

Worship Service “Just”

Pentecost 15, Year C, 18th September, 2022

1 Timothy 2:1-7 NIV / Luke 16:1-13 CEV

Prelude (Video) *How Shall I Sing To God*

written by Brian Arthur Wren, Lloyd Larson, played by Annie Center, CCLI SONG # 2940476, Words: Hope Publishing Company, Music: 1999 GlorySound (Admin. by Hal Leonard LLC) (Admin. by Tom Cat Music), used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

Opening Music (Video) *Red Letters* dc Talk

written by Chris Harris, Kevin Max Smith, Mark Heimermann, Michael Tait, Toby McKeenan, CCLI SONG # 2800327, 1998 Achtoper Songs (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing), Blind Thief Publishing (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing), Out of Twisted Roots Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing), Remaining portion is unaffiliated, posted to YouTube by dc Talk, used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace(video) *I Will Change Your Name*

written by D. J. Butler, played by Annie Center, CCLI SONG # 145139, 1987 Mercy / Vineyard Publishing (Admin. by Integrity Music), used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

Opening Music (Video) *God is Here Among Us* 16

(written by Gerhard Tersteegen, performed and posted to YouTube by Hillside Community Church)

Call to Worship [Responsive]

One: Though our hearts may be grieving, we come risking joy:

All: God is our balm.

One: Though we weep over woes of the day, we are here seeking hope:

All: God soothes our discomfort.

One: Though our lives are often difficult, we gather for strength:

All: God restores our souls and cares for us;

God calms our anguish and dries our tears.

Let us call on the Holy One, and rejoice in God,

ever our source of solace in our daily journey,

ever our comforter in times of trial

Amen.

Invocation [In Unison]

God of our hearts, you are our Physician in times of hurt; your balm heals our wounds. You hear our prayers, intercessions and supplications. Your presence is pleasing to us and we welcome you. Together in your sanctuary we rejoice in your embrace and offer you our boundless praise. Amen!

Epistle Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-7 NIV

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—

for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

This is good, and pleases God our Savior,

who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus,

who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Most Holy God, Most Mysterious God, we dare to approach you and to say in all candor that you have been a balm and you have been a bother. You have soothed and healed our troubled hearts; you have disrupted and upended our complacent lives. In all things, we give you praise for your wisdom and imagination. Surely you are working out peace beyond our understanding! Surely you are working out justice beyond our envisioning!

Until such a time when this world reflects a divine peace and a holy justice, we pray:
– for children who miss meals and for parents who tuck hungry kids into bed at night;
– for men and women who work 'round the clock but are told that their efforts are not enough; – for those who would wipe the woes of a nation onto the backs of persons who live in poverty; – we pray for leaders who count weapons and barter for power by waging war; – we pray for local and world leaders who seek out such power

in the pursuit of peace; – we pray for those who have the shrewdness to extend grace in unexpected ways.

We name aloud those places and experiences where our souls cry out for grace to come swiftly:

such as the legislative and judicial hallways in Washington, DC; – and for grace in those everyday places where our lives experience joy and pain so intimately: hospital rooms and schools; the bedside of the dying and the cribside of the newly-born; church meetings and Facebook groups and our own kitchen tables; may these all be places where your love is known.

Now by your faithfulness make us faithful, we pray. Call us to singular focus and trust in serving you. We ask for the sake of your will on earth; Amen.

Hymn (Lyric Video)

There is a Balm in Gilead

627

(African American spiritual, posted to YouTube by DailyHymns)

Gospel Lesson (Video)

Luke 16:1-13 CEV

(Luke 16:1-13, Serving God Or Wealth A weekly bible reading, from the lectionary, narrated by Douglas Brown. Text from CEV : the Contemporary English Version Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible, posted to YouTube by Douglas Brown)

Message - *Just*

We all know the story of Robin Hood. Whether it's from the multitude of movies, or reading the story, I'm sure we've all heard of Robin Hood and his merry band of thieves, who spend their time journeying through the Sherwood Forest, robbing from the rich and giving to the poor. Robin is the hero that sets things right by undoing the injustice of the evil usurper King John, and his notorious henchman, the Sheriff of Nottingham. We find ourselves cheering him on in his adventures and applaud his efforts to ensure people are treated justly. It's kind of interesting how we can celebrate the results of his well-intended work in this legendary story from a time long gone by, yet if we take a moment to think about what the story is really about, would we still find it so laudable?

In our modern context, this would essentially be someone who is armed and mugging and robbing people of wealth that they have legally earned. Yet those aren't the details we focus on. As a legend and moral tale, we're drawn into the do-good aspects of the story. After all, it's not all about Robin fighting the evil characters of the Sheriff and the King. Much of the story includes his efforts to seek justice for the poor peasants and serfs of his time. These were people who were stuck in the meager circumstances of an existence of constant struggle to make ends meet. Kept in place by their obligation to the local noble landowners, the amount owed to their landlord often amounted to most of what they

produced off of the land they worked, leaving them forever indebted to their overlord. Yet from our modern sensibilities, would we find Robin's actions so laudable. After all, he was, in effect, a serial mugger and robber, stealing the money and wealth from those who were better off, and giving it to others to whom it did not belong. While we may argue that is true justice, the reality of the matter is he'd be doing some serious time in today's world, wouldn't he? Even in the legend we are so familiar with, the local legal authority, the Sheriff, is constantly seeking to apprehend him to pay for his crimes.

His story is not that different from the manager in our story from Luke today. Like many parables, the surface meaning is often quite different than what we arrive at if we look a little deeper. And this particular parable is probably one of the most troubling and confusing ones in the canon at first read. After all, we have the manager of a wealthy landowner who we are told right off the bat that he's not managing his boss's resources well, wasting his money. Then when he hears he's about to be let go for his poor performance, he works out a fraudulent plan with his boss's debtors to reduce their debts, in order to put himself in better standing with them. And the landowner applauds him for his shrewd actions and Jesus goes on to pretty much imply that such fraudulent behavior is the standard we should follow, kind of. Clear as mud, isn't it?

But if we step back and take a look at the bigger picture, it might shed a little light into what we are to make of all of this. Like in our Robin Hood story, these debtors were likely local farmers and merchants who barely got by. The deck was stacked against them, and the norm would be they would find themselves hopelessly indebted to the wealthy landlords who took advantage of the situation to allow them to wrack up more and more debt. This often resulted in them being forced to sell or transfer their land or property to the landowner to try to resolve the debt. Which allowed the landowner to acquire even more wealth, and driving the peasant into deeper poverty. We're not told how the manager was wasting his boss's money but what if we were to suppose that it followed a similar line as his desperate attempt to further win the respect of the landowner's debtors. What if he was giving price breaks and cooking the books all along to make the business arrangement more equitable for those in debt to his master. That might change how we look at this whole story. Even without that supposition, even just looking at his wheeling and dealing at the end gives us something to consider and a new way of thinking about Jesus' conclusions on what is the right and appropriate behavior. If we view this from a lens of what is just with the bigger picture in mind, our conclusions may differ from our initial impressions.

We make the assumption that when Jesus talks about "wicked wealth" and "dishonest" behavior, he's referring to the manager's actions. But what if he's referring to the landowner instead? Someone who probably overcharges his clients in order to generate more debt that will likely lead to more wealth and property to him, at the expense of a decent life for those whom he deals with. From that perspective, we have more of a Robin Hood scenario to look at. With that viewpoint in mind, Jesus' closing statement about the evils of money make more sense. But we still have the question of what is just in this story? Is it OK to take matters into your own hands, like Robin Hood, like the manager in our parable today? Or is

that stealing?

The answer isn't so cut and dry. Maybe that's the point Jesus is ultimately making. We can't serve two masters and be faithful to both. Those that seek more and more wealth, which always comes at the expense of others in a world of finite resources, whether directly or indirectly, choose the master they will follow, which is not God. Yet are we to really resort to dishonest practices to rectify the injustice the accumulation of wealth leads to?

This story may seem like a remote example, but our world isn't so different. Not much has changed in the millenia since this parable was written down. We too have predatory business people who spend their time seeking more and more wealth. Our corporate models are all geared to maximize profit and maintain stock value at all costs. Our entire economic system is based on achieving the maximum profit with the least expense. Certainly the mechanisms are more complicated today, but the basic process and result are the same. Some have inherent advantages over others and benefit, while others have disadvantages built in.

What is just? Are we called to be Robin Hoods and directly rob from the rich to give to the poor to make society more equitable? We've heard a lot of this kind of talk in the political debate in the last several years. Words like "socialism" and "redistribution" become the buzz words for all that is wrong with some parties and candidates. But in reading what Jesus says about wealth, shouldn't capitalism and corporate greed be bad words as well?

What is just? In the grand scheme of things, trying to solve the problem seems like an impossible task. After all, this is how the world has largely worked for a very long time. Yet it doesn't have to be that way. Jesus reminds us that the kin-dom of God is drawing near, that we are to seek the kin-dom in the here and now.

One example that highlights how things can change is brought to our attention by author Philip Yancy. He points out that the Scandinavian countries were once the home of the murderous Vikings, known for their repeated looting and pillaging of many of the lands of Europe centuries. Yet as Christianity spread, over the centuries they began to change. Now they are places where they ensure the welfare of all their citizens, even welcoming many of the world's refugees and caring for them. One of our sisters in the Sunnyslope congregation likes to say "with God the impossible is possible."

With God, how do we make the unjust, just? How do we make ourselves into the merry band of God's people, who work at caring for the uncared for, making sure all have a fair shake? Unfortunately, I can't give you a magical answer to that question. But that's where this whole notion of being the body of Christ comes in. Individually we can only do so much, yet we can do so much more together, with the Spirit to guide us. As we go forward together, I hope and pray we can seek what part God has in store for us, and put our faith in the right master. Amen.

A Call to Serve

God's love is steadfast and abundant. We are blessed to give from hearts of love that others might experience abundance. May the gifts we bring be used to supply whatever balm is needed, wherever it is needed. May these resources be used to facilitate the wholeness of all.

A Time for Reflection - *As The Deer*

written by Greg Scheer, played by Annie Center, CCLI SONG # 1276155, 1993 Scheer, Greg, used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

God, as your church we reflect your hopes for humanity. We offer these gifts and ask you to guide us to shrewd and loving management of all we are given in order to further your work in our midst.

Hymn (Lyric Video)

For the Healing of Nations

367

written by Fred Kaan and Henry T. Smart, performed and posted to YouTube by Reveille UMC, Reveille, VA

BENEDICTION

As we leave here today, let us seek God's help to change. To change ourselves and to change our world. To know the need for it. To deal with the pain of it. To feel the joy of it. To undertake the journey without understanding the destination. To truly embrace the art of gentle revolution. Amen.

Postlude

Come unto Jesus

Music by Orson Pratt Huish; arr. by Tiffany Hobson, played by Annie Center