

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2024
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
MARK 9:30-37 | "POSITION"



ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431
*Please stand if comfortably able
and respond with words in bold print

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: "Jesus Loves the Little Children" Mark Hayes

PENNIES FOR MISSION:

Deaconess Parish Nurse Ministries

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

(Inspired by Psalm 54)

One: Let us humble ourselves as we seek the presence of the Sovereign God.

Many: God is our helper, the upholder of life.

One: The Holy One saves and delivers, vindicates and redeems, listens and responds.

Many: God is our helper, the upholder of life.

One: Give thanks to Holy Love and worship our Maker.

Many: God is our helper, the upholder of life.

***INVOCATION:**

Good God, make yourself known among us. We lift our voices in song, our hearts in prayer, our minds in consideration, our lives in adoration toward you. We acknowledge that your Spirit leads, comforts, and challenges us as we follow you. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 539**

"Won't You Let Me Be Your Servant?"

***PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**
Holy Love, we confess that too often we become fixated with our position in the world. We love the exercise of our own power and exert it over others rather for the benefit of the common good and your kingdom. Transform our hearts to crave you as the source of our power and love the only good and fulfilling demonstration of it. Make us your instruments of peace, joy, and hope in the world and agents of new life. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

Image bearers of the divine, grace and mercy follow you in anticipation of your repentance. Turn toward the ways of justice and righteousness. Let Wisdom guide you and Holy Love use you for the glory of God and the blessing of our neighbors in humanity and in creation.

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

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Proverbs 31:10-31

The competent wife

¹⁰ A competent wife, how does one find her?

Her value is far above pearls.

¹¹ Her husband entrusts his heart to her,

and with her he will have all he needs.

¹² She brings him good and not trouble all the days of her life.

¹³ She seeks out wool and flax; she works joyfully with her hands.

¹⁴ She is like a fleet of merchant ships, bringing food from a distance.

¹⁵ She gets up while it is still night, providing food for her household, even some for her female servants.

¹⁶ She surveys a field and acquires it; from her own resources, she plants a vineyard.

¹⁷ She works energetically; her arms are powerful.

¹⁸ She realizes that her trading is successful; she doesn't put out her lamp at night.

¹⁹ She puts her hands to the spindle; her palms grasp the whorl.

²⁰ She reaches out to the needy; she stretches out her hands to the poor.

²¹ She doesn't fear for her household when it snows, because they are all dressed in warm clothes.

²² She makes bedspreads for herself; fine linen and purple are her clothing.

²³ Her husband is known in the city gates when he sits with the elders of the land.

²⁴ She makes garments and sells them; she supplies sashes to traders.

²⁵ Strength and honor are her clothing;
she is confident about the future.
²⁶ Her mouth is full of wisdom;
kindly teaching is on her tongue.
²⁷ She is vigilant over the activities of her household;
she doesn't eat the food of laziness.
²⁸ Her children bless her;
her husband praises her:
²⁹ "Many women act competently,
but you surpass them all!"
³⁰ Charm is deceptive and beauty fleeting,
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.
³¹ Let her share in the results of her work;
let her deeds praise her in the city gates.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 1 Page 621

SECOND TESTAMENT: James 3:13-4:3, 7-8A

Wisdom from above

¹³ Are any of you wise and understanding? Show that your actions are good with a humble lifestyle that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ However, if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, then stop bragging and living in ways that deny the truth. ¹⁵ This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. Instead, it is from the earth, natural and demonic. ¹⁶ Wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there is disorder and everything that is evil. ¹⁷ What of the wisdom from above? First, it is pure, and then peaceful, gentle,

obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair, and genuine. ¹⁸ Those who make peace sow the seeds of justice by their peaceful acts.

Conflict with people and God

⁴ What is the source of conflict among you? What is the source of your disputes? Don't they come from your cravings that are at war in your own lives? ² You long for something you don't have, so you commit murder. You are jealous for something you can't get, so you struggle and fight. You don't have because you don't ask. ³ You ask and don't have because you ask with evil intentions, to waste it on your own cravings.

⁷ Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will run away from you. ⁸ Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners. Purify your hearts, you double-minded.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 9:30-37**

Jesus predicts his death

³⁰ From there Jesus and his followers went through Galilee, but he didn't want anyone to know it. ³¹ This was because he was teaching his disciples, "The Human One will be delivered into human hands. They will kill him. Three days after he is killed he will rise up." ³² But they didn't understand this kind of talk, and they were afraid to ask him.

³³ They entered Capernaum. When they had come into a house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about

during the journey?”³⁴ They didn’t respond, since on the way they had been debating with each other about who was the greatest.³⁵ He sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be least of all and the servant of all.”³⁶ Jesus reached for a little child, placed him among the Twelve, and embraced him. Then he said,³⁷ “Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me isn’t actually welcoming me but rather the one who sent me.”

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen

MESSAGE: Don’t get distracted.

I don’t know if the author of the Gospel of Mark wants us to feel sorry for the disciples at this point, but quite frankly I do. Earlier in the gospel Jesus said things to them in code, and they didn’t get it. The parables were secret, hidden messages which they gradually learned how to understand but it had to be away from the crowds. When Jesus warned them about the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod (8:15) they thought he was making a comment about them forgetting to bring bread. They have struggled to get their minds around the fact that he often says things that have a clear meaning at the surface level, but what he wants is for them to look under the surface and find a hidden meaning

somewhere else. It makes me think about the difference between Sunday School and Seminary.

And now Jesus tells them something which we, the readers, realize he means quite literally; and they, not surprisingly, are puzzled because they are looking for a hidden meaning and can’t find it. Remember when I told you I couldn’t do crossword puzzles. I got as confused as the disciples.

In this passage Jesus is not teaching the crowds. This is part of the hidden, inner meaning of Jesus’ whole career, the bit that the crowds won’t see until it actually happens. Jesus doesn’t, at this stage, even attempt to tell parables about his approaching fate. Nearer the time he will do strange things, and say even stranger things, about it; but at this stage he is simply trying to tell them what he can see is going to happen. He will be handed over; he will be killed; he will rise again.

Why couldn’t they understand? Basically, because no such fate could possibly have been part of their game plan, their understanding of what a Messiah might do. *(We talked a little about this last week. To the Jews, Jesus did not fit their description of what a Messiah is.)* Probably not all Jews of the time believed that God would ever send a Messiah; but nobody at all believed that if and when God did send one, that Messiah would have to suffer, much less have to die.

At this stage we can only sympathize with the disciples; we must ask ourselves whether we do the

same thing. When God is trying to say something to us, how good are we at listening? Is there something in scripture, or something we've heard in church, or something we sense going on around us, through which God is speaking to us. If so, are we open to it? Are we prepared to have our earlier ways of understanding things taken apart so that a new way of understanding can open up instead?

Any time we are trying to learn new things, we must not let our thoughts be distracted. We might be distracted by thoughts of what will be our reward once we decode what Jesus is saying to us.

There are no thrones for us to sit on. Our reward is to kneel before God and say, "Here I am Lord. Send me!"
Amen.

**SPECIAL MUSIC: "We are Called" Video by David Haas
(Sing along)**

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 all hatred and blindness will be no more!

3. Sing! Sing a 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!

PASTORAL PRAYER: We draw near to you, Generous God, as we slow down our thoughts, take a deep breath, and relax in your arms. We come not just with complaints and petitions but with praise and contrition. We are in awe of your mighty mercy, forgiveness, and love for all humans and nature.

Heavenly Sovereign, save us from the jealousy that seeks to detract from the accomplishments of others, especially the young and those who come late in life to your service, that all of us working together may find joy in serving you as one body, one in Spirit, one in mind.

Today we remember all those struggling with health problems. May they seek comfort in knowing you are with them always and you are sending others to help them. We pray for all those on our prayer list.

We remember all those affected by storms, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, or tornadoes. They grieve for

their loss, but they are reminded of God's hope for them that they remain in God's eyes.

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: 769

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

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

Like the words of Psalm 54:6, we proclaim: "With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, Holy One, for it is good." Let us give with the generosity of love made real, available, and free.

OFFERTORY: "More Like the Master" John M. Rasley

***DOXOLOGY:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen**

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

Gracious God, we give you thanks for all the gifts we receive from you and pray you receive our gifts for your kingdom. May they be a blessing and gift in our extended community and the world. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 531**

"God, Speak to Me, That I May Speak"

***BENEDICTION:**

May you go into the world renewed and refreshed
With humble and expectant peace
To witness to the love of God
The joy of the community of faith
And the hope of new life in Christ. Amen.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE:

"Let There Be Peace on Earth"

THE BELL IS RUNG:

POSTLUDE: "God Is Our Salvation" Chester Nordman