life.

Welcome, Christ my Lord, into my heart.

Welcome, Holy Spirit, into this place.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy God, your faithful love toward me never ends! It is as sure and dependable as the sky over my head. I praise you! I offer you my worship and my thanksgiving. I will declare to any who will listen that you are my God, and I am yours. May your Spirit be at work as I worship, opening my eyes to the light of your presence in this place. To you alone, Faithful Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, be all glory and honor, now and forever. Amen.

HYMN #327 From All That Dwell Below the Skies

1. From all that dwell below the skies
let the Creator's praise arise:
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Let the Redeemer's name be sung
through every land, in every tongue.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

3. Eternal are thy mercies, Lord;
eternal truth attends thy word:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Thy praise shall sound from shore to shore,
till suns shall rise and set no more.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

2. In every land begin the song; to every land the strains belong:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

In cheerful sound all voices raise and fill the world with joyful praise.

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

PRAYER OF BROKENESS

Patient Lord, we want to extend the hand of welcome and friendship to all whom we meet, but you know that sometimes we shy away from reaching out. We make judgments about others based on their appearance and other surface factors, and we neglect your mandate to be a welcoming presence. That lack of welcome extends further when we see needs that must be addressed and choose to turn our backs. We turn away from the pain and suffering, protecting our own lives. Yet you remind us that as we welcome others, so we are also welcoming you. Heal us and give us strength and courage to always be welcoming others in your name. Amen.

WORDS OF FORGIVENESS

God's love is a wellspring that gushes into eternal life. God's love cannot be held back, it overflows again and again. God's love is for you. You are God's child. Take heart; Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON Psalm 13

¹ How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

² How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,

⁴ and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

⁵ But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

⁶ I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON Matthew 10:40-42

⁴⁰ "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.

⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous;

⁴² and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

SERMON (This sermon assumes it is being heard during worship on June 28, 2020)

How much time have you spent looking at yourself lately? Many of us try to avoid long periods of mirror-gazing especially as we get on in years. Since mid-March when stay-at-home orders went into place a large segment of the population has spent a great deal of time looking at themselves due to the necessity of video chats and conferencing using platforms such as Zoom – like now. Those of you who are listening in on your telephone (or reading this) aren't going to appreciate this so much so I suggest that the next time you make a phone call, sit in front of a mirror while talking and just watch yourself. It won't take long to get the point. Prolonged gazing causes most people to start seeing themselves as if for the first time and not liking so much of what's in front of them.

Ben Holber, co-founder of the teledermatology platform *Apostrophe*, notes that the website has seen a 60 to 70 percent increase in new patients, and attributes at least *some* of it to the fact that people are spending more time analyzing their own skin on video calls. Zoom is trying to help out by making it possible to simply push a button so you can "touch up my appearance," as the button is called, which ever-so-subtly sends the

message that what is real is not good enough. I have pushed that button myself and from what I can see, it's not helping!

But let's be honest, most of us don't often think of ourselves as anything nearing the perfection of a magazine cover. And with our somewhat "Plain Jane or Stanley" looks, we don't perceive of ourselves as being all that special. The saying goes, "a face only a mother could love." That might be an exaggeration of our opinion of ourselves, but sometimes it feels that way, or is that just me?

But who we are matters. How we are perceived matters. A bunch of years ago *The Washington Post* conducted an experiment. They wanted to know what would happen if Joshua Bell, one of the world's finest violinists, playing one of the best violins ever crafted, would perform ten of the most elegant pieces of music ever written. The catch – Bell dressed like an ordinary street musician, positioned in one of the most down-to-earth places: a subway station in Washington, DC, during the morning commute. The question they wanted to answer was: in a dreary setting, during an inconvenient rush-hour, would rare beauty be noticed or appreciated? The answer was no.

That Friday morning passed like so many others. A crowd did not gather. They did not miss their trains and did not show up late for work. In fact, it was estimated that more than 1,000 people passed by and virtually no one noticed—a scant 7 people even paused. For his forty-five minute performance, this world-renowned violinist made \$32 and change. Few people even bothered to look.

How we are perceived matters. A rabbinic saying proclaims that every human being is preceded by a legion of angels announcing, "Make way for the image of God." I don't know about you, but when I stare at myself or others on Zoom or in the mirror, "image of God" is not what usually comes to my mind. I don't think those in that DC train station heard, "Make way for the image of God" as they rushed past Joshua Bell even if he was making heavenly music.

It is difficult—for all practical purposes, impossible—to keep in mind such an exalted image as we go about our daily lives among other mortals, no matter how much we try to value everyone equally.

Brennan Manning tells the story of an Irish priest, who, on a walking tour of a rural parish, saw an old peasant kneeling by the side of the road, praying. Impressed, the priest said to the man, "You must be very close to God." The peasant looked up from his prayers, thought a moment, and then proclaimed with a broad smile, "Yes, he's very fond of me." Manning has a slogan to introduce himself to others: "I am the one Jesus loves." He says he has taken this telling phrase from the Gospel in which Jesus' closest friend on earth, the disciple named John, is identified as "the one Jesus loved."

Manning says, "If John were to be asked, 'What is your primary identity in life?' he would not reply, 'I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist, an author of one of the four Gospels,' but rather, 'I am the one Jesus loves.'" This is who we are, but is this how we are seen and perceived?

If we, as Jesus' followers, are so loved, then it makes sense that Jesus said, "whoever welcomes *you*, welcomes *me*. We bring Jesus along with us, and the trail of love follows, also blessing those to whom we ourselves reach out.

The desire for deep understanding of what it means to encounter others who are also in God's image colors how we go about our daily lives and has consequences every day. Lutheran pastor Richard Neuhaus wrote of the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., that challenged him: "Whom you would change you must first love." Neuhaus remarked, "That means we must see more in other people than they see in themselves if we are to help them in becoming what they are."

Franciscan nun, professor and author Ilia Delio has written in *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love*: "What will it take for us to realize that we are unfinished creatures who

are in the process of being created? That our world is being created? That our church is being created? That Christ is being formed in us? ...The good news of Jesus Christ is not so much what happens to us but what must be done by us. The choices we make for the future will create the future. We must reinvent ourselves in love.”

There was a tribe of Native Americans who lived long ago in the state of Mississippi. Their settlement was situated next to a swift and dangerous river. The current in it was so strong, that if people happened to fall in, they could easily be swept downstream.

One day the tribe was attacked by a hostile group of settlers. They found themselves cornered, with their backs to the river. They were greatly outnumbered, and their only chance for escape was to risk crossing the rushing river. They huddled together, and those who were strong picked up the weak and put them on their shoulders: the little children, the sick, the old, and the infirm—those who were ill or wounded—were carried on the backs of the tribespeople who were strongest.

They waded out into the river, hoping to escape; and to their surprise they discovered that the weight on their shoulders from carrying the least and the lowliest helped them keep their footing and for all to make it safely across the river.

Carrying the weak, together they were able to cross the river to escape and to live. Those who offered blessing became blessed. Jesus said: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward.”

We truly represent Jesus in all that we undertake. But it entails more than simply passing on the wisdom and the message that Jesus first gave to his disciples and then to us. H. King Oehmig tried to explain this when he said: “Agency,” or representation, “is a key concept in the understanding of discipleship. That is, the ‘agent’ of Jesus, who went out in his name, was not just a *representative* of Jesus, but the personal embodiment of him and his authority. When someone met a disciple of Jesus, it constituted encountering Jesus himself. ‘Whoever welcomes you,’ Jesus said, ‘welcomes me.’”

For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health—Jesus is judged through his agents. Our witness establishes not only who we are, but also who Jesus is. Who we are matters as it reflects whose we are. This is what determines the effectiveness of the Gospel. Our level of commitment, our willingness to be transformed by the Spirit, validates Christianity in the world. Think about that. That’s a pretty awesome responsibility. What message are we sending?

Who we are is seen in what Jesus describes as the best way to communicate the Gospel – relationally rather than by dogmatic hypothesis – words. The Gospel was “caught” naturally from person to person by the relationships we establish. Think of it this way. Did a hypothesis, did words, get you out of bed, dress you, feed you breakfast and drive you to church (in the days when we could go to church)? Did a confession of faith vow to support and uphold you throughout the peaks and valleys of your lifelong walk of faith?

If the church is to thrive it will be through the agents of Jesus. Folks just like you and me. And here’s the great thing. It doesn’t take much. Jesus said that even a cup of cold water offered in his name will receive its reward. The smallest of good deeds, a cup of water. Small, but life giving and with it brings eternal reward for the giver. The smallest of good deeds—the ultimate reward.

When the great playwright and wit Oscar Wilde was sent to prison in 1895 it was an ultimate humiliation for him. In his day he was a real celebrity but all that evaporated once he was convicted. Whenever the prison authorities moved him in public he was spat at and jeered. On one occasion when the crowd was particularly hostile, a friend of Wilde appeared and made a simple gesture of friendship and respect that silenced the crowd. What did he do? As Wilde passed by, handcuffed and head bowed, the man simply raised his hat to

him, the smallest of good deeds. Wilde later wrote:

“Men have gone to heaven for smaller things than that. I do not know to the present moment whether my friend is aware that I was even conscious of his action. It is not a thing for which one can render formal thanks in formal words. I store it in the treasure house of my heart. I keep it there as a secret debt that I can never possibly repay. When wisdom has been profitless to me, and philosophy barren, and the proverbs and phrases of those who sought to give consolation as dust and ashes in my mouth, the memory of that lowly silent act of love has unsealed for me all the wells of pity, made the desert blossom like a rose, and brought me out of the bitterness of lonely exile into harmony with the wounded, broken and great heart of the world.”

The smallest of good deeds: a little thing done in love. The cup of cold water is the symbol of that. It doesn't take much to be hospitable, welcoming, and accepting of other people. A cup of cold water replicated in a thousand and one other simple small deeds – the tip of the hat, wearing a mask, offering a smile instead of a suspicious stare, a phone call, patience when helping with homework, a kiss good night, a few cans given to the food pantry. We often imagine discipleship as requiring huge sacrifice or entailing great feats, and sometimes that is exactly what discipleship comes to. But at other times, Jesus seems to say, it's nothing more than giving a cup of cold water to one in need. Or offering a hug to someone who is grieving. Or a listening ear to someone in need of a friend. Or offering a ride to someone without a car. Or volunteering at the local foodbank. Or making a donation to an agency like FISH or Habitat for Humanity. Discipleship doesn't have to be heroic. David Lose said, “Like all the small acts of devotion, tenderness, and forgiveness that go largely unnoticed but tend the relationships that are most important to us, so also the life of faith is composed of a thousand small gestures. Except that, according to Jesus, there is no small gesture. Anything done in faith and love has cosmic significance for the ones involved and, indeed, for the world God loves so much.” In those smallest of good deeds is God.

You may be familiar with Loren Eiseley's story of “the star thrower” -- the one about the guy tossing starfish after starfish into the sea. When asked why, he replies that if they don't get back in the water soon, they'll dry out and die. Looking at a beach strewn with thousands of starfish, his interviewer responds that he can't possibly hope to make any difference. To which he says -- and this is the famous closing line -- “To the ones I throw back, it makes all the difference in the world.”

Exactly. Because Jesus has promised to come in time to redeem all in love, to fix all damage, heal all hurts, and wipe the tears from every eye, we can in the meantime devote ourselves to acts of mercy and deeds of compassion small and large, not trying to save the world -- Jesus has promised to do that! -- but simply trying to care for the little corner of the world in which we have been placed. And so even a cup of cold water can make a huge and unexpected difference to those to whom we give it and, according to Jesus, such acts have eternal and cosmic consequences.

When you look in the mirror or see yourself on Zoom, what do you see? Are you a cup bearer or a starfish thrower? What does the world see?

PRAYER

O Lord, hear my prayer:

Prayers for hope for those who feel hopeless

Prayers for healing for those who need healing

Prayers for safety for those whose lives are at risk

Prayers for jobs for those who are jobless

Prayers for community for those who feel lonely

Prayers for peace for those whose lives are filled with conflict.

Prayers for forgiveness and reconciliation where there has been offence.

Prayers for understanding for those seeking to be understood.

Prayers for unity where there is division.

Prayers for comfort those who grieve.
Prayers for food for those who hunger.
Prayers for shelter for those who are homeless.
Prayers for clean water for those whose waters are contaminated
Prayers for rain for those who live in drought.
Prayers for a time of drying for those who are facing too much rain.
Prayers for freedom for those who live under dictatorships.
Prayers for wisdom for our leaders.
Prayers for spiritual growth and health for our churches.
Prayers for your Kingdom to reign here on earth.
Amen.

HYMN #749 Come! Live in the Light!

1. Come! Live in the Light!
Shine with the joy and the love of the Lord!
We are called to be light for the kingdom,
to live in the freedom of the city of God.

Refrain: We are called to act with justice;
we are called to love tenderly;
we are called to serve one another,
to walk humbly with God.

2. Come! Open your heart!
Show your mercy to all those in fear!
We are called to be hope for the hopeless
So hatred and violence will be no more. (*refrain*)

3. Sing! Sing an new song!
Sing of that great day when all will be one!
God will reign, and we'll walk with each other
As sisters and brothers united in love. (*refrain*)

BENEDICTION

Go forth to walk in God's light.
Show others the way to God's heart.
Bring hope and healing to the world.
With a gift as simple as a cup of water, and as complex as your life, join Jesus in serving those around you.
Go forth to gather up the little ones of your community into your heart.
With the gift of the Holy Spirit, you are no longer a stranger but are a child of God's family.
May the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you
now and forever. Amen.