

Worship Service “ *Good Works* ”

Easter 5, Year A

7th May 2023

1 Peter 2:2-10 NRSV / John 14:1-14 NRSV

Prelude

Opening Music (Video) [*God Is Working*](#)

performed by the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir,

written by Carol Cymbala, CCLI SONG #3194661, 1999 Carol Joy Music (Admin. by ClearBox Rights, LLC), used and reported under Streaming CCLI license 20261246

Welcome/Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn *Christ is Our Cornerstone* 43

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: Out of a world of cut-throat competition, of winners-and-losers, and too many left behind we come together.

All: The world’s ways are not our ways. The world’s ways are not Christ’s ways.

One: Out of a world of hatred, violence, individualism, and life-taking power we gather as *Koinonia*, as God’s people.

All: God’s ways are inclusive, expansive, and life-giving for all peoples.

One: Come and worship the One whose love knows no limits! Swim and splash in the cleansing waters of divine community! Resurrect your spirits and souls in worship of the One!

All: Praise be to the Everlasting One!

Invocation

Ever-gracious, Way-Making God, we celebrate the gifts of your Spirit. You have not fed us a diet of shame or shrinking, but with the milk of your truth you have made us strong and faithful servants of Christ. You call us to take up the mantle of justice and to follow wherever faith leads us. You fill us with strength and hope, and you invite us to share in the cost and joys of discipleship. You promise us splendor and beauty in this life and in the world to come. Meet us here, we pray, that your word will be fulfilled in our hearing and that your Spirit will fill us with courage. **Amen.**

Epistle Reading 1 Peter 2:2-10 NRSV

Be like newborn babies who are thirsty for the pure spiritual milk that will help you grow and be saved.

You have already found out how good the Lord really is.

Come to Jesus Christ. He is the living stone that people have rejected, but which God has chosen and highly honored.

And now you are living stones that are being used to build a spiritual house. You are also a group of holy priests, and with the help of Jesus Christ you will offer sacrifices that please God.

It is just as God says in the Scriptures, "Look! I am placing in Zion a choice and precious cornerstone. No one who has faith in that one will be disappointed."

You are followers of the Lord, and that stone is precious to you. But it isn't precious to those who refuse to follow him. They are the builders who tossed aside the stone that turned out to be the most important one of all.

They disobeyed the message and stumbled and fell over that stone, because they were doomed.

But you are God's chosen and special people. You are a group of royal priests and a holy nation. God has brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Now you must tell all the wonderful things that he has done. The Scriptures say,

"Once you were nobody. Now you are God's people. At one time no one had pity on you. Now God has treated you with kindness.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

God of grace and light, Found within and out with the structures of humanity, You cannot be contained, But on occasion choose to dwell in hearts and homes. Glance lightly upon the hearts and homes dear to us, The people and places where we seek blessing.

Build up our homes: Where the happy may find peace; The sad may find comfort; The hungry may find food; The weary may find rest.

Build up the places where we work: Where the honest may find reward;

The dedicated may find delight; The imaginative may find new horizons.

Build up our community: Where the isolated may find friendship;
The marginalized may find welcome; The unloved may find acceptance.

Build up our nation, loving Lord, And bless those entrusted with the care of our society's fabric. May they use their skills, their calling, their hard graft To fashion communities of grace and understanding, Where generosity of heart and mind and soul. May be not only the gilding of our daily life But its very core.

Build up the Church, redeeming Lord, So that all Your children may find their place, Unique and special, Chosen and essential to the living edifice of grace, Where by Your grace Each one might know their value in Your economy, And their significance in Your eyes.

Help us all, this day, to be living stones, and not dead weights, Dreaming dreams, and living gloriously the joy and kindness. Of a faith that edifies everything that life should be. In the Name of our Saviour, our cornerstone, we pray. Amen

Hymn ***For the Healing of the Nations*** **367**

Gospel Reading **John 14:1-14 NRSV**

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

And you know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

Message – *Good Works*

Work is a central part of our lives. From the time we are young, we learn what work is. We are conditioned to pick up our toys at a young age, and as we grow, more and more tasks and responsibilities are added. Often we are assigned household chores, and we learn the importance of doing our part to keep the house running smoothly. As we get older, we discover that work is usually a necessary part of achieving our goals, those things we seek to get out of life. It puts a roof over our head, food on the table, and helps us to provide for our families, physically and developmentally. Often, we find that we define ourselves by the work we do. One of the most common conversation starters when meeting someone new is, “what do you do?”

We often define our social responsibility by our commitment to do the work that needs done. Likewise, to not do what is expected, is viewed negatively, casting one as “lazy” or a “bum.” There is no doubt that physical work plays a major role for us in how we define ourselves. But is it only the routine work of our day to day lives that plays a major role in our lives? What about our spiritual lives? We often don't think about work in relation to our faith journeys but there is plenty of work to be found there as well.

Throughout human history, spiritual practices have been a core part of faith and religion. Ritual and meditative observations have consistently been a central part of how we connect with the divine, however that was defined. One has only to think about the sacrificial practices of so many early cultures, the mind altering meditative practices, and the ceremonies that often formed the core of so many cultures throughout history. Generally these practices coincided side by side with the routine tasks of daily life, often becoming intertwined.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, one's faith practice determined which food you hunted or fished for, which crops you grew and how, and even the methods used to prepare that food. It determined which garments you wore, and even the method by which you ate. Many grew up blessing food at every meal, eating certain food for particular holidays, and including ritual decoration of our homes, and even our own attire for certain holidays and occasions. For those that grow up in a faith tradition, the routine work one learns growing

up is done concurrently with learning the work of faith: practicing the rituals, studying the scriptures, and becoming proficient in the tasks to become an active participant in the faith community. In the same manner that our secular work supports and maintains our household, our culture, and our society, our spiritual work maintains our families and spiritual communities.

Peter, in his epistle, addresses this concept of the importance of our spiritual work to our family of faith. Like a newborn being taught how to consume that which gives their body physical substance, we, as new believers, are taught as we grow how to find the spiritual milk that gives our soul substance. As in our physical journeys, we are taught which foods will make us spiritually strong and healthy, and which ones are not good for us, those that are not of God, that will weaken our souls and faith. Drawing from the communal family imagery of the Psalms, Exodus, and Isaiah, as we hone our skills, we support our place in a spiritual family, God's family. As we learn and grow strong, we become "living rocks," the foundation on which much more can be built up, as part of a growing project with Jesus as it's cornerstone.

Likewise, Jesus, in our gospel reading this morning, further clarifies the importance of this spiritual work. It is the way in which God is manifest, not only in our own individual lives, but in the lives of the greater community. As he informs his disciples that his work is taking him away from them, they are confused. They want to know where he is going, and how they can find their way to that place, how they can find the God that is in him. His answer is simple: work. God is seen in his work. The simple and sometimes miraculous actions he has been doing all along: feeding the hungry, healing and caring for the sick and troubled, treating the outcast as valued, and opposing those who oppress them. But in his early mortal journey, he is only one man. However, that is the wonder of our discipleship journeys. We learn how to do that work, and we likewise teach others to follow the same path, and the work multiplies, becomes greater. Just like adding more employees to a business, Jesus' disciples increase the capacity for God-reflecting work exponentially.

But therein also lies a crucial difference between our worldly work and our spiritual work. Generally, our worldly work is like completing a checklist. We organize that work in completing one task, and then moving on to the next. Our work as disciples is about the work for its own sake. Tasks are often ongoing and never come to completion in the space of our faith careers. Perhaps that's what Jesus was getting at two chapters earlier in John, when he tells the disciples that they will "always have the poor with them." There is always more work to be done. This is a task that we won't be checking off of our to do list. But that is the transition we make when we choose this spiritual walk. As Peter illustrates, we choose to accept this new way of working and continue down the path, or we reject it and find ourselves stumbling. It's a big change from the work that we are used to, and a big decision to make.

Our kin-dom work can't just be itemized and checked off. It's not something we can just take a break from and put off until tomorrow. It entails an entirely different way of being,

focused not on the end results but on the tasks themselves. Often that's what leads us to stumble, to fall off the path. We try to look at God's work through our human work lens. We set goals and milestones for our spiritual work, and then when we don't accomplish those goals, we are disappointed. We feel we've failed if we don't have more bodies in the pews on Sunday, if we don't pull in the offering we were planning for, if that visitor stops coming. We get discouraged because we are using the wrong measure to evaluate ourselves. It's about doing the work, not ticking off successful objectives. That doesn't mean we give up trying to reach more people. It means letting go of our own expectations of what that should result in. It doesn't mean we give up on outreach because only a few respond. Who knows what impact our work has that we may never be aware of. Because that is the clincher in all of this. It isn't ultimately our work, it's God's. We don't rely on ourselves, we rely on God's grace and guidance. Ironically, what can cause us our greatest frustration can also be what can give us our greatest joy.

What if we learned to truly enjoy the work for the work itself, and not think about benchmarks and accomplishments? What if we just put our best effort and initiative into our endeavors, and trust that God will provide the best results? Our lives would be more centered, less stressful. Such an attitude could inform all areas of our lives as well: our secular work, our relationships, our parenting. It's not that there isn't a goal. We always seek God's way, the kin-dom way that Jesus modeled in his earthly existence. He prepares the way for us, is the Way for us, we only need to walk down the path he has laid out.

This morning, let us think about our work. Is it "good work" that follows the example of Jesus? Or is it work that leads us to frustration and causes us to stumble. Is it our work based on our priorities, or God's work based on God's priorities? There is work that we are all called to. It's work we were created and gifted to do. It's always been there, waiting for us to do it. I hope and pray that we as individuals can find the good work we are being called to that makes us into the living stones on which the kin-dom is built, and as a community add to that project with Jesus as the cornerstone, and continue to seek others to join in God's mission in this world. Amen.

Call to Serve

We have tasted of the Lord's goodness and the sweetness is still on our lips. Now we permit ourselves to be living vessels of God's sweet, sweet Spirit, offering ourselves, our lives and our gifts to those who are most in need of Christ's healing mercy.

Let's give thought to how we can be living stones at work building God's kin-dom today, and what greater works we are being led to.

A Time for Reflection

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Generous God, here are our gifts of time;
here are our gifts of talents; here are our gifts of money;
building stones for Your Kingdom, awaiting shaping and placing
within Your loving purpose. **Amen.**

Hymn ***Christ is Alive! Let Christians Sing!*** **278**

Benediction

We know that the way, the truth, and the life is love, and that love has been made known to us in Christ Jesus. We are forgiven, loved, and restored. In Christ we find rest, we find hope, and we are not alone. We belong to Christ, and to one another. Live into Christ's ways of love and peace, and God will see you through. Amen.

Postlude