

The Tenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 14, 2022
"SECURITY IN GOD"



St. John United Church of Christ
10207 Lincoln Trail, Fairview Heights, IL 397-6323
Rev. Rosemary Captain

***CALL TO WORSHIP:**

In a world uprooted at every turn, come beloved of God for replanting.

Our hope and weariness are mixed together, yet we come, trusting ancient promises.

The Holy One who led the people out of Egypt,

yearns to lead us, too.

God will not rest until all are re-rooted, restored, and renewed for rejoicing.

Let us be joined to God's song of justice, bearing beauty into the life of the world.

May our lives be formed for faithfulness by the One who is always faithful.

***INVOCATION:**

Loving and Gracious God, form a new song of soul within us. Take every fragment of our lives and fashion a new creation. Plant us deep in the soil of Your love, that your living water might rise in us, forming a fruit of possibility unimaginable on our own. Grant us grace to trust your promised presence already meeting us here, now, and always. By this, gift us with a new strength of heart for whatever Your love demands. Amen.

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

Gardener God, You plant us in a gifted place, but often we return sour grapes. In the midst of Your abundance, we complain of not having enough or being enough. Your call "to give justice to the weak and the orphan; to maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute" is easily overlooked or ignored.

We are uprooted by our own inaction, selfishness, and fear. Re-root our hearts, our minds, and our lives in the soil of Your forgiving love. Bear up in us a boldness to sing a song strange to the world but known by You. Let it be the song of shalom, the chorus of Christ-love, a hallelujah rising as the world is mended by our consent to You. Yes, plant this anew in us today.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Hear this good word. God can never cease to be love. God has no joy in plants uprooted or journeys detoured by distraction. The ancient promise of God proclaimed again and again throughout history still rings true. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, made known to us in Christ Jesus. God forgives you and is already planting you anew. This is the good news and you can trust it with your life. Thanks be to God!

***GLORIA:**

**Glory to the Creator,
and the Christ and the Spirit so near.
As it was from the start so it shall be forever,
One God always here.**

(Repeat two more times.)

(end) **One God always here. One God always here.**

FIRST TESTAMENT READING: Isaiah 5:1-7

(A few notes to better understand this passage. This is an example of Hebrew love poetry, the vineyard represents the beloved. Initially, the speaker announces that he will sing a song, but the song is limited to 1b-2. The speaker is the prophet Isaiah who speaks as the friend of the bridegroom in verses 1 and 2. In verses 3-6 the prophet assumes the role of the vineyard owner. In verse 7 he speaks as a prophet and he concludes the “song” by revealing the partners: the vineyard is Israel and the “owner” is the Lord of hosts. The entire passage is an indictment against the people of Israel and Judah.)

Song of the vineyard

5 Let me sing for my loved one
a love song for his vineyard.

My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

² He dug it, cleared away its stones, planted it with excellent vines, built a tower inside it, and dug out a wine vat in it.

He expected it to grow good grapes—
but it grew rotten grapes.

³ So now, you who live in Jerusalem, you people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard:

⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I haven't done for it?

When I expected it to grow good grapes,
why did it grow rotten grapes?
⁵ Now let me tell you what I'm doing to my vineyard.
I'm removing its hedge,
so it will be destroyed.
I'm breaking down its walls,
so it will be trampled.
⁶ I'll turn it into a ruin;
it won't be pruned or hoed,
and thorns and thistles will grow up.
I will command the clouds not to rain on it.
⁷ The vineyard of the LORD of heavenly forces is the
house of Israel,
and the people of Judah are the plantings in which
God delighted.
God expected justice, but there was bloodshed;
righteousness, but there was a cry of distress!

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 80:

Page 672 in back of the hymnal

EPISTLE LESSON: Hebrews 11:29-12:2

²⁹ By faith they crossed the Red Sea as if they were on
dry land, but when the Egyptians tried it, they were
drowned.

³⁰ By faith Jericho's walls fell after the people
marched around them for seven days.

³¹ By faith Rahab the prostitute wasn't killed with the
disobedient because she welcomed the spies in
peace.

³² What more can I say? I would run out of time if I
told you about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah,
David, Samuel, and the prophets. ³³ Through faith
they conquered kingdoms, brought about justice,
realized promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ put out
raging fires, escaped from the edge of the sword,
found strength in weakness, were mighty in war, and
routed foreign armies. ³⁵ Women received back their
dead by resurrection. Others were tortured and
refused to be released so they could gain a better
resurrection.

³⁶ But others experienced public shame by being
taunted and whipped; they were even put in chains
and in prison. ³⁷ They were stoned to death, they
were cut in two, and they died by being murdered
with swords. They went around wearing the skins of
sheep and goats, needy, oppressed, and
mistreated. ³⁸ The world didn't deserve them. They
wandered around in deserts, mountains, caves, and
holes in the ground.

³⁹ All these people didn't receive what was promised,
though they were given approval for their
faith. ⁴⁰ God provided something better for us so they
wouldn't be made perfect without us.

Let's also run the race

12 So then, with endurance, let's also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, ² and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne.

***GOSPEL READING: Luke 12:49-56**

Page 1268 in the Pew Bibles

⁴⁹ "I came to cast fire upon the earth. How I wish that it was already ablaze! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism I must experience. How I am distressed until it's completed! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, I have come instead to bring division. ⁵² From now on, a household of five will be divided—three against two and two against three. ⁵³ Father will square off against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; and mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

⁵⁴ Jesus also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud forming in the west, you immediately say, 'It's going to rain.' And indeed, it does. ⁵⁵ And when a

south wind blows, you say, 'A heat wave is coming.' And it does. ⁵⁶ Hypocrites! You know how to interpret conditions on earth and in the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret the present time?

MESSAGE: Open our Eyes and Ears to God

With thoughts from Rev. Erick j. Thompson

This Gospel reading is one of those passages that no one likes to preach. I'm an optimist and Jesus' words here go against my DNA so I found someone who has the correct DNA to explain this passage, Rev. Erick Thompson, an ELCA pastor.

With all of the divisiveness present in society these days, it seems like the last thing we need is a gospel text that seemingly encourages more division. However, there must be something important in these words that Jesus wants us to know so let's see what we can find.

On the face of it, Jesus calls for or predicts that very thing called division. Yet, as we dive into this text, there are certainly other interpretations available. Situated inside the entire section, there is ample evidence to suggest that Jesus is setting the stage for the eventual outcome of his ministry and what that means for those who follow him.

Our Gospel lesson for today can be looked at as having three different parts. The first is a quick summary of Jesus' ministry and its eventual end; a fire of cleansing judgment that spreads the good news and the baptism of his death in order to conquer death.

(As an aside; when we read the word "fire" in the Bible, we immediately think of the fires of hell. We should be thinking of the refiner's fire that burns away impurities. So, let's read that sentence again. ⁴⁹ "I came to cast fire upon the earth. How I wish that it was already ablaze!" Jesus is looking for purification; not destruction.)

Following this is a discussion of the effects the gospel might have on anyone who follows him, and finally, a warning from Jesus about our willingness to hear and see only what we want to.

Let's listen to the first 2 verses again. ⁴⁹ "I came to cast fire upon the earth. How I wish that it was already ablaze! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism I must experience. How I am distressed until it's completed!"

In the first part we hear this language of fire and think judgment, and that may be what Christ wants us to think ... for now. But, in reality, the fire of judgment is perhaps about our own (in)ability to save ourselves. The cleansing fire reveals that we need God.

At that time in history, fire was meant to destroy the reigning religion and religiosity that people used as a way of "guaranteeing" their salvation, yet, which ironically actually distanced people from God. Could the same be said for our own religion today? For Jesus, fire will burn down our human need for security and by extension those institutions that provide human security instead of security in God. The fire is followed by the talk of baptism, which has promise inherent within it. Baptism is not meant to be simply an easy, joyous occasion. On the one hand, baptism is promise for us, on the other hand, for Jesus, baptism leads to death on the cross so that we might have life.

This death turns our baptism into joy and celebration. For many, baptism is the entry into the life of the church. Part of life as God's chosen is vocation, God's calling to us; God's reaching out to us and inviting us to be part of God's plan to care for the world; meaning everyone. This means that Christ's baptism, and his ministry and death on the cross, anticipates our own baptism and provides a bridge to the next section about division.

Our callings, varied and numerous, do not end the day we are baptized. What ends in baptism is the consequence for our failure to live out those vocations. So, while joy is a fundamental emotion for

baptism, it is joy because of the grace that we have been given, not because we will never experience pain again.

The second part of our passage is verses 51-53, ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, I have come instead to bring division. ⁵² From now on, a household of five will be divided—three against two and two against three. ⁵³ Father will square off against son and son against father; mother against daughter and daughter against mother; and mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Jesus lets those gathered know that following him will not be easy, particularly because the gospel will not always bring peace. Families were being torn apart when the gospel spread because it changed everything.

Given our contexts, this may not always happen, but there certainly could be some disagreement or strife in families as the nature of the God’s call for each of us is worked out and understood. Whether it be to attend church, go to seminary, engage in social justice issues, etc. the gospel’s effects can create division. There is no doubt that many churches have experienced division at some time in their histories.

The problem may not lie in the division itself, but in how we respond to the divisions that happen in our lives.

One possibility may be to see that God is at work in all realities, and that division is not the problem. Perhaps it is in our own naive expectation that we have more truth than others. Instead, could God be at work on both sides of an issue?

There have been calls within the Christian church to become one church so that all might believe. Jesus’ talk about division may point to a broken reality for Christianity no matter how hard we work toward unity.

Perhaps this is Jesus’ point: that human togetherness is not what the gospel is about. Rather, the gospel preached into the life of an individual person will do its work, and we are left to trust that it is God at work, and resist our attempts to control the outcome.

Our need for control may be the point of the final part of this selection, verses 54-56, where Jesus addresses our inability to realize what’s really happening. Why do we remain blind to all that is happening around us concerning Christ and God?

The accusation of hypocrites is an interesting one here, since Jesus is talking about those who can read the signs, but can’t figure out the “present time.”

This isn't exactly hypocrisy, but sounds more like bad vision.

The hypocrite label might make sense if the hypocrites believe that Jesus brings grace, yet who continue to work under the law to achieve their own righteousness. Or, we might be hypocrites when we believe that we have a monopoly of truth, about ourselves and our world. The hypocrite thinks they have everything figured out, but keeps using human actions to guarantee God's presence and remain in control.

This accusation of hypocrisy is an important one to consider seriously as we live out life in the church. Do we allow ourselves to hear God's call again and again, or do we rest comfortably in our perfect church attendance or other human work?

Another way to put this is: Why do we insist on pretending to ignore the injustices (racial and otherwise) around us? Most likely the answer is that we don't want to see what's really happening or our role in the injustices of the world. There is clearly an opportunity to talk about the "elephant in the room" for many contexts.

Simply naming an issue might be gospel for many, and may be that Holy Spirit event that changes everything. It may lead to division, but, we have to trust that God is at work in all situations, and

remember that God has claimed us in our baptisms, not because we've been perfect Christians.

So, what have we learned? We are not know-it-alls. We are not God. We are not in control. Instead, we need to trust God; we need to live out our vocation with God; we need to rely on God for our security, we need to rely on God for our salvation. Rev. Thompson has taken this Bible passage and turned it on a dime. It is not a passage about doom and gloom; it is Jesus giving us promise and joy.

Amen

PASTORAL PRAYER: God of truth and compassion, we come to you today to give thanksgiving for your care for us and for comfort for our many concerns. We are grateful that you listen to our petitions. Our world is damaged in so many ways. We ask for your wisdom and compassion for all the people who are thirsty, hungry, oppressed, in danger, hurting, grieving, sick, or lonely or all these things together. Help us be good stewards to all.

We pray for those who are in governmental positions. May their decisions be made prayerfully with clarity and charity.

Savior, keep in your mercy all those whom we love, our children, our relatives, our friends, our acquaintances, and all the friends we haven't met yet. Stretch out to them the strong hand of your help in their time of trouble or crises of decision.

We ask for safety to all farmers, truck drivers, teachers, and custodians. They all work hard and seldom get recognition.

Make us prolific in good deeds also that we may produce more wood, hay, and straw to be burnt in the refiner's fire. All glory and honor be yours.

THE LORD'S PRAYER:

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 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.

PRAYER RESPONSE: NCH 769

Hear our prayer, O God, Hear our prayer, O God. Incline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

We live in a more than enough world, created by a God who lavishes abundance. Today, we are

privileged to join God's motion of generosity. When we add our gifts, God multiplies them for good, and joy mysteriously rises. This is God's will and way. May we be joined to it.

OFFERTORY: "I Need Thee Every Hour"

Robert Lowery

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise Holy Spirit Comforter;
One God, Triune, whom we adore. Amen.**

***UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**

We thank you, Loving God, that sourness gives way to sweetness when we answer Your call to be generous. Multiply these gifts and Your spirit in us, that the world may know your life-giving will and way.

***BENEDICTION:**

May you remember, God has planted Your life and given you a song to sing into the world. May it be a song of healing and hope, of justice and joy. And may you discover yourself blessed again and again as you

find yourself joined on the journey with Jesus.
Blessings on you, beloved of God.

POSTLUDE: “Exaltation” Robert J. Hughes

PRAYER LIST: Urban Baum, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Carol White, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Theo Mally, Jane Riess, Betty Massey, Gary Whitkas, Sandy Fort, Ingrid Alexiou, Becky Ballard, Peggy and her family (friends of Judy Schmitt,) Kaitlan and John Cray (Buddy Hagley’s granddaughter and husband) on the death of their expected baby and to Nancy Dinges the expectant grandmother.