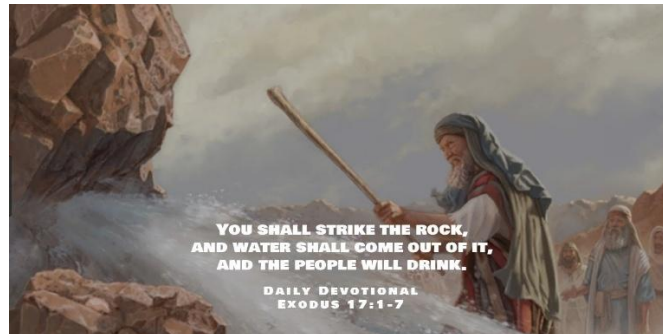


SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2026
EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



EXODUS 17:1-7A "THE PEOPLE MAY DRINK"

St. John United Church of Christ

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

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Organist/Pianist – Lisa Cleveland

Liturgy –

Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal - CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

Respond with words in bold print.

Bible translation – CEB Common English Bible

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

THE BELL IS RUNG:

PRELUDE: "The Love of Jesus Medley" by William Bradbury, arr. by Mark Hayes

PENNIES FOR MISSION: Deaconess Parish Nursing Ministries

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP (inspired by Psalm 25)**

One: To you, O God, we lift up our souls. We trust you!

Many: Make your ways known to us. Teach us your truths.

One: To you, O God, we lift up our souls. We follow you!

Many: Lead us in your ways. Your path liberates and saves.

One: To you, O God, we lift up our souls. We worship you!

Many: Guide us in humility and goodness. Praise the Holy One!

***INVOCATION:**

Living Water, we delight in your presence. You sustain us in dry moments and seasons. Quench our thirst for word and revelation. Let your Spirit flow among us. Send a river of anointing, power, and encouragement in this assembly.

We come to worship you and declare that you are with us...and we are with you. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 460 "Be Not Displayed"**

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

Holy Presence, you demonstrate the way of love and community, yet so often we turn immediately to quarrels and complaints against one another and against you rather than helpful ways of communicating and confronting conflict. Teach us to be loving even as we struggle. Stir up compassion and accountability in our interactions. Remind us that you are with us even through tests, trials, and disappointments. Transform us with trust and care to be faithful and to seek you in prayer when we feel driven to quarrel and complaint. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

The Holy One meets us with compassion and care even when we do not embody our best or strive for the goodness of God. Let us follow in the path of trust and faithful remembering of what God has done for us and how God has empowered us for transformation and new life.

***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 LESSONS

OLD TESTAMENT: Exodus 17:1-7

Water from a rock

17 The whole Israelite community broke camp and set out from the Sin desert to continue their journey, as the Lord commanded. They set up their camp at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² The people argued with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why are you arguing with me? Why are you testing the Lord?"

³ But the people were very thirsty for water there, and they complained to Moses, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?”

⁴ So Moses cried out to the Lord, “What should I do with this people? They are getting ready to stone me.”

⁵ The Lord said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of Israel’s elders with you. Take in your hand the shepherd’s rod that you used to strike the Nile River, and go. ⁶ I’ll be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Hit the rock. Water will come out of it, and the people will be able to drink.” Moses did so while Israel’s elders watched. ⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites argued with and tested the Lord, asking, “Is the Lord really with us or not?”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16 Page 669 - 670

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON: Acts 3:1-19

Healing of a crippled man

³ Peter and John were going up to the temple at three o’clock in the afternoon, the established prayer time. ² Meanwhile, a man crippled since birth was being carried in. Every day, people would place him at the temple gate known as the Beautiful Gate so he could ask for money from those entering the temple. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he began to ask them for a gift. ⁴ Peter and John stared at him. Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵ So the man gazed at them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ Peter said, “I don’t have any money, but I will give you what I do have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, rise up and walk!” ⁷ Then he grasped the man’s right hand and raised him up. At once his feet and ankles became strong. ⁸ Jumping up, he began to walk around. He entered the temple with them, walking, leaping, and praising God. ⁹ All the people saw him walking and praising God. ¹⁰ They recognized him as the same one who used to sit at the temple’s Beautiful Gate asking for money. They were filled with amazement and surprise at what had happened to him.

¹¹ While the healed man clung to Peter and John, all the people rushed toward them at Solomon’s Porch, completely amazed. ¹² Seeing this, Peter addressed the people: “You Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why are you staring at us as if we made him walk by our own power or piety? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of our ancestors—has glorified his servant Jesus. This is the one you handed over and denied in Pilate’s presence, even though he had already decided to release him. ¹⁴ You rejected the holy and righteous one, and asked that a murderer be released to you instead. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, the very one whom God raised from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ His name itself has made this man strong. That is, because of faith in Jesus’

name, God has strengthened this man whom you see and know. The faith that comes through Jesus gave him complete health right before your eyes.

¹⁷ “Brothers and sisters, I know you acted in ignorance. So did your rulers. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he foretold through all the prophets: that his Christ would suffer.

¹⁹ Change your hearts and lives! Turn back to God so that your sins may be wiped away.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 21:23-32**

Jesus’ authority questioned

²³ When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and elders of the people came to him as he was teaching. They asked, “What kind of authority do you have for doing these things? Who gave you this authority?”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I have a question for you. If you tell me the answer, I’ll tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things. ²⁵ Where did John get his authority to baptize? Did he get it from heaven or from humans?”

They argued among themselves, “If we say ‘from heaven,’ he’ll say to us, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶ But we can’t say ‘from humans’ because we’re afraid of the crowd, since everyone thinks John was a prophet.” ²⁷ Then they replied, “We don’t know.” Jesus also said to them, “Neither will I tell you what kind of authority I have to do these things.

Parable of two sons

²⁸ “What do you think? A man had two sons. Now he came to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ ²⁹ “‘No, I don’t want to,’ he replied. But later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ “The father said the same thing to the other son, who replied, ‘Yes, sir.’ But he didn’t go. ³¹ “Which one of these two did his father’s will?” They said, “The first one.” Jesus said to them, “I assure you that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering God’s kingdom ahead of you. ³² For John came to you on the righteous road, and you didn’t believe him. But tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. Yet even after you saw this, you didn’t change your hearts and lives and you didn’t believe him.

MESSAGE:

If you have ever watched, what I call “cop shows”, you might have noticed that when they take a suspect into the examining room, the officers never start with the main question they have, “did you commit the murder?” The officers know that they would never get the true answer if they just blurted that out. It seems to me that they usually start with “where were you last night at 9 pm?” “Were you alone or did anyone see you?” “Why were you there?” “Why were you so worried when we came to find you?”

The officers could not ask the big question yet, because they didn't want to say the words too soon. If the suspect wasn't the murderer, but knew something about it, this might give the game away. If he was the murderer, a direct question would certainly make him say "NO" and then everything else would be useless. They needed to come with a barrage of other questions to get him talking, to get him either telling the truth or twisting around in so many lies that they'd catch him out sooner or later. Then the truth would come out.

The question the chief priests and the elders of the people really wanted to ask Jesus was, "So do you think you're the Messiah?" All the other questions they ask him, in this chapter of Matthew and the next one, and all Jesus' answers are whirling around this central issue. Why?

The answer is this; it was the Messiah who would have authority over the Temple. Let's face it, Jesus has already walked into the Temple like he owned the place. Here he was, a country boy from Galilee, coming to the big, smart capital city. He walked into its holiest shrine, which had been ruled for centuries by the chief priests. And for a moment, Jesus took it over. Who did he think he was?

The only person who might conceivably have greater authority in the Temple than the high priest was God's anointed king, the Messiah – if and when he showed up. Nobody knew when that would be. Here's an important thing that we should keep in mind. Other would-be messiahs had come and gone. Now here was Jesus behaving as though he had the right to do what only the Messiah could do. So naturally, they ask him: by what right are you doing all this? And who gave you the right?

What do you think? Are the Priests in their rights to ask questions of this man are should they be suspicious?

What if someone walked in right now and said, "move over, Pastor Rosemary, I'm taking over. I'm going to tell these people what they really want to here. How they can be successful and rich. Bible stuff doesn't matter."

That exact thing happened in several of our southern Illinois churches. All that person needed was a few people to agree with him. He would be in, and the people who had worshipped in that church for generations were told to leave. So, yes, questions should be asked.

So what does Jesus do? He gave them a question before he was willing to answer their question. "Where did John's baptism come from? Was it from heaven, or from this world?" The priests debated this among themselves. "If we say "from heaven", he will say, "so why didn't you believe him?" If we say "from this world", we'll have to watch out for the crowd, because they all believed John was a prophet."

So the Priests took the easy way out. They answered, “we don’t know.” (See how smart they were?) Jesus didn’t answer their question either. But that’s a good thing. Jesus did not want to admit that he was the Messiah just yet. He had more work to do before he would be arrested.

Then he told another parable. The Priests missed the point of the parable also. The first son, who rudely tells his father he doesn’t feel like working today, but then does after all, stands for the tax-collectors and prostitutes. Their daily life seemed to be saying “NO” to God; but when they heard John they changed their mind and their lifestyle - they repented. The second son, who politely tells his father he will indeed go to work, but then doesn’t, stands for the Temple hierarchy and other leaders. They look as though they’re doing God’s will, worshipping in the Temple and keeping up appearances, but they refused to believe in John’s message, not only about repentance but also about the Messiah who was standing unknown in their midst. Now the Messiah himself is here to call them to account. Not surprisingly, they don’t like it.

The first will be last and the last will be first. Those who turn their sinning ways around and repent will be first in line to God’s kingdom. What do you think?
Amen.

RESPONSIVE HYMN: 519 “Not My Brother, nor My Sister”

PASTORAL PRAYER:

THE 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:

May the gifts that we bring reflect the generosity of Creator’s abundance and goodness.

OFFERTORY: "Exaltation Medley" arr. by Teresa Wilhelmi

***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.**

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

God who provides, as we present our offerings before you, sanctify them for your glory and magnify them for your people. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 474 "I'm So Glad Jesus Lifted Me"**

***BENEDICTION:**

Go from this time of worship like streams of water,
Flowing from the abundance of the Living Water.
Saturate every encounter with the goodness and abundance of God
As a living witness that the people may drink.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571

O God of Love, O God of Peace
Make wars throughout the world to cease.
The wrath of human wrong restrain;
Give peace, O God, give peace again.

THE BELL IS RUNG:

POSTLUDE: "I Will Call Upon the Lord" words & music by Michael O'Shields, arr. by Mark Hayes

CONDOLENCES to the family and friends of Pattie French.

PRAYER LIST: Cindy Jablonski, Carol Bulva, Jim Warning, Kim Holmes, Nancy W., Becky Ballard, Russ Hartmann, Marilyn Paul, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Pam and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Jackie Canterbury, Wayne Huss, our Beloved Country.