

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
July 10, 2022  
***“A Plumb Line”***



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

Liturgy - Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay

**\*RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

God of salvation, we lift our souls to you.

**The paths of the Holy One are steadfast love and**

**faithfulness.**

In trust, we wait on you to speak, to reveal, to send.

**The paths of the Holy One are steadfast love and faithfulness.**

Lead us in your truth with mercy and righteousness.

**The paths of the Holy One are steadfast love and faithfulness.**

**\*INVOCATION:**

Divine Builder, you set our standards and foundation. Make your presence known to us as we gather before you. Let this community reflect your body and your vision. Fortify us with all truth and strengthen us with your abundant love. Enliven our senses and stir our being as we worship you as the people you have crafted to build alongside you. Amen.

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

Everlasting God, you build up and tear down. We confess that we have erected idols that need to be demolished in our time.

We embrace complacency and comfort over following your vision of beloved community and liberation.

We measure ourselves not against your precepts but by the standards of this world. We close our ears to voices we do not want to hear and our eyes to sights too painful to see.

Tear down the fear of discomfort within us and rebuild us with the pillars of holy love, compassionate care, and Spirit-led action. In your mercy, make us new. Amen. *Pause for reflection*

**\*WORDS OF GRACE:**

The Righteous One remains near to you and delights in prospering the fruit of your bodies, your soul, and your acts. The way of God is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away.

**SCRIPTURE TEXTS: FIRST TESTAMENT: Amos 7:7-17**

**A vision of a plumb line**

<sup>7</sup>This is what the LORD showed me: The LORD was standing by a wall, with a plumb line in his hand. <sup>8</sup>The LORD said to me, “Amos, what do you see?”

“A plumb line,” I said.

Then the LORD said,

“See, I am setting a plumb line  
in the middle of my people Israel.  
I will never again forgive them.

<sup>9</sup>The shrines of Isaac will be made desolate,  
and the holy places of Israel will be laid waste,  
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam  
with the sword.”

**Exchange between Amaziah, Jeroboam, and Amos**

<sup>10</sup>Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, reported to Israel’s King Jeroboam, “Amos has plotted against you within the house of Israel. The land isn’t able to cope with everything that he is saying. <sup>11</sup>Amos has said, ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will be forced out of its land.’”

<sup>12</sup>Amaziah said to Amos, “You who see things, go, run away to the land of Judah, eat your bread there, and prophesy there; <sup>13</sup>but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king’s holy place and his royal house.”

<sup>14</sup>Amos answered Amaziah, “I am<sup>[a]</sup> not a prophet, nor am I a prophet’s son; but I am a shepherd, and a trimmer of sycamore trees. <sup>15</sup>But the LORD took me from shepherding the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’

<sup>16</sup>“Now then hear the LORD’s word.  
You say, ‘Don’t prophesy against Israel,

and don't preach  
against the house of Isaac.'

<sup>17</sup> "Therefore, the LORD proclaims:

'Your wife will become a prostitute in the city,  
and your sons and your daughters will fall by the  
sword,  
and your land will be measured and divided up;  
you yourself will die in an unclean land,  
and Israel will surely be taken away from its  
land.'"

#### **EPISTLE READING: Colossians 1:1-14**

##### **Greeting**

<sup>1</sup> From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus  
by God's will, and Timothy our brother.

<sup>2</sup> To the holy and faithful brothers and sisters in  
Christ in Colossae.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

##### **Thanksgiving and prayer for the Colossians**

<sup>3</sup> We always give thanks to God, the Father of our  
Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you. <sup>4</sup> We've  
done this since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus  
and your love for all God's people. <sup>5</sup> You have this  
faith and love because of the hope reserved for you  
in heaven. You previously heard about this hope  
through the true message, the good news, <sup>6</sup> which  
has come to you. This message has been bearing fruit

and growing among you since the day you heard and  
truly understood God's grace, in the same way that it  
is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world. <sup>7</sup> You  
learned it from Epaphras, who is the fellow slave we  
love and Christ's faithful minister for your sake. <sup>8</sup> He  
informed us of your love in the Spirit.

<sup>9</sup> Because of this, since the day we heard about you,  
we haven't stopped praying for you and asking for  
you to be filled with the knowledge of God's will,  
with all wisdom and spiritual understanding. <sup>10</sup> We're  
praying this so that you can live lives that are worthy  
of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way: by  
producing fruit in every good work and growing in  
the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> by being strengthened  
through his glorious might so that you endure  
everything and have patience; <sup>12</sup> and by giving thanks  
with joy to the Father. He made it so you could take  
part in the inheritance, in light granted to God's holy  
people. <sup>13</sup> He rescued us from the control of darkness  
and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he  
loves. <sup>14</sup> He set us free through the Son and forgave  
our sins.

#### **GOSPEL TEXT: Luke 10:25-37**

##### **Loving your neighbor**

<sup>25</sup> A legal expert stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he  
said, "what must I do to gain eternal life?"

<sup>26</sup> Jesus replied, “What is written in the Law? How do you interpret it?”

<sup>27</sup> He responded, “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.*”<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Jesus said to him, “You have answered correctly. Do this and you will live.”

<sup>29</sup> But the legal expert wanted to prove that he was right, so he said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He encountered thieves, who stripped him naked, beat him up, and left him near death. <sup>31</sup> Now it just so happened that a priest was also going down the same road. When he saw the injured man, he crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. <sup>32</sup> Likewise, a Levite came by that spot, saw the injured man, and crossed over to the other side of the road and went on his way. <sup>33</sup> A Samaritan, who was on a journey, came to where the man was. But when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. <sup>34</sup> The Samaritan went to him and bandaged his wounds, tending them with oil and wine. Then he placed the wounded man on his own

donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day, he took two full days’ worth of wages and gave them to the innkeeper. He said, ‘Take care of him, and when I return, I will pay you back for any additional costs.’ <sup>36</sup> What do you think? Which one of these three was a neighbor to the man who encountered thieves?”

<sup>37</sup> Then the legal expert said, “The one who demonstrated mercy toward him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

These are the ancient Words of faith  
given to us anew.

**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

### **MESSAGE: “How Do We Measure Up”**

It has been said that a parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. The Lord Jesus frequently used parables as a means of illustrating profound, divine truths. Stories such as these are easily remembered, the characters bold, and the symbolism rich in meaning. Parables were a common form of teaching in Judaism. Before a certain point in His ministry, Jesus had employed many graphic analogies using common things that would be familiar to everyone (salt, bread, sheep, etc.) and their meaning was fairly clear in the context of His teaching. Parables required

more explanation, and at one point in His ministry, Jesus began to teach using parables exclusively. A parable is similar to a folk moral tale. Parts of it may not always be true. Look at Aesop's stories. He had animals talking. There are some things about this parable that we just read, that perhaps cannot be true. Let's take a deeper look into this parable to find out what is possible, probable, or impossible and why it does or doesn't really matter.

First, let's look at the scene of this story. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a notoriously dangerous road. Jerusalem is 2,300 feet above sea level; the Dead Sea, near Jericho is 1300 feet below sea level. So, in somewhat less than twenty miles, this road dropped 3600 feet. It was a road of narrow, rocky passages, and of sudden turnings which made it the happy hunting-ground of gangsters and bandits.

In the fifth century Jerome tells us that it was still called "The Red or Bloody Way." In the nineteenth century it was still necessary to pay safety money to local rulers before one could travel on it. As late as the early 1930s the travel writer H.V. Morton tells us that he warned to get home before dark, if he intended to use the road, because a certain gang of thieves was adept at holding up cars and robbing travelers and tourists, and escaping to the hills before

the police could arrive. When Jesus told this story, he was telling about the kind of thing that was constantly happening on the Jerusalem to Jericho road.

Next, let's look at the characters of this parable. First there was the traveler. He was obviously a reckless and foolhardy character. People seldom attempted the Jericho road alone if they were carrying goods or valuables. Seeking safety in numbers, they traveled in convoys or caravans. This man had no one but himself to blame for the trouble in which he found himself.

Then there was the priest. He hastened past. No doubt he was remembering that anyone who touched a dead man was unclean for seven days, according to the laws in the book Numbers Chapter 19. He could not be sure but he feared that the man was dead; to touch him would mean losing his turn of duty in the Temple; and he refused to risk that. He set the claims of ceremonial above those of charity. The Temple and its liturgy meant more to him than human suffering.

Next there was the Levite. He seems to have gone nearer to the man before he passed on. The bandits were in the habit of using decoys. One of them would act the part of a wounded man; and when some unsuspecting traveler stopped to help the "faking

wounded person”, the others would rush upon him and overpower him. The Levite was a man whose motto was, “Safety first”. He would take no risks to help anyone else.

Our last character is the Samaritan. The listeners would obviously expect that with his arrival the villain had arrived. However, he might not have been a racially Samaritan at all. The Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans and yet this man seems to have been a kind of commercial traveler who was a regular visitor to the inn. Being called a Samaritan was like being called a racial slur. The name was sometimes used to describe someone who was considered a heretic and a breaker of the ceremonial law. Perhaps this man WAS a Samaritan in the sense of being one whom orthodox good people despised.

Two more things about him. His credit was good. Clearly the innkeeper was prepared to trust him. He may have been theologically unsound, but he was an honest man.

Of all those who saw the wounded man, he alone was prepared to help. A heretic he may have been, but the love of God was in his heart. It is not uncommon to find the orthodox more interested in dogmas than in helping others. Actually, to find those whom the orthodox despise to be the ones who show the greatest love for others. In the end we

will be judged not by the creeds, dogmas, or rules we hold but by the life we live.

Thirdly, let’s look at the teaching of the parable. The legal expert who asked the question, “who is my neighbor?” was in earnest. Jesus asked him what was written in the law, and then said, “how do you understand this law?” Strict orthodox Jews wore around their wrists little leather boxes called phylacteries, which contained certain passages one of which was what the legal expert answered Jesus, “You shall love the Lord your God”. To that passage the scribes had added in Leviticus 19:18 “love your neighbor as yourself”; but with their passion for definition the Rabbis sought to define who a person’s neighbor was; and at their worst and their narrowest they confined the word neighbor to mean their fellow Jews. For example, it was illegal to help a Gentile woman at the time of childbirth for that would mean another Gentile into the world. So that the legal expert’s question, “who is my neighbor?” was a genuine question.

Jesus’ answer involves three things. 1.) We must be prepared to help others even when they have brought their trouble on themselves, as the traveler had done. 2.) Anyone from any nation who is in need is our neighbor. Our help must be as wide as the love of God. 3.) The help must be practical and not consist

merely in feeling sorry. (*Our thoughts and prayers are with you.*) No doubt the priest and the Levite felt a pang of pity for the wounded man, but DAD nothing. Compassion to be real, must contain deeds.

As we have discovered there was a lot more to this parable than we first thought. Was the whole story true? Maybe not. What traveler would go alone on the road to Jericho? True or not, we learned a moral lesson from Jesus. What Jesus said to the legal expert, he says to us – “Go you and do the same.”

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

Mighty God, you have taught us in our prayers to remember the needs of all people. Hear our intercessions in the name of Jesus Christ and our supplications for our church communities.

Remember the church in its faith and works, its progress and failure, its love and its half-heartedness. Deliver us from false doctrine, from hateful neglect, from unwise distractions, firming our resolves to serve you faithfully as long as life lasts. May our church family truly be a morning star, heralding a brighter, better day.

Conserve in our national life the great values of our heritage, and reform our society in striving for

the high ideals we have espoused but not yet achieved. May your name be hallowed by all.

We pray for our church family here at St. John UCC. For those who can not be with us this morning due to illness or failing strength, we ask that you, dear God, will be present with them. We pray for all those on our prayer list and all those whom we don't know but are suffering. To you, O God, Creator, Savior, and Restorer, we give all glory and praise.

#### **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.**

#### **THANK YOU FOR YOUR GENEROSITY:**

The plumb line is a device used to ensure alignment in construction. Generosity aligns the use of resources in excess. We bring our gifts out of the abundance we have received to benefit our neighbor and bless the world.

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND**

**THANKSGIVING:**

**Architect of our faith, use these humble offerings to construct your plan of peace, hope, and love for life abundantly. Amen.**

**\*BENEDICTION:**

Be filled with all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Bear fruit in every good work as you grow in the knowledge of God. Be strong in God's and give thanks to the One who has given you a share in the kingdom, the power, and the glory. Amen.

**PRAYER LIST:** Urban Baum, Donna Isselhard, David Seneczyn, Warren Neff, Carol White, Dennis Franklin, Cheri Schutzenhofer, Dorothy Wagner, Theo Mally, Jane Riess, Betty Massey. The family of Judy Hartmann.