



*Sunday Worship*  
*October 4, 2020*  
*Draw near to God*  
*for God is waiting for you.*

*CALL TO WORSHIP*

*Leader: Today we gather around God's table from near and far*

**People: We are the people of God!**

*Leader: Though we differ in language, custom, and tradition*

**People: We are brothers and sisters in Christ!**

*Leader: For there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism*

**People: We are one in God's Spirit!**

*Leader: We are one and together we remember our Lord Jesus*

**People: For we are the people of redemption!**

*Leader: He gave himself up for us, so we could be reconciled to God.*

**People: Come, let us worship the God of our Salvation!**

*OPENING PRAYER*

God of hope and peace, you are with us in all our days and in all our ways. As you walked with the Israelites in the desert, when they had given up hope, you came to them with nourishment and your steadfast love. As Jesus walked through Jerusalem, healing the sick and those afflicted, your love was made abundantly clear through acts of love and mercy. Be with us this day as we gather to hear your word. Inspire and encourage us in all that we do, that we may serve you faithfully, bringing hope and your message of love to your thirsting world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

*HYMN #321 The Church's Foundation*

1. The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord.      3. Mid toil and tribulation, and  
tumult of her war

She is his new creation by water and the word. She waits the consummation of  
peace forevermore: till with the vision glorious her  
From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride  
longing eyes are blest, and the great church victorious shall  
With his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.  
be the church at rest.

2. Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth, 4. Yet she on earth has union with  
God, the Three in One, And mystic sweet communion with  
Her charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth. O happy ones and holy! Lord, give  
those whose rest is won: like them, the meek and lowly, may  
One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food, us grace that we,  
and to one hope she presses, with every grace endued. live eternally.

### *CALL TO CONFESSION*

In these confusing days, it is easy to think that there are no rules we need to follow, but we can live, act, do whatever we want. But Paul reminds us that, when we gain Christ Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we receive exactly what we need - forgiveness, grace, hope. Let us confess our foolishness to God so that we might know God's healing love for us!

### *PRAYER OF CONFESSION*

God of mercy, your love has never been far from us. Even when we turn our backs on people in need, when we seek our own comfort and neglect opportunities to help others, when we, by our thoughts and actions, betray you, you always are with us. Forgive us for all those acts of cowardice and self-centeredness that have drawn us away from you. Heal our spirits and rebuild our lives. You have placed us in a global community in which illness, oppression, greed, fear and anger abound. You ask us to proclaim your words of hope and love, of healing mercy for all your people. Place us again on the path of peace for all your children. For we ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### *WORDS OF ASSURANCE*

From the beginning of all creation, God's word was love. That love has been lavished upon you, not because you did anything to earn it, but because it is God's great gift to you. Live in that love and bring peace to others. Remember the promise of your baptism that Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen.

### *FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON* Romans 14:7-12

<sup>7</sup> We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. <sup>9</sup> For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

<sup>10</sup> Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. <sup>11</sup> For it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,  
and every tongue shall give praise to God.”

<sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

### *SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON* Matthew 21:33-46

<sup>33</sup> “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. <sup>34</sup> When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. <sup>35</sup> But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. <sup>37</sup> Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ <sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup> So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. <sup>40</sup> Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” <sup>41</sup> They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:

‘The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
this was the Lord’s doing,  
and it is amazing in our eyes’?

<sup>43</sup> Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. <sup>44</sup> The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.”

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup> They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

### *SERMON*

As many of you know, I have a cat – *Action Jackson*. He isn’t the friendliest of cats. If I pet him too long or in the wrong way, he bites me. If I’m sitting down on the couch, he’ll get up and take a seat elsewhere. Heaven forbid I pick him up!!! But at varying times during the day, he wants to play. His play is with a feather tied to the end of a string tied to the end of a stick. I wave the string around and he jumps and chases until he collapses. Thing is, if he wants to play, he lets me know it by pushing my buttons. Those buttons include scratching the furniture or meowing very loud and persistently, or pawing at me with his claws out as he was doing when I was writing this sermon. Every time he does any of these behaviors, he knows he will get a rise out of me.

Does anyone ever push your buttons? Usually it’s done to annoy the other person. I think most of us have buttons that when pushed it’s like a switch turns on the angry within us. Children are great at pushing buttons. When my children were teenagers they loved to push my buttons by cursing, and when I say cursing, I mean some real obscenities. They did it on purpose and I would get hopping mad and go into a tirade about how offensive it was and how it made them look stupid. But they persisted and would just laugh because they knew what they had done.

In today's gospel lesson, it looks like Jesus knew just what buttons to push to get the Jewish authorities' dander up and this parable sure did that. To gain understanding, let's look at the background. Just a few days before this reading Jesus entered into Jerusalem, stirring up the city by riding on a donkey with the crowds shouting "Hosanna!" After this troubling hero's reception, Jesus immediately went to the temple where he thoroughly and violently removed the corrupt dealings of the money changers and market goods. That sure pushed some buttons of the higher ups. Was it on purpose? No wonder then that Jesus was questioned regarding his authority. Turning it around, he asked about the authority of John the Baptist, a touchy subject as many felt he was a prophet likened to Elijah. And then he told a parable about two sons – one who did the will of his father and one who did not. It was a parable to contrast the outcasts that were actually doing the will of the Father and the Jewish authorities who actually did not by their practices of exclusion. More buttons pushed This led to the second of three parables about the treacherous tenants. Remember, this was told to the Temple leaders just days before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. .

It's rather interesting that this teaching of Jesus is found in Matthew, Mark and Luke. The only other teaching found in all three are the parable of the Mustard Seed, the parable of the Sower and this one, the Parable of the Wicked Tenant. It's interesting that all three gospel writers felt that this was important enough to include it in their writing and yet it isn't what we would consider a "top ten hit." This might be because it is hard to take. It is so full of violence. Maybe more than that, it pushes our buttons.

Let me explain what I mean. First the scene. This is a farm that was being cared for by tenants. The landowner, as was very typical in that day, rented out his fields. The tenants didn't own the land but were permitted to live there and tend to the crops. Payment or rent was made by giving to the landowner a portion of the harvest. That seems fair, doesn't it? Anyone who rents knows that this isn't a free ride. You have to pay to stay. There would have been an agreement made between landlord and tenant so there were no surprises. At a designated time, the landlord would send his servants to collect what was owed him. In this story we get a shock as violence broke out. It's as if the tenants forgot who they were, their place in this deal, and who actually owned the land. One servant got beaten, another stoned and the third is just killed outright. Word got back to the landowner. Now what would you expect the landowner to do? What would you do? Call the police? Send in some muscle for retaliation? Kick out the tenants and get new ones? You would think the landlord's buttons would have gotten pushed and so revenge would seem like due justice. Violence would beget violence.

Instead of violence and revenge, the landlord tries again sending out a different set of servants. Oh, their numbers were greater but they weren't armed with swords and clubs, just the same instructions – collect the rent. What did they receive? The same treatment as the first. Finally, thinking he possessed greater authority, the landlord's son was sent – and the tenants killed him foolishly hoping to get his inheritance, ownership of the land. Violence and more violence.

Jesus turned to the chief priests and Pharisees, you know, the big important guys, and asked, what they thought the landlord would do after the murder of his son. Of course, bring those evil of evils (as the Greek puts it) to their rightful wretched end *and* rent the vineyard to other tenants who would remember who owned the land and give the landlord his share of the crop.

Jesus doesn't affirm their violent tendencies. His next words, as recorded by Matthew, seem at first glance to confirm this instinct to respond to violence with yet more violence, as he references the Psalms (118:22) to explain how those who oppose and reject him are missing God's plan for salvation and therefore will lose the kingdom. That shouldn't be terribly surprising, as even a quick read of Matthew reveals a consistently harsher attitude toward Jewish religious authorities than you find in Luke or Mark. Historians have suggested that members of Matthew's largely Jewish community, perhaps worn down by distress and danger in the wake of the destruction of the Temple at the hands of the Romans about thirty-five years after Jesus' death, were contemplating returning to their Jewish faith of their youth and that Matthew consequently saw the Pharisees as competitors for their loyalty.

When we keep in mind that Matthew's community was a vulnerable religious minority of the day, we can sympathize with his plight and response. But it is still regrettable, because when Christianity went from minority to majority religion of the Roman Empire and grew into the most powerful political and cultural force in Europe, these same verses and others like them helped to justify centuries of mistreatment of Jews by Christians. Violence yet again.

Images of the violence in our country coming at us from so many directions – in deeds and words with references to it in the parable made me, at first, despair of whether there is any alternative. David Lose speaks about this passage and says that we need to look beyond it, and think about where the gospel writer is taking us. We are led to another act of violence – the Crucifixion. Of the innocent Son and heir. Just like in the parable. But then all of a sudden it's not the same. Because rather than return violence for violence, in the cross of Jesus God absorbs our violence and responds with life, with resurrection, with Jesus triumphant over death and offering, not retribution to those who caused him harm, but peace.

Whatever we may make of the words Matthew records Jesus offering, that is, Jesus' actual deeds are quite different. He does not shrink from the sacrifice on the cross, he does not return with vengeance, he does not kick anyone out of the kingdom of heaven. Instead, the resurrected Jesus, having taken on the worst that our violence can inflict, comes back and instructs his disciples to take the good news of the Gospel to the very ends of the earth, promising to be with them always.

In this violent riddled time in our history, when there is so much anger and frustration, this is good news because in part it means that violence does not and will not have the last word. That the only response to violence is not more violence. That tragedy and death and loss and hatred are, in the end, no match for love and life and forgiveness and peace.

We may never know what all motivates others to act in violence toward others, what buttons are pushed. There's a lot of work to do to take action on policies and procedures that will make people safer from active forms of aggression. But in the meantime, we have the promise that even when it looks like violence is the only outcome and response possible – "He will put those wretches to a miserable death." – it's not. Perhaps that's all the religious authorities in the story could imagine, or maybe it was all Matthew the Evangelist could imagine. Maybe at times it's all our leaders can imagine, and perhaps all we can imagine, too. But there is another way forward. For while Jesus' words, Matthew's words, and our words all matter, Jesus' deeds

matter even more, as Jesus' death and resurrection creates more possibilities than those we can see, including the possibility of peace. As David Lose reminds us, Jesus spoke these words:

- Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid (John 14:27).
- Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Mt. 5:9).
- Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Rom. 12:15-18).
- And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Mt. 28:20).

This does not erase our grief or lessen our call to act to make atrocities less likely. But it does, in the meantime, offer us hope, and hope is the birthplace of faithful action, compassion, and resolve. On this World Communion Sunday, let us respond by sharing Christ's peace with the whole world – it is God's world after all, and we are just the tenants.

#### *AFFIRMATION OF UNITY*

We share one faith, have one calling, are of one soul and one mind; have one God and Father, are filled with one Spirit,  
are baptized with one baptism, eat of one bread and drink of one cup, confess one Name, are obedient to one Lord,  
work for one cause, and share one hope.

Together we come to know the height and the breadth and the depth of the love of Christ;  
are built up to the stature of Christ, to the new humanity;  
know and bear one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ  
that we need one another and up build one another, admonishing and comforting one another;  
that we suffer with one another for the sake of righteousness.  
Together we pray; together we serve God in this world.

#### *PASTORAL PRAYER*

Holy God, health of the sick, comfort of the sad, rebuke of the oppressor, judge of the greedy, hope of the repentant, friend of the downtrodden; in prayer we lift up to you this world with its outrageous injustices yet also its outpouring of human kindness from ordinary people.

Loving God, let your blessing be upon those who serve their neighbours without thought of reward, who forgive their enemies seventy times seven, who care for broken strangers as if they were dearest friends, who weep with the bereaved as if they were sisters, who heal the diseased not counting the risk to themselves.

Let your blessing encourage those who work for peace when the only result seems to be more violence, who preach and live the Gospel in the face of persecution, who feed the hungry although their efforts get misinterpreted, who stand up for the downtrodden in spite of public scorn and who maintain the church when those around belittle it.

Holy Friend, please reach out your hand over each of us gathered here now, that our faith may be enlarged and fortified, our vision enlightened and extended, and our compassion refreshed and widened.

Through Jesus of Nazareth, whose love was good enough for the simple, too much for the proud and powerful,  
and absolutely amazing for all who shared his cup. Amen.

*HYMN #769 For Everyone Born*

1. For everyone born, a place at the table, for everyone born, clean water and bread,  
A shelter, a space, a safe place for growing, for everyone born, a star overhead,

Refrain: and God will delight when we are creators of justice and joy compassion and peace: yes  
God will delight when we are creators of justice, justice and joy

2. For woman and man, a place at the table, revising the roles, deciding the share,  
With wisdom and grace, dividing the power, for woman and man, a system that's fair,

3. For young and for old, a place at the table, a voice to be heard, a part in the song,  
The hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled, for young and for old, the right to belong

4. For just and unjust, a place at the table, abuser, abused, with need to forgive,  
In anger, in hurt, a mindset of mercy, for just and unjust, a new way to live

5. For everyone born, a place at the table, to live without fear, and simply to be,  
To work, to speak out, to witness and worship, for everyone born, the right to be free

*BENEDICTION*

We are a blessed people. Go to be a blessing in the world. Even when there are so many angry people around you, you are the face of Jesus. Go to be love and compassion to all. Even when you are isolated, quarantined, living in lockdowns, you are the family of God. Go to serve your sisters and brothers wherever you may find them. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with now and forever. Amen.