

SCRIPTURE READINGS AND SERMON

Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

July 5, 2020

Psalm 145:1–14

1 I will extol you, my God and King,
and bless your name forever and ever.

2 Every day I will bless you
and praise your name forever and ever.

3 Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.

4 One generation shall commend your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts.

5 On the glorious splendor of your majesty,
and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.

6 They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds,
and I will declare your greatness.

7 They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

8 The Lord is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 The Lord is good to all,
and his mercy is over all that he has made.

10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord,
and all your saints shall bless you!

11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom
and tell of your power,

12 to make known to the children of man your²mighty deeds,
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.

[The Lord is faithful in all his words
and kind in all his works.]

14 The Lord upholds all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.

Old Testament Scripture Reading: Zechariah 9:9–12

The Coming King of Zion

9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

10 I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim
and the war horse from Jerusalem;
and the battle bow shall be cut off,
and he shall speak peace to the nations;
his rule shall be from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

11 As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

12 Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

EPISTLE: Romans 7:14–24

14 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. 15 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. 16 Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. 17 So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. 18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

21 So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. 22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

HOLY GOSPEL: Matthew 11:25–30

Come to Me, and I Will Give You Rest

25 At that time Jesus declared, **“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26**

yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. **27** All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. **28** Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Sermon 26 – Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

“Yoked to Belief”

Matthew 11:25-30

Dear friends,

Our Gospel lesson for this Sunday is a continuation of the Gospel lesson this past Sunday from Matthew. Jesus has sent out the twelve for fieldwork, He has reinforced His identity, and now He is alternating between condemning unbelief in cities that should have known better, as well as making beautiful promises. If putting those two things together seems odd, it kind of is, but it fits well with how Jesus is received. Many did believe Him and believe in Him, probably thousands if not more, and Jesus has one thing to say to them. Many others did not, they rejected Him, and Jesus has another harsher warning for that set. The words that He is about to speak are both condemnation and promise, and what I want you to see about this particular section is that they are linked. This helps explain what might be described as a bit of a dangling plot thread with that whole thing about his yoke being easy. What is it that makes being Jesus' child easy? That's the question I want to answer today.

“25 At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.” This is the first part, both promise and condemnation. Jesus praises the Father for whom the Father has chosen to reveal Him, that it is not the cream of the crop, it is not the rich and powerful, its the folks in the universities, laboratories, and such. Instead, it is us. The rest of society. Not the 1%, us. This was true of the disciples as well. You had some educated men in their ranks, but they were working educated men even for the time. Matthew himself was a tax collector, he had an education, but it was a vocational education for the rather tasteless vocation of taking money from people. That's about as far as it went for the disciples. The rest of them were fishermen, small business

owners, even a couple of political psychos. Simon the Zealot was one of the disciples, and the Zealots were a violent, rebellious political party that routinely employed dagger-wielding men to go out into crowded streets to stab Roman sympathizers. This is a motley bunch surrounding the Messiah of God.

It continues to be. We have every background here at Bethel, and even just accounting for the church work I personally have done it has covered all kinds of bases. On vicarage in Seattle, I had a church full of Microsoft employees, Nintendo programmers, lawyers, authors, and doctors. My parishes in Montana were almost exclusively barley farmers and their wives. That's the whole spectrum, just for one guy who hasn't even been doing this for a single decade. Throughout Christian history this has been. Christians have been kings, beggars, Jews, Gentiles, and everything in between.

Not just professional backgrounds or intelligence either, but morality. If your backstory has more than a few instances of things you regret, things that were genuinely wrong, like mine does you're not alone. We've got people here that have lived a variation of the Christian way their whole lives, moral, upright people. We've got people here that have late come to the faith, still learning to come to grips with it. Like I said, it's a motley crew, and that's just us. Expand this faith across the country, across the world, and it gets infinitely more complex, checkered, not so simple to put it mildly.

And Jesus praises this. That's what I love about it. He loves this. If that seems strange to you, remember that this is the same Jesus that tells us that the angels in heaven rejoice over every sinner saved. Jesus does this because of what He says here. The Father reveals the Son to mankind. God is the one who brings Jesus to us, and that means that for every Christian, regardless of who they are or what they've done, it is God's gift to them. Christians are so because God makes them who they are, it cannot be any other way, because our sin is too great.

“27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” That is the other reason why Jesus says these words. Our sin is indeed too great, it renders us helpless, and you see the results of it in this judgment He makes. God didn't reveal Jesus to the wise and understanding because God knew the wise and understanding would've thought they knew better. He chose the little children, you and I, of the world instead. Not because we know better, but because we know what we don't know. Because we know what we need, and what we need is something this world cannot provide. We need hope, peace, a reason to keep going, a purpose for our work and our exertions. We can't take credit for this, again, God is the one who makes it happen.

What all this reminds us is that what the world thinks is important: Money, achievements, intelligence, good looks, fame, and such, isn't what God considers. God considers the hearts, and on our own, He finds our hearts wanting. He knows our sinful hearts crave more, and He condemns this by offering what He offers: Jesus. That's it. He chooses the simple to shame the wise, the poor to shame the rich, the insignificant to shame the big names. He chooses it to remind us that He is the gatekeeper, He is the door to salvation, there is no other.

But this is a promise as well, and you can see this next. **“28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light .”** I have always had a skeptical eye on these verses, because they seem to contradict what Jesus Himself says about being a disciple. He says it gets tough sometimes, but then He says stuff like this, come to me, I'll give you rest, and so forth. Which one is right?

Well, the question I want you to ask is what these verses mean. What is the heavy burden that Jesus is talking about? Who are the heavy laden and those who labor? I don't think He's talking about this life specifically, and I think the reason for that is what He's just said. The burden, the yoke, Jesus addresses specifically is the yoke of how we come to God, how we are saved. Jesus makes that easy because no one knows the Son except the Father, and those to whom the Father chooses to reveal Him. The light yoke is the fact that we know we belong to Jesus, we know we are God's children, and that takes the burden off us to have to do that ourselves.

Now, if you're like me, and your Lutheranism is well-entrenched by this point, doubts about salvation are not something you frequently experience. We Lutherans kind of refuse to shut up about this, and that's good, we're all convinced just fine that we're saved. Let me put this frankly. I despise that light yoke that Jesus places on me. I want a different kind of lightness. I want the yoke of living in this world, this life, to be lighter. But Jesus doesn't promise that. He promises the light yoke of knowing we are Christian and remain Christian thanks to Him. Our sin makes us want a better life for ourselves, but Jesus tells us that we have such a life waiting for us and that this is the true peace that we should seek. It's hard lesson to learn, and when I learn it, I'll let you know how.

For now, though, let's seek to take on Jesus' priorities. Jesus has His eye on the prize, our eternal life, and we should too. This life is all too uneven and all too impermanent, it's real but it won't last. Jesus tells us to seek after that light yoke, to crave the release that He gives, the release from sin and its bonds

in this world of flesh. Disease is just one. Unrest another. We're all reminded, daily, how we haven't created paradise yet, all we've created is hell, but Jesus tells us that what He creates is good. What He calls good will never fall short. And that is us. Thanks be to God.

Amen.