

October 10, 2021 - 10:00 am
20th Sunday after Pentecost



Hands that serve others

St. John United Church of Christ
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CALL TO WORSHIP (*adapted from Hebrews 4:12-16*)

One: The word of God is alive and active,
sharper than any two-edged sword,
piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from
marrow; it can judge our thoughts and intentions of
our hearts.

Many: We cannot hide for we are naked and laid bare to the one whom we must render an account.
Let us hold fast to our confession before Jesus who was tested as you and I and yet was without sin.

We approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

O God, you sowed the seeds of justice when you created this world. Though your bountiful creation has enough for everyone, it is hardly divided fairly. There are those who struggle to get their daily bread each day and then there are those who have more than they can use in their lifetime.

May we remember that all we have comes from you and that you have entrusted to us all that we have. May we take your commandments to heart so we can do as Jesus asks of us.

Grant that we, O God, use this hour to work in our ministries to end this disparity. **Amen.**

GLORIA PATRI: NCH 759

Glory to the Creator, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, Three-in-One; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen. Amen.

EPISTLE READING: Hebrews 4:12-16

¹¹ Therefore, let's make every effort to enter that rest so that no one will fall by following the same example of disobedience, ¹² because God's word is living, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates to the point that it separates the soul from the spirit and the joints from the marrow. It's able to judge the heart's thoughts and intentions. ¹³ No creature is hidden from it, but rather everything is naked and exposed to the eyes of the one to whom we have to give an answer.

¹⁴ Also, let's hold on to the confession since we have a great high priest who passed through the heavens, who is Jesus, God's Son; ¹⁵ because we don't have a high priest who can't sympathize with our weaknesses but instead one who was tempted in every way that we are, except without sin.

¹⁶ Finally, let's draw near to the throne of favor with confidence so that we can receive mercy and find grace when we need help.

***GOSPEL READING: Mark 10:17-31**

¹⁷ As Jesus continued down the road, a man ran up, knelt before him, and asked, "Good Teacher, what must I do to obtain eternal life?"

¹⁸ Jesus replied, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God. ¹⁹ You know the

commandments: *Don't commit murder. Don't commit adultery. Don't steal. Don't give false testimony. Don't cheat. Honor your father and mother.*"

²⁰ "Teacher," he responded, "I've kept all of these things since I was a boy."

²¹ Jesus looked at him carefully and loved him. He said, "You are lacking one thing. Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come, follow me." ²² But the man was dismayed at this statement and went away saddened, because he had many possessions.

²³ Looking around, Jesus said to his disciples, "It will be very hard for the wealthy to enter God's kingdom!" ²⁴ His words startled the disciples, so Jesus told them again, "Children, it's difficult to enter God's kingdom! ²⁵ It's easier for a camel to squeeze through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter God's kingdom."

²⁶ They were shocked even more and said to each other, "Then who can be saved?"

²⁷ Jesus looked at them carefully and said, "It's impossible with human beings, but not with God. All things are possible for God."

²⁸ Peter said to him, "Look, we've left everything and followed you."

²⁹ Jesus said, “I assure you that anyone who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, or farms because of me and because of the good news ³⁰ will receive one hundred times as much now in this life—houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and farms (with harassment)—and in the coming age, eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last. And many who are last will be first.”

MESSAGE: “What have you done for me lately?”

You’ve probably heard this passage many times and can repeat how preachers teach it. “Sell your possessions if you want to follow Jesus.” Indeed, that is a message that we can hear in this passage. But perhaps there are other insights we can glean from these words.

First of all, let’s look at how the man came and how Jesus met him. The man came running and flung himself at Jesus’ feet. There’s something amazing in the sight of this rich, young aristocrat falling at the feet of the penniless prophet from Nazareth who will soon be considered an outlaw. Jesus didn’t want any flattery. “Don’t call me good. Keep that word for God!”

I believe that Jesus immediately recognized that this man was having a “mountain top” experience. Jesus was afraid that he was getting swept up by a

moment of emotion.” Jesus was saying “think calmly what you are doing. Have you considered the cost of what you are doing?” Jesus was not cold-shouldering the man. Because the man seemed to be calling Jesus as good, in effect Jesus was saying “you cannot become a Christian by devotion to me. **You must look at God.**”

The next lesson Jesus is teaching the man has to do with respectability. We all want to be considered respectable in our community and in our churches. Jesus says, “**that’s not enough.**” The man proudly assured Jesus that he had followed all of the commandments all of his life. With one exception the commandments he spoke about are all negative commandments; what you should not do. Jesus is asking the real question. “**What good have you done?**”

*(Have you ever thought about that? To tell you the truth, I had not. It’s like the old saying, “what have you done for me lately?” The man probably never did anyone harm, but what had he done to help others with his wealth? This is the difference between respectability and Christianity. Respectability, on the whole, consists in **not doing things**; Christianity consists in **doing things**. That was precisely where this man – like so many of us – fell down.)*

So, Jesus confronted him with a challenge. In effect he said, “Get out of this moral respectability. Stop looking at goodness as consisting in not doing things. Take yourself and all that you have, and spend everything on others. Then you will find true happiness in time and in eternity.”

It may be respectable never to take away from anyone. It is Christian to give to someone. “How much do you want real Christianity? Are you ready for the cost? Do you want it enough to give your possessions away?” The man said, “no.”

(For us, giving away all that we have is not what Jesus is asking us to do. Jesus wants us to think about how we can help others. Jesus wants us to ask ourselves, are all my actions for someone or against my neighbor. That’s the true identity of a Christian. Amen.)

PASTORAL PRAYER: Beginning with a time for silent personal prayer.

Jesus, the great teacher, help us change our perspective. We like to watch the guy on the stage who has sequins on his shirt and colorful strobe lights behind him. The crowd is cheering his name. We follow his every word and directions. Is he the messiah? The person to save us all? Yet, when the show comes to an end, the man and his roadies all

disappear into a fancy RV and drive to the next place he can find others who will fall at his feet and worship him.

Then we look at Jesus on the cross. There’s no sequins or strobe lights, no one cheering his name. Why should we follow this man? Jesus does not want any acclamations to him. Instead, he tells us to look to God. God will answer our prayers and help us make better decisions for our lives. God may be invisible, yet God has more power than the man on the stage.

In our humble ways, we pray for those on our prayer list and all those we hold deep in our hearts. Help our government to work out their differences and do the best for others; not just look for acclamation from those who voted for them – not for respectability – but for actions that help others.

We pray for our church, that it may be a light to others and a place to feel safe as we learn together the wisdom of Jesus and how we can absorb some of that knowledge. We pray all in the name of your Son, Jesus . . .

THE LORD’S PRAYER: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed it be your 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 debts as, we

forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

INVITATION TO SHARE:

We should not forget that our offering should be the first fruits of our labors which we dedicate to God. Not only do we honor God by this offering, but it also helps us not to keep the best of what we have for ourselves.

By giving our first fruits to God, we help to ensure that those who have little will receive something and we who have much do not keep it entirely for ourselves.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

Generous God, we thank you for all that we have for all of it comes from you. We gratefully return a portion of what we have to you. May our offerings sustain and support the work of this church to close the disparity between those who have much and those who have little in this community. Amen

BENEDICTION:

(Based upon Psalm 90:12, 14, 17 adapted)

Let us count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

Let God satisfy us this morning with steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Depart in peace and let God's favor be upon us to prosper the work of our hands. Amen.