

Worship Resources - [*Two Roads*](#)

Pentecost 21, Year B,

17th October, 2021

Hebrews 5:1-10 NRSV / Mark 10:35-45 NRSV

Prelude

Welcoming Announcements

Pass the Peace

Call to Worship (Responsive)

One: We come here today not because we are clever but because God welcomes the slow learners.

All: We come here not because we are wise, but because God loves us in spite of our folly.

One: We come knowing that the greatest persons will be found among those who humbly serve like Jesus did, and that the brightest ideas and the deepest truth will come from those who see themselves as little children in Christ's school.

All: O Lord, open up our mind and our hearts and enable our lives to declare your praise.

Invocation (resources)

Holy Dwelling Place, Your tent is wide enough to provide shelter for all who seek you, food for all who hunger, and healing for all who suffer. Meet us here today, and fill us with confidence in your presence, that we may risk sharing Jesus' cup and his baptism so the world may become the place of love and justice you desire for all.

Shelter us with your light, and clothe us with your heavenly garments.

Teach us how we may best serve ourselves and one another on this daring adventure.

Amen.

Opening Music (Lyric Video) [*Jesus Call Us Here to Meet Him.*](#)

Performed by Ruth and Joy Everingham,
written by Graham Maule and John L. Bell,
used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

Epistle Reading Hebrews 5:1-10 NRSV

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness;

and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people.

And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you";

as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."

In the days of his flesh, Jesus[a] offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.

Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;

and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him,

having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hymn (Lyric Video) [*There's a Spirit in the Air*](#)

written by Brian Wren,
performed and posted to YouTube by the Olive Tree Church,
LutonLockdown Choir,
used with permission and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

The word angel originally meant “messenger.” For God’s angels on this earth, **let us now pray.**

We thank you, loving God, that you do not leave us without helpers. thank for your special agents, those guardian angels—both human and heavenly—who never cease to care.

Wherever there are situations of confusion, where doubts proliferate and anxieties spawn, please send in your angels of light.

Wherever people are crippled by guilt, or deeply regret damage to others which they can never rectify, send in your angels of mercy.

Wherever there is arrogance and deceit, corruption and rapacious greed, send in your fiery angels of judgement.

Wherever ignorance reigns or superstition cripples individuals or communities, please send in your angels of truth.

Wherever persons or nations become obsessed with aggression, or resort to terrorism and warfare, send in your agents of peace and goodwill.

Wherever families are at loggerheads, or in the workplace folk feel alienated from one another, send in your angels of reconciliation.

Wherever people see their future as bleak or dangerous, and fall into the trap of inertia or despair, please send in your angels of hope.

Wherever the church becomes exclusive, or gets caught up in its own regulations, traditions, or inflexible dogma, send in your angels of reformation.

Wherever ministers lose their passion for the Gospel, or congregations become self-satisfied or apathetic, please send in your angels of rebuke.

Wherever there are people who are afflicted by disease or injured in accidents, struggle against mental ills or suffer from criminal violence, send in your angels of healing.

Wherever the dying endure fears or pain, and the bereaved either shed the hot tears of a fresh grief or endure the long-term loss of a partner or friend, send in your angels of comfort.

Loving God, Lord of all the messengers of grace on earth and in heaven, hear our prayers and enlist us, please God, within the ranks of your caring angels. Through Jesus Christ your only True Son, our Saviour and our inspiration. **Amen!**

Gospel Reading Mark 10:35-45 NRSV

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?"

And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory."

But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;

but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John.

So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant,

and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.

For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Message – Two Roads

The Road Not Taken by Robert Frost

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could. To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there. Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.*

That is one of my favorite poems from my favorite poet. When we have the same choice in our own lives, which do we take? Do we go with the one that is well-worn, the one that leads to a predictable destination, or do we take the risk of the one not as familiar, the one with more risk? Do we choose the high road with the potential of success and privilege, or the low road that often is portrayed as less appealing? It's a dilemma we all face in life. We like security, we don't like the unknown. When many people see a chance to "get ahead" or get a bigger piece of the pie, and the security they attribute to that position, however they define that, they often have a desire to "go for it."

In our Gospel story today, James and John are seeking that security. They've been strategizing how they can find their way onto that high road, and they ask Jesus for the highest places of honor in his kingdom to come. They're apparently not worried about the other ten, just how they can take care of themselves. And when the rest hear what is transpiring, they come clamoring, angry that those two are trying to outdo them. Now on the surface, we could brush this off as just another example of these often bumbling, clueless followers just not getting it. But it's helpful to give a little more thought to what is going on.

In the verses preceding today's reading, for the third and final time in Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to be arrested and put to death. As we've seen earlier in Mark, when Jesus talks like this, the disciples get uneasy and worried. So much so that Peter gets rebuked by Jesus for, in effect, telling him to shut up about that stuff. So after this third time, immediately James and John seek to ensure they have a place of privilege in what is coming up.

Our initial reaction is to see that request as ambitious and selfish, and it is both of those things, but what if it's also a reaction to fear? The fear of what is about to happen to their rabbi, their messiah, and the fear of what will happen to them if what Jesus just said really comes to pass. Will they suffer the same fate as Jesus because they follow him? They want

to make sure that whatever transpires, in the end they come out on top. The problem is, how they define “being on top.” They are a product of their status-based culture.

To be “on top” was to have the highest status and honor among your peers. It meant that you had the seat of privilege at any event you went to. People moved out of your way and clamored over each other to serve you. It was all about what other people thought of you. Did you live a pious life that resulted in riches and blessings being bestowed on you? Did you wear the finest clothes and live a life of honor in your well-appointed lavish residence? Were you a popular and sought after guest at dinners and other functions? These are the kinds of attributes that conveyed success and more importantly, security. If you fit into this mold, you didn't have to worry about your safety in any way. If you were with the “in” crowd, the government liked you. You didn't worry about going hungry, or losing your property. These disciples saw being Jesus' favored followers as a path to all those things that would eliminate the need to be afraid. And these weren't bad men. They were devoted followers of Jesus. They wanted to embrace the good news he shared.

John Calvin wrote that this narrative contains a “bright mirror of human vanity,” because it shows that proper and holy zeal is often accompanied by ambition, or some other vice of the flesh, so that those who follow Christ end up having a different object in view from what they ought to have. These disciples let their fear get the best of them until their focus shifted from caring for others, to worrying only about themselves, even at the expense of their fellow disciples. They just can't get their heads out of “this world” thinking, even when it comes to who Jesus really is. With all this “kin-dom” talk, they are translating Jesus into the worldly messiah they've all been waiting for: a man of power, who will rule with his own elite at his side, neatly fitting into the status and privilege patterns that are so much an ingrained part of the world around them. From that perspective, they are the bumbling disciples that just don't get it.

Jesus tells them that they don't understand what they are really seeking, that they don't really understand what it means to share in his baptism, and drink from his cup. His baptism and his cup lead to salvation for sure, but it is obtained through pain and crucifixion. The ironic part is they still persist saying they will share in those, and historical evidence does suggest that they indeed ended up being martyred for their faith. Jesus yet again tries to set them straight on what the kin-dom is and isn't. It isn't like the world they know. He points out that those whom they seek to emulate, those with power and prestige, are tyrants over them. Their self-interest only benefits themselves, to the detriment of others. And the disciples are those others, those who suffer and struggle to eke out a living while those in power benefit from their suffering. His kin-dom is the opposite of what they seek from the world's perspective. It's what you do for others before yourself that matters. You gain status not by being the guest of honor, but by being the servant of all. Humility, not pride, is the value of importance. It's a group effort instead of a me effort. But the clear message is that

it's not about our individual success. It's about how we work to ensure others are lifted up with us.

So what about us? What does success mean to us as individuals, as a culture, as a church? Has that much really changed in 2000 years? Who has the status and prestige in our culture? I would wager that many of us have thought of how nice it would be to win one of those big lotteries, like the Powerball or Mega-Millions. I'm sure our initial thought would be all the things we could buy with that money: a nice house, reliable car, have a nice nest egg, take good trips and not have to worry about how we'll get by. Though if we're really honest, those thoughts often lead to fantasies of really nice houses, expensive cars, and a huge nest egg. I'm sure everyone in here would be generous as well, but when we think of what success and prestige mean, our minds still seem stuck in the same mindset as James and John. Those individuals we want to emulate, and who often become those in leadership, are those who have acquired wealth and power, who are able to sit in today's seats of honor at the sporting and other premier events of our culture. Like James and John, we see those people as being secure, and not having to be afraid or worry. Likewise in our churches, isn't it our nature to be jealous of the booming church down the street, the one with hundreds of members who have the nice building and healthy budget. They don't have to worry about paying the bills or making ends meet. And then there's our culture. What do we value there? Do we like to be second rate or do we like to see ourselves as top of the heap? Do we want other countries to always follow our lead, to emulate everything about our culture? Do we like our leaders to be calm, caring servants whose primary concern is the welfare of all peoples or do we like to see tough guys who put our particular interests first?

We have fears and insecurities much like John and James. It's still a scary world out there. It gets more and more expensive to live and one has to work harder and harder to keep one's job. There's violence in the world to worry about too. We want to have our own sense of security. That's a perfectly natural human instinct. But how we get that security is the key point that Jesus is making. We won't get it by seeking prestige and status in whatever arena of our lives we feel insecure. It isn't through the power structures of this world that we will find that stability. This world's system is based on winners and losers. For every winner, there are often many losers. Our focus is to serve the least of these, those for whom the system fails to lift up. Many of the fears we have, result from those who are excluded taking desperate measures to try to change the balance of things. When we take the initiative, when we serve others, we mitigate that imbalance.

Charles Swindoll uses the illustration that being a servant comes down to basin theology. "Remember what Pilate did when he had the chance to acquit Jesus? He called for a basin and washed his hands of the whole thing. But Jesus, the night before His death, called for a basin and proceeded to wash the feet of the disciples. It all comes down to basin theology: Which one will you use?" We, like the disciples, have a choice. We can think about "me", or

we can think about “we.” We can take the road well-worn to bigger and better things for ourselves, or the road less traveled that winds longer but leads to a better life for all. May we choose wisely. Amen.

A Call to Serve

Jesus came not to be served but to serve. Let us follow this example and share our gifts so that we may also experience the joys and challenges of serving. As we approach the coming week, let’s think about how we can be of service to others in the coming week as we listen to this interlude by Annie.

A Time for Reflection

Annie Center

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Parent God, may this offering assist us in continuing Christ’s work in the world to heal the grief, transgressions, and illnesses that oppress and harm your creation. Amen.

HYMN (Video)

**[Will You Let Me Be Your Servant](#) (*The Servant Song*),
performed by Mutual Kumquat, used with permission**

Commissioning/Benediction

Our lives are filled with struggles and suffering—
none of us are immune.

The key to full life in Christ is not to rise above it,
but to struggle together and help one another along the way,
knowing that God is with us in every moment.

This is service.

If we seek to serve and lift one another up,
committing to struggle together,
together we will witness Christ’s glory.

So be it!

Postlude