

NOVEMBER 2, 2025
TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER
PENTECOST



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(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431
Unless otherwise noted, all scripture texts
are from the **Common English Bible (CEB)**
*Please stand if comfortably able
and respond with words in **bold print**

SUMMARY OF SCRIPTURE TEXTS

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4 In the opening words of this text, we hear echoes of our own protest to God against injustice in the world, while in the closing words we are reassured that the righteous will live by faith.

Psalm 119:137-144 The theme of righteousness also pervades this Psalm, although the emphasis falls on the righteousness of God. These words serve well as a response to the reading from Habakkuk, for they boldly assert and defend God's justice.

2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12 The apostle Paul's opening prayer of thanksgiving concluding with the confident hope that God would make new converts worthy of their calling.

Luke 19:1-10 We meet the familiar story of Zacchaeus, whose encounter with the Lord results in his conversion and uncommon generosity.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: "Come, Ye Thankful People, Come" by
George J Elvey, arranged by Heather Sorenson

PENNIES FOR MISSION:

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP:**

One: We gather in awe

Many: standing in the presence of the One

who crafted the stars, the mountains, the seas.

One: We gather in faith,

Many: trusting that the One who has held little children holds our lives in the heart of God.

One: We gather in need,

Many: seeking the One who longs for justice to grace each and every person in creation.

***UNISON PRAYER OF INVOCATION:**

Based on the UCC Statement of Faith

Holy God, we thank you that you receive us not according to our failing goodness, but according to your overflowing grace. You receive us as we are. You show us what we can be, through Jesus Christ, who came to share our common lot and reconcile us to yourself. Sweep over us with your Spirit, and change us by your love that we may sing with joy before you. And live to your glory in the world. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 349 "I Come with Joy"**

***CALL TO RECONCILIATION:**

How patient is God! We run around trying to do everything our way, and God just waits. We try to buy life and happiness, and God waits. We hurt others and walk away from those in need, and God waits. God waits, and upon hearing our heartfelt prayers and cries for help, God touches us with forgiveness and new life.

Come, join me as we pray to the One who waits to hear - from us!

***UNISON PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS:**

Surrounded by so many seductions, Patient God, we find it difficult to see you in our lives. Justice has a hard time surviving when there is so much persecution and affliction towards the little ones of the world. Our neighborhoods, our families, even our churches, are filled with strife and contention.

We cry for help, Listening God; forgive us! As we wait for your grace to fill our lives, may we open our hearts to your hope and healing, always giving thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Silence is kept

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON:**

One: Rich, poor; young, old; sinner, saint. We are all God's children, and God transforms each of us into the people we are meant to be.

Many: Broken, we are mended; separated from others, we are made one; longing to serve, we are sent forth. Thanks be to God, we are forgiven. Amen.

***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.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS: Old Testament

Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4 From “THE MESSAGE”

Justice Is a Joke

1 ¹⁻⁴ The problem as God gave Habakkuk to see it: God, how long do I have to cry out for help before you listen? How many times do I have to yell, “Help! Murder! Police!” before you come to the rescue? Why do you force me to look at evil, stare trouble in the face day after day? Anarchy and violence break out, quarrels and fights all over the place. Law and order fall to pieces. Justice is a joke. The wicked have the righteous hamstrung and stand justice on its head.

2 What’s God going to say to my questions? I’m braced for the worst. I’ll climb to the lookout tower and scan the horizon. I’ll wait to see what God says, how he’ll answer my complaint.

Full of Self, but Soul-Empty

²⁻³ And then God answered: “Write this. Write what you see. Write it out in big block letters so that it can be read on the run. This vision-message is a witness pointing to what’s coming. It aches for the coming—it can hardly

wait! And it doesn’t lie. If it seems slow in coming, wait. It’s on its way. It will come right on time.

⁴ “Look at that man, bloated by self-importance—full of himself but soul-empty. But the person in right standing before God through loyal and steady believing is fully alive, *really* alive.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 119:137-144 Page 701

EPISTLE LESSON: 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12

1 From Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy:

To the church of the Thessalonians, which is in God our Father, and in the Lord Jesus Christ.

² Grace and peace to all of you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and encouragement

³ Brothers and sisters, we must always thank God for you. This is only right because your faithfulness is growing by leaps and bounds, and the love that all of you have for each other is increasing. ⁴ That’s why we ourselves are bragging about you in God’s churches. We tell about your endurance and faithfulness in all the harassments and trouble that you have put up with.

¹¹ We are constantly praying for you for this: that our God will make you worthy of his calling and accomplish every good desire and faithful work by his power. ¹² Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored by you, and

you will be honored by him, consistent with the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Luke 19:1-10**

A rich tax collector

19 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through town. ² A man there named Zacchaeus, a ruler among tax collectors, was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but, being a short man, he couldn't because of the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed up a sycamore tree so he could see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came to that spot, he looked up and said, "Zacchaeus, come down at once. I must stay in your home today." ⁶ So Zacchaeus came down at once, happy to welcome Jesus.

⁷ Everyone who saw this grumbled, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

⁸ Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord, I give half of my possessions to the poor. And if I have cheated anyone, I repay them four times as much."

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this household because he too is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ The Human One came to seek and save the lost."

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: "The Man Everyone Despised"

This episode of Luke 19:1-10 is what they call, a Human Interest story. If you have ever written for a newspaper or magazine you've heard that term. We can also see Human interest stories on shows such as the Today Show or other morning news programs that broadcast all types of information. I think it helps to have Human Interest stories when we the audience get bored and overwhelmed with the news from Washington.

The author of the Gospel of Luke is well known for his parables that have a narrative plot and include more than the usual amount of interesting detail: such as the good Samaritan that Nancy preached on a while back. Then there was the rich fool who built bigger barns to hoard all his grain and then who died that same night. We had the story of the rich man and Lazarus, and which one suffered in the after-life. There was the dishonest steward, the unjust judge from two weeks ago, the Pharisee and the tax collector who prayed differently, and we can't forget the story of the Prodigal son.

It is also the case that Luke's writings bring us literary artistry in narrating non-parable stories. You know sometimes we forget that the Bible is a work of literature. As a matter of fact, I think Southwestern Illinois College still offers the class "the Bible as Literature". I took both semesters many years ago. It was very enjoyable to look at the Bible in a different way.

The story before us today is also a conflict story. “All who saw it began to grumble and said, ‘He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.’” In that day as well as today, the common wisdom was “birds of a feather flock together” and “you can judge a person by the company he keeps.” Don’t we warn our teenage children to stay away from certain crowds of kids. My parents used to tease my brother and I every week; “well we didn’t see your name in the police blotter in the newspaper this week so we guess you’re listening to our warnings.”

I’m sure you can think of a few churches who don’t want “sinners” in their church. My response is, “where would you like them to go for help?”

That Jesus rejected such “wisdom” in his seeking and searching to teach how to love is a vivid and repeated truth of the Gospels. One thing he taught us was that loving and forgiving are not condoning, and the behavior of Jesus fulfills rather than abolishes righteousness. Let me say that again. Loving and forgiving is not the same as condoning, or excusing, or ignoring, or overlooking. I believe some of us are afraid to forgive someone because that person may think that what they did or didn’t do was okay. Forgiving is not pardoning the offense.

This story about Zacchaeus is a radical one. Zacchaeus is not only a tax collector but a chief tax

collector. All the criticism that could be hurled against a tax collector such as ceremonially unclean for he was Jewish, socially ostracized, politically treasonous, could be compounded against Zacchaeus. In a corrupt system, the loftier the position the greater the involvement in that corruption.

Some people might say, “well maybe he is nice at home.” Probably not. The fact is, a person is not privately righteous while participating in a corrupt system that robs and crushes other persons.

Zacchaeus was not hiding a private righteous life. He was crooked through and through. That’s what makes this story so radical.

Zacchaeus was silently granted grace by Jesus. WHAT?? Everyone thought he was beyond forgiveness or repentance. Haven’t we all thought that about some people? “They are beyond help. They will never change. They will never give up all their riches and lavish life style!”

I know this is hard for us to believe, but Jesus does not give up on anyone. We may think it is unfair for people like Zacchaeus to be given grace, but that is not ours to decide. We are not judges. That job is taken by the Almighty.

This man, Zacchaeus, without Jesus lecturing to him, repented and voluntarily gave restitution to all those he had cheated. Did you notice that? Jesus did not shake

his finger at Zacchaeus. He did not say “shame on you, Zacchaeus.” All Jesus did was invite himself to the tax collector’s home. And the tax collector confessed to everyone around that tree that day, that he would give half of his possessions to the poor and that he would repay four times over anyone he had cheated.

Why did Jesus have that affect on Zacchaeus? We don’t exactly know, but we know it happened. And what was Jesus’s response to all those people who despised Zacchaeus? Jesus said, “Today, salvation has come to this house-hold because he too is a son of Abraham” as we all are. Jesus said, “The Human One came to seek and save the lost.” Amen.

HYMN OF RESPONSE: 451 “Be Thou My Vision”

PASTORAL PRAYER:

You stirred the dust and created us for service;
you breathed into our lungs so we could share your good news;
you shape our hearts with the tools of compassion so we will seek justice for all. We thank you, God of gifts.

In the hospitality of Zaccheus, we see your openness for all who are different; in the grumbling of his neighbors, we hear the echoes of our own prejudices and fears; in his transformation into a new person, we see your grace which is prepared for us. We thank you, Companion of the poor.

You cradle us in the peace of the resting night; you awaken us with the light of dawn and the warmth of your gentleness; you walk with us through each day, nudging us to be that blessing we are called to be to others. We thank you, Surprising Spirit.

And we thank you for your healing love that you offer to all who suffer physically or mentally or both. As we remember all those on our prayer list may they feel the warmth of your Spirit in their weary bodies. And we remember all those on our hearts that we pray for in our silence. May all your children around the world know you, the one true God, who can bring comfort to all. Let us pray in unison the prayer your son taught us . . .

OUR LORD’S PRAYER:

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:

As the days become cooler and the leaves of summer begin to wear their fall colors, we are reminded of the many ways God interacts with the world in order to meet its many needs. The cycle of life goes on and we are among the actors. But more importantly, we are stewards and caretakers of the earth because we are made in God’s image. Let us now share in that

responsibility as we set aside a portion of our wealth to fulfill our task as stewards of the earth.

OFFERTORY: “Blessed Assurance” by Phoebe Palmer, Knapp, arranged by Joel Raney

***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 DEDICATION/OFFERING**

How easily we overlook the Zaccheus in our midst - the father short of money, the woman short of hope, the children short of food. As we offer our gifts, we pray you would open our hearts to recognize all around us, especially those looking for you in us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

THE INVITATION: This is the table of God, the joyful host. Everyone, child, youth, and adult, is welcome to eat at this table. No matter what your religious affiliation, no matter what your particular beliefs or nagging doubts may be, you are welcome to share in this meal. With the boldness of Jesus we invite everyone: Come and joyfully

share!

One: May the God of all hope be with you.

Many: And also with you.

Lift your hearts to the One who comes to feast with you.

We offer our hearts to God who is in our midst.

Children of God, sing praises to the One who feeds you with goodness and hope.

Our hearts and voices resound with joy.

In your heart, God of wonder, you wrote the vision of creation, and the Word shaped the mountains from the rich loam of the valleys, your Spirit breathed life into everything you created which sprang forth from your imagination.

Welcomed into your garden with hope, we forgot your words of hospitality, running to catch a glimpse of the parade of seductions sin and death brought to town. Prophets came, your vision written on their hearts, your voice standing behind their words which sought to bring us back to you, but we took no delight in their invitations.

So you sent your Beloved, Jesus the Christ, to be the guest of sinners in every time and place, that we might receive the gift of salvation. So, with reformers and saints who have gone before us, with friends and neighbors sitting around us, we lift our songs of praise to you:

Holy, holy, holy are you, God of justice and righteousness.

All creation keeps watch for your justice.

Hosanna in the highest!

Blessed is the One who comes to call us home.

Hosanna in the highest.

In your heart, Forgiving God, you wrote the vision of redemption, and sent Jesus, your Servant of righteousness, to your people at the appointed time.

When our zeal for sin consumed us, he came to feed us with the bread of life; when our souls were emptied out by the corruption of death, he came to grow abundant faith in us; when we saw only destruction on the horizon, he came to stand at his watch post, defeating sin and death so they could never harm us again, and inviting us to find life and peace in your heart's home for all eternity.

As we remember his life, his teachings, his words, as we celebrate the good news of his resurrection, we speak of our faith, which often seems a mystery:
Christ died, faithful to the end;
Christ was raised, your righteousness come true;
Christ will return, our hope and peace.

In your heart, Blessing God, you wrote the vision of a community which would live out your kingdom here on

earth, pouring out your Spirit of life and grace upon the gifts of the Bread and Cup, and on your people gathered for your Feast.

As we are fed by your Word become life, give us understanding so we might hear those who are crying out for hope; as we are nourished by your Spirit of peace, may we go to all who live surrounded by oppression, bringing justice to every place where it has never prevailed.

And when we are gathered in that vision of life forever which is written in your heart, we will join our sisters and brothers from every time and place, forever praising you, God in Community, Holy in One. Amen.
Blessed are you, God of all creation, you are the bread of life.

Blessed are you, God of all creation, you are the cup of blessing.

SHARING THE ELEMENTS

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:**

For the healing you have given us in the brokenness of bread and the pouring out of cup, we thank you. For the community that you have restored in us through the sharing of life, we thank you. For the courage and strength that you have promised to us, even as we have honored the ones of courage in our own past, we thank you. Send us forth from this place in love, freeing us to

work out justice with gentleness and power known in the presence of your Spirit. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 75 “Lord, Make Me More Holy”**

***SENDING:**

One: God gives us the vision,

Many: so let us go to see others as our sisters and brothers.

One: Jesus gives us the eyes,

Many: so let us look in all the unexpected places to welcome all into our lives.

One: The Spirit calls us to watch,

Many: so let us bear witness to the justice and hope coming into our shattered world.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE:

“Let There Be Peace on Earth”

THE BELL IS RUNG:

POSTLUDE: “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” Welsh hymn tune, arranged by Cindy Berry