

Worship Service “*Inconceivable*”

Pentecost 22, Year C, 6th November, 2022

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17 NIV / Luke 20:27-38 CEV

Prelude

[Prelude in C Major by J.S.Bach](#)

played by Annie Center

Opening Music (Video)

[What A Friend We Have In Jesus](#)

the Mississippi Mass Choir, posted to YouTube by malacomg, www.malaco.com, [Merlin] The Malaco Music Group (on behalf of Malaco Records); LatinAutor, Sony Music Publishing, Public Domain Compositions, Adorando Brazil, AMRA, LatinAutorPerf, Polaris Hub AB, AMRA BR, BMG Rights Management (US), LLC, and 5 Music Rights Societies

Welcome Guests / Announcements

Pass the Peace

[Invocation by Alban Forster](#)

played by Annie Center

Opening Music (Video)

[What is This Place](#)

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by Huub Oosterhuis (trad. Dutch hymn), Traditional Dutch hymn, 1626. Text and music copyright 1967. Exclusive agent for English language countries: OCP , posted to YouTube by Chris Brunelle, written by Bernard Huijbers, David Smith, Huub Oosterhuis, CCLI SONG # 1456535, Ekklesia Music Publishing (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.), used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

Call to Worship [responsive]

One: The Holy One is here in this community of faith:

All: Great is our God and greatly to be praised!

One: Let us bless the Holy Name forever and ever

All: Great is our God and greatly to be praised!

One: Let us meditate on God’s wondrous works

All: Great is our God and greatly to be praised!

One: Let us bless and praise God’s name forever and ever

All: Great is our God and greatly to be praised!

Invocation

Holy One, you have promised to be with us, And long ago sent your Spirit to abide among us and guide us to a future of goodness and hope. We come seeking your truth, your justice, your kindness. O God, you are with us this morning. Let us feel your presence and welcome you into our lives. Come and fill these desires of our hearts. Amen.

Epistle Reading: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5, 13-17 NIV

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters,

not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come.

Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,

encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Holy One of days and nights, of sinners and saints, of right and left and everything between and beyond, We are grateful for all Your presence that abides in every corner of our living.

You lurk quietly in the loneliest places in our hearts, keeping watch. You grieve with us in our devastations, our losses, our fears. You journey with us in our celebrations, our defeats, and even in the monotony of our days. You delight in us, and love us.

May we live in that love and delight, knowing that as we sink into You we might become more like You, wanting life and grace for this world and all peoples and creatures that live upon it.

We pray for this world, for the places and precious people who are striving to recover from hurricanes and floods and raging fires.

We pray for peace among nations, and make us instruments of that peace.

We pray for our children and our youth that they may be surrounded by protection, and also be challenged to be all of who they have been created to be.

We give you thanks, for all of the saints in our lives, those who are living and those of blessed memory.

We pray this prayer for Love's sake, Amen.

Hymn (Lyric Video)

[Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)

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performed by the Glenn Elyn Chorale, posted to YouTube by Islington Baptist Church

Gospel Lesson: (Video)

[Luke 20:27-38 CEV](#)

Luke 20:27-38, Jesus Speaks Of The Resurrection 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 Society. Used by Permission. Pictures from commons.wikimedia.org

The Sadducees did not believe that people would rise to life after death. So some of them came to Jesus

and said: Teacher, Moses wrote that if a married man dies and has no children, his brother should marry the widow. Their first son would then be thought of as the son of the dead brother.

There were once seven brothers. The first one married, but died without having any children.

The second one married his brother's widow, and he also died without having any children.

The same thing happened to the third one. Finally, all seven brothers married that woman and died without having any children.

At last the woman died.

When God raises people from death, whose wife will this woman be? All seven brothers had

Jesus answered: The people in this world get married.

But in the future world no one who is worthy to rise from death will either marry or die. They will be like the angels and will be God's children, because they have been raised to life.

In the story about the burning bush, Moses clearly shows that people will live again. He said, "The Lord is the God worshiped by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

So the Lord isn't the God of the dead, but of the living. This means that everyone is alive as far as God is concerned.

Message - *Inconceivable*

What is real? How do you define reality? Is it what your senses can perceive? As human beings, we are largely limited by what we can see, smell, taste, hear, and feel with our body.

When we think of what is real, our minds tend to define reality by what we can witness with our physical senses. As higher functioning mammals, with incredibly complex brains and thought processes, we can also imagine realities that we've never personally encountered, but we still define those imaginary dimensions with the same criteria we perceive everything else: through things like color, texture, temperature, smell, taste and sound. Who hasn't been carried away by the vivid details of a good book, or gotten lost in the tales of a friend or family member describing far away places and cultures. Yet we still see all those things from our physical perspective. After all, it's the only frame of reference we have. Even in science fiction, the technology and science expands from what we already know to be the nature of our universe. Concepts without definition, without rules and boundaries, are often beyond our capacity to conceive. But what happens when we are confronted with situations and experiences that are beyond our mental capacity to make sense of?

I'm reminded of the movie *The Matrix*, where most of humanity lives in a computer generated reality that mimics the late 20th century. In order for the human beings plugged into the simulation to accept the program, there had to be imperfection and tragedy; the human mind would not accept a perfect, heavenly program without drama and imperfection. This inability to grasp any reality that differs from what the human senses can experience and define as normal reality is not unlike the mindset of the Sadducees in our gospel lesson this morning.

Their reality is defined by a corporeal human life lived in the material world around them. According to traditional Jewish theology, one lived a life in this world that we are all familiar with, then one died and slept in the grayness of Sheol for eternity. Just gray sleep, nothing else at the end of the tunnel. So Jewish tradition was all about living a vibrant, meaningful life while you were alive here on Earth, because there was nothing beyond that.

Much of the wisdom of the First Testament pointed to God blessing one who lived a faithful, just life in this world with success and tranquility here and now. If meaningful existence ended with death, then what incentive would there be to a faith that didn't deliver in the here and now? At surface value, the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Torah, do not promise anything after this life. The whole story of the garden of Eden, the Exodus, and the early kingdoms of Israel are all about life in the present, not the future. So this background explains why the Sadducees are skeptical about any suggestion of something more. This has

been the foundation of the faith all along. Yet in the century or so before Christ, other ideas, spurred by new scriptures being circulated like Daniel, begin to suggest that this life is not all there is, that there is a resurrection of people at some point down the road.

This concept begins to gain some ground in the debates and doctrines of the Pharisees, scribes, and Priests. Jesus, as the Incarnation, certainly teaches the same and knows the reality beyond. But the Sadducees can't get out of their human framework. They try to present Jesus with an example to debunk his argument. They ask him who will be the true husband of a childless woman widowed to seven brothers. In this world, that is a valid question.

Women needed to be linked to a man to be supported, to survive. That's why she would be passed, sadly like chattel, from one brother to the next until she could bear a male heir who would then inherit her to care for should her husband die before her. They can only imagine any potential afterlife as simply an extension of this world, with all the same problems and all the same solutions, kept working with the same rules that are meant to provide justice and compassion in this reality. Yet Jesus upends their whole argument by presenting a reality that just doesn't compute in their system.

The resurrection is different. There are no marriages, no need for marriage. In the ancient world, the primary purpose of marriage was procreation. One needed to have a male heir, to have honor and status, to be able to have a tangible legacy. In the resurrection that Christ presents, there is no death. In fact, Jesus indicates there never has been. He makes the words of the God of the burning bush in Exodus, present tense, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Not nameless dead ancestors in the gray of Sheol, but the living resurrected forefathers of Israel.

The quandary the Sadducees attempt to stump him with is no quandary at all. The Sadducees, however, cannot accept that the quandary simply disappears. But I would wager, if we are really honest with ourselves, we may suffer from a similar dilemma. Like the Sadducees, we cannot help but make meaning of life as we know it, from within the perspective of life as we experience it, from our own human reality. We value love, friendship, and happiness because we have experiences of these goods, and we know that they are good by virtue of our experience of them. Similarly, we cannot help but experience and engage God from within the horizons of our creaturely experience.

When we say God is love, for example, what we mean by love is inevitably conditioned by our human experience of love, tied to the ways we have received and have given love to others. And is there anything wrong with that? After all, that's what human beings do. We make sense of life with what we are given, through the human lens we know, in the physical universe we can conceive. After all, in Jesus Christ, God stands with us as a human being and empowers us to respond to God from our standpoint, as broken, messy, and complex as it is. The mistake however, is to insist that all that life can mean is contained within the horizon of our own experience. In this story and others in this chapter, Jesus explodes the human horizon. There is profoundly more to life than just the human experience of it, even

if that means we cannot wrap our heads around it.

Death is not an ultimate condition for us, and it does not permanently bind the experience of life and its meaning to just this earthly existence. It is not an easy walk for sure. As people of faith, we find ourselves existing in two worlds at once. Jesus highlights the reality that his life has created: there are now two ages, two eras and now two realms coexisting. There is the former age, the age of waiting for the Messiah. There is also now the new age, inaugurated by the Messiah, by Christ. In this new age, the reality of the resurrection will be revealed. This dual reality means both that God is living and active in this world now and also that God will bring the world to the fulfillment God intends for it. To live in faith is to live in two worlds simultaneously.

Christ reveals that God is with us, as Emmanuel. Christ reveals that in the end lies God's realm. So we are freed to live in the varied contingencies of our world with hope, with patience, and with courage. But like the Sadducees, we too are stuck in two worlds, the one we can perceive with our human senses, and the one that draws near, that is beyond our human perceptions. It is just as easy for us to get just as lost on the here and now, and lose sight of the potential of living a resurrection life.

Where is our focus? Do we focus on the sights and sounds, the pleasures and rewards of life on this Earth, or do we look at the long game, at the promise we all have of eternal hope? After all, we are still human. We still have the same sensory limits to what we can perceive of what is real. Yet we also have the knowledge that there is more to come, that this is not all there is.

Unfortunately, the mindset of the Sadducees did not fade away with them. We still have voices that would lead us into a blessing and reward mindset. That if we do the right thing, live the right way, we will be rewarded by God with a blessed, rich life in this world. And we may be blessed in this life, don't get me wrong. But when you have the eternity of resurrection to look forward to, it should change your understanding of what blessed really means. It ceases to be keeping up to the standards presented to us in this life. Material wealth and success in this world no longer have the same urgency.

Living a life with a different view of reality can free one to focus on the just, virtuous existence that God has prescribed since the beginning. A life of faith and compassion, seeking justice in all that we say and do, without worrying about all the perks possible by playing the game in this lifetime. Though the walk isn't any easier today than it was for the Sadducees in Jesus' audience. Our world is still based on that very real human experience. Our culture still values those creature comforts and sensual standards of success: the good, high paying job, the comfortable home, the stuff that makes life convenient and easy.

Like the Sadducees, do we find ourselves so stuck in the world of our own making, that we cannot fathom something different, a bigger picture of reality that is beyond what our senses can perceive? That is the picture Jesus paints for us in the lesson this morning. There is something bigger, there's always been something bigger. Our job is to live as if we belong to that world that is just beyond our reach, our understanding. Because it is the larger

reality that we truly belong to, the promise we all have in resurrection. This morning I pray that we seek to live into that promise, seeking that eternal reality from the false promise that a life rooted in the empty success and rewards of this temporary existence, seeking the reality of the resurrected life from the illusion of this world. Amen.

A Call to Serve

We are invited to offer financial resources, time, abilities, compassion, in a tangible expression of our hope for the future of the indoor and outdoor of this community of faith and for many others near and far away. Be generous, my friends, with your trust in the future.

A Time for Reflection [Londonderry Air,](#)

Traditional Irish Music played by Annie Center

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

O God our Father, who through our Lord Jesus Christ has loved us and through grace has given us eternal comfort and good hope, make our hearts strong for the work which lies ahead. Indeed, help us to “not be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed,” and to “stand firm and hold fast” as we cooperate with your Spirit in the holy task of bearing fruit. These offerings are part of your harvest. Help us to put them to good use. **Amen.**

Hymn (Video) [New Earth, Heavens New](#) 299

performed and posted to YouTube by Assembly Mennonite Church, Permission to stream the music in this service obtained from CCLI, Streaming License # 20261246.
"New Earth, Heavens New," Harris J. Loewen Words and Music
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BENEDICTION

As you go to love and serve the Lord, I offer you this old Celtic benediction.

God bless to you the earth beneath your feet, the path whereon you go, the place wherein you rest. Evermore and evermore, God bless the way you take. God bless to you the faith whereon you set your mind, the love whereon you set your heart, the hope whereon you set your life. Evermore and evermore, God bless to you your life. *AMEN!*

Postlude [Praise The Lord](#)

by W.A. Mozart, played by Annie Center