

## Worship Resources - *“Imperfect Foods”*

8<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany, Year C,

27<sup>th</sup> February, 2021

Isaiah 55:10-13 NIV / Luke 6:39-49 NRSV

### Prelude

Gospel Opening

[We're Marching to Zion](#)

14

performed and posted to YouTube by Plantation SDA Church,  
led by Ahkeem Darden, Praise Leader

### Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn – *Holy Spirit, Come With Power* 26

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: Bless one another, love one another, serve one another;

**All: For by doing so, we bless, love, and serve Christ.**

One: Forgive one another, seek peace, do justice;

**All: For by doing so, we follow the way of Christ.**

One: Live into hope, keep to faith, stay close to the truth;

**All: For by doing so, we know Jesus as Lord.**

One: Come, enter this time of worship, coming before Christ our Lord;

**All: Who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.**

### Invocation

O God, you are beyond words and description, your love is beyond knowledge and explanation. Make our hearts ready to receive you. Change us, we pray, that our lives may reflect the glory of your transfiguration. We rejoice in the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

### First Testament Reading - Isaiah 55:10-13 NIV

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever."

**Hymn**

***There's a Wideness in God's Mercy***

**145**

## **A Time of Prayer**

### **Joys and Concerns**

#### **Pastoral Prayer** (Resources)

It is a strange time of year, O God. We linger between the seasons of Epiphany and Lent. We are between the joy of your appearing and the horror of your undoing at the hands of those who would not or could not embrace your way of life.

Perhaps we – like Peter, James, and John – wait for your appearing in dazzling light and unmistakable clarity: We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the way through the mix and mess of this life.

We pray for the people of the world whose names we will never know, whose faces flash across the TV screen in anonymity born of numbers; those who bear the weight of earth's pain, particularly those facing the uncertainty of war in Ukraine.

We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the truth – the truth that love is stronger than hate; peace is possible; and life can emerge even in the midst of devastation. We pray for that truth to be known:

We are in need of a glimpse of Jesus who is the life; inviting us to follow in his footsteps as he trod the way of love and justice, inviting us to follow him in prayer as he lived out his faith and made You known.

We give thanks for the good news that unfolds in the world as people dream your dreams, follow your nudging, and seek you in the faces they meet each day. Perhaps, O God, it is the only Transfiguration we really need. For all those who are quiet witness to your love and way of life, we give thanks, O God.

You call us to love those whom you would love, and give us the words to say. You call us to bring wholeness to lives that are broken, and give us the words to say.

You call us to bring comfort to those who are grieving, and give us the words to say.  
You call us to bring good news to those who are seeking, and give us the words to say.  
Your word, living water in desert sands.  
Your word, blossoming in parched earth.  
Your word, bearing fruit wherever it is sown.

Draw us to the rhythm of Lent as it unfolds in our midst; a sacred invitation to explore the corners of our soul. Open us to your light that we might see ourselves clearly, with all our fears and faults and faith, with all our desires and dreams and duties. Help us to see our journey as a place of your appearing – that like Peter, James, and John we may come down from the mountain and set one foot in front of the other in your name and for your sake. **Amen.**

## **Gospel Reading      Luke 6: 39-49 NRSV**

He also told them a parable: “Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?

A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher.

Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?

Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Friend, let me take out the speck in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit;

for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.

The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks.

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you?

I will show you what someone is like who comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them.

That one is like a man building a house, who dug deeply and laid the foundation on rock; when a flood arose, the river burst against that house but could not shake it, because it had been well built.

But the one who hears and does not act is like a man who built a house on the

ground without a foundation. When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.

## **Message - *“Imperfect Foods”***

So when we think of really good fruit, what images come to mind? Think of an apple. What kind of image do you think of as a really good looking apple, or a banana? What kind of banana do you imagine as good looking? For most of us, I would guess it's the ones that are clean, bright and shiny, the ones without bruises or spots, the ones without blemish. After all, isn't that kind of what we're taught, either by our parents or our culture. When we see commercials on television, is the food they present to us discolored or blemished, or is it pristine? In fact, much of what we see in advertisements isn't even food at all. It's substances meant to be the ideal of what we think of as perfect food. Glue or paint used instead of milk in cereal commercials because milk isn't white enough to be milk. Apples and pears at the grocery store with a coating of paraffin to make them as shiny as we think they should be to be appealing. Bananas that are kept hermetically sealed in refrigeration until the moment they are put on the shelf, so they don't have ripe spots, yet they go from green to brown in days.

Certainly there appears to be a gap between what our ideal is and what occurs in reality. Yet when we are shopping for our food, we constantly seek that perfect ideal. We'll pick through the fruit seeking that perfect apple, that perfect plum or banana. Yet how often do we find that perfection? Even though we may find something that looks unblemished on the outside, we get it home and lo and behold, under the skin or rind, those bruises and imperfections show themselves. Clearly we often have an unrealistic idea of perfection in our food. But it is just limited to our food, or could the same be argued of our opinions of each other as well? Do we have realistic expectations of each other and all our flaws, or are we looking for those without blemish?

Jesus tells us in our gospel lesson today that we are to not point out the speck in our neighbor's eye without taking the log out of our own. Often we have interpreted this as not to judge others before judging ourselves, which is certainly supported in Christ's words in Matthew 7, “to judge not lest ye be judged also.” And certainly that is part of it, but I think it's important not to separate this from the preceding verses. Jesus starts this section by asking, “Can a blind person guide a blind person? Will not both fall into a pit?” Jesus is asking us to take a serious look at ourselves, not just our faults, but our strengths as well. As disciples of the living Christ, we are to be teachers and examples to others, as he says in verse 40, “a disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully qualified will be like the teacher.” So we are called to be leaders, teachers, and examples for others, yet not to go into that endeavor blind, but with open eyes.

What does that look like? Well, it starts with getting rid of those blemishes we find in ourselves, those logs in our own eyes. What is it that distracts us from having our focus on God and Christ? We often look at this scripture as a criticism of our own personal morality, that we need to get rid of our own sin before working with others, but I would argue it's more about getting rid of those obstacles in your life that pull you away from God and godly behavior. After all, if we wait until we rid ourselves of sin and lead a perfect moral life, we'll never be rid of what blocks our vision.

Henry David Thoreau saw this irony of the blind leading the blind in how we act and live and said of the New Testament that people "favor it outwardly...defend it with bigotry...and (yet) I know of no book that has so few readers." The truth is that reading texts like this can cause us discomfort. It's easy for us to hear this text and think that it is meant for others not us. We don't judge others, it must be for somebody else. We admit we are sinners so, boom, our work here is done. We know we sin and that shouldn't judge so case closed. Not so quick. Jesus is talking about both "them" and "us."

Jesus says to all of his followers, then and now, three things. First, it is hard to lead if you have no vision for where you are going. Second, you cannot teach unless you have already learned. Third, you are what you do, no matter what you believe. Jesus thinking that the blind leading the blind is a recipe for disaster makes sense. Jesus understood that it is impossible for us to teach and lead if we ourselves lack vision, if we still have the plank in our own eye. Sadly, too often we pick our leaders in the church because they are available and willing, not necessarily for their vision and ability.

Jesus also knew that teaching is hard work, Little wonder he admonishes his followers not to try until they have learned their own lessons. He doesn't seem familiar with the expression that "those who cannot do, teach." What he was aware of was that most groups tend to look like their leaders and, more importantly, act like their leaders. In other words, before anyone attempts to teach or lead another, some self-evaluation is in order.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks tells the story of how philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein once said that his aim in philosophy was to show the fly how to get out of the bottle. When a fly becomes trapped in a bottle, it searches for a way out but repeatedly bangs its head against the sides until it dies of exhaustion. Had the fly the ability to reason, to learn, it could save itself fear, despair, and death by reasoning that if there was a way in, there is a way out. The fly cannot reason that it should look up. To learn, to have insight, is to see familiar things from an unfamiliar perspective. It is difficult for any of us to see ourselves in any other way than from our own perspectives. If we remove that log, however, we may be surprised with what we learn and therefore can teach.

Finally, Jesus uses two metaphors to teach one lesson. Bad trees will not bear good fruit and bad foundations are not good support. In other words, because we are intended to be a new creation, transformed by grace, what we become in the process matters.

What we do, what we practice. Living a Christian life is by definition a life of learning, of acting. It's a life of discernment, of seeking and following vision and call. As most of you know, I have been very involved at the district level for a few years now, serving as part of the voluntary leadership. A big part of our discussion there has not only been a new way of thinking about God, but also trying to envision a new way of thinking about not only our district community, but also how we as individual churches see ourselves. When we look around, do we like what we see?

I've heard from many inside and outside of our congregation about dwindling participation on Sunday morning. The question is, what do you see us becoming, what vision do you have for us? Do you only want to see the perfect unblemished fruit, that full sanctuary of decades in the past? And if that fruit is unrealistic, do we give up the harvest and walk away or do we seek what fruit we can find in this season?

That's the choice we have and it's a choice all congregations are facing. Are we going to choose vitalization, revitalization, or hospice for ourselves? Do we have the initiative to seek what new things God has for us or do we want to simply do what we've always done and hope for a different result, or just give up on God at work among us and walk away?

What is it you are willing to do? Because Jesus is clear in our scripture this morning that activity and participation are required. As we journey together over the next month or so as we enter and travel through Lent together, let us all give thought to what we envision for this church, to what we are willing to contribute to move this church into a new phase of life, in time, talent, or treasure, or whether we want to simply move into hospice care. In the near future, we will be hosting an online Zoom retreat, where we hope to gather those who participate in person, or online, to discern where we are being led, and what God has in mind for us. I'm happy to lead us in whatever direction we determine, but it needs to be an effort supported by all and utilizing the talents of all. In the end, we are what we do. It's how our beliefs are manifested. I hope and pray we do what we are called to, as the body of Christ in this world. Amen.

## **A Call to Serve**

The needs of our world are too numerous to name. Shelter, food, clean air and water... Our gifts touch these needs, but the biggest gift we can give is to love the world so much that we give of ourselves. Nothing will transform need more than sacrificial love. So as you make a commitment to serving God today, don't let your giving be done simply in the offering plate. Start planning to go deeper with resources of love and compassion that go beyond dollars and cents. May God now bless our hopes and dreams for a better world.

## **A Time for Reflection - Musical Interlude**

### **The Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Bless these gifts and commitments, we pray.  
May they represent just the beginning of our journey  
to show forth your glory to the world. Amen.

### **Hymn – *You Shall Go Out With Joy*      427**

### **BENEDICTION**

Jesus stands and asks: “Who do you say I am?” We join millions who have gone before and say: “the Messiah”

Jesus stands in front of us and tells us the realities of discipleship We join millions who have gone before in the challenges of living as disciples; we go out into the world to live and serve.

Jesus stands before us, shining in glory, and will be with us to the end of the age. Thanks be to God. Amen.