

Worship Service “ *Spiritual* ”

Easter 6, Year A

14th May 2023

1 Peter 3:13-22 NRSV / John 14:15-21 NRSV

Prelude

Opening Music (Video) [*Spirit Fall Down*](#)

performed by Luther Barnes and the Red Bud Choir,

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Welcoming/Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn *Holy Spirit, Come With Power* 26

Call to Worship

We worship the God who inhabits our world and indwells our lives. We need not look up to find God, we need only to look around: within ourselves, beyond ourselves, into the eyes of another. We need not listen for a distant thunder to find God, we need only listen to the music of life, the words of children, the questions of the curious, the rhythm of a heartbeat.

We worship the God who inhabits our world and who indwells our lives.

Invocation

God of all time and space,

you initiated the relationship of love and generosity with creation
at a time before and beyond all knowing.

Through the Word and the Spirit,
you continue in eternal love for all beings.

Fill us with a deep and abiding awareness of your presence,
your call, and your grace in our lives and in our world.

Shape us to into the people you have made us to be –
poured out in creative mercy
for the sake of Jesus Christ in all creation. Amen.

Epistle Reading

1 Peter 3:13-22

NRSV

Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good?

But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated,

but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you;

yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame.

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,

in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,

who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water.

And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Center us now, O God, on your presence in this place among your people, as we lift up our hearts desires, our soul's deep needs, our hungers, fears and failures.

As we have often failed to be obedient to your will in our lives as individual disciples and as church, we pray that you will forgive us and enliven us to be and to do the gospel of Christ.

Open us to your Spirit's urgings, and awaken us to live faithfully as your people in a changing, often hurting world.

We pray for those around us who need your care, and ask that you would make us your instruments of healing, peace and redemption. We pray especially for those we

have named to you this day, and others we lift to you in the silence of our hearts. Reveal your presence with them and with us, God of life, that as people of renewed faith and vitality, we may be empowered to serve your world, and so give glory to you; for we offer our prayers and our lives in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Hymn

God Sent His Son

345

Gospel Reading

John 14:15-21 NRSV

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.

This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.

In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Message – *Spiritual*

Living a “good” life these days can be challenging. In our complicated, modern world, it's often hard to discern what the right course of action should be. With so many voices competing for our attention on social media, television, email, and many other sources, we often find ourselves being led down one path or another by those who claim to represent the truth and are all too ready to illustrate why those who think differently are the ones to blame for whatever ill of society they are addressing. Pundits these days have become very skilled at manipulating our fears and values to win us to their viewpoint, regardless of what side of the aisle they're on. We can all too easily find ourselves vilifying others, placing blame, yet not doing anything about solving the problem at hand. Often we're left feeling “that there's nothing I can do about it, I'm just one person.” So we just keep going about the daily routine that is the norm. We don't make waves, we just go with the flow. We may complain about the problems around us with like-minded people, and criticize those we blame as the source, but most of the time, that's all the further it goes. Sound familiar? It's certainly nothing new in human history.

While the media sources are different, the same situations were not uncommon in first century Asia Minor where John's gospel and Peter's first letter were prevalent. That audience lived in one of the most prosperous parts of the Roman world, yet there was plenty of inequality and injustice present. Like now, you have the haves and the have-nots, those who were in, and those who were out, often being the ones who bore the brunt of the blame for all that was wrong in that world. So you had the choice of going with the flow and not making waves, or bucking the system and risk ending up on the outside, with the outcast.

A walk of faith is definitely not an easy path to follow. It can be all too easy to join the voices around you that want you to place blame, to listen to what conspiracy they are selling to get your support, or more likely, to get your inaction. Their attraction is the illusion that you are helping them expose some great evil. So you share that take on the latest "conspiracy," and sometimes argue incessantly against those who have joined the opposite side of the debate. Sometimes you discuss, more often you argue. It's hard not to get emotional about the serious problems at the root of these interactions. But are these interactions Spirit led? Are they on the path, or somewhere far afield? Some good questions to ask yourself are: do they lead me towards the teachings of Christ? Do they build the kin-dom? Do I sense the Spirit at work, or is something else motivating me? Our ancestors in the faith faced similar dilemmas. What does it mean to live faithfully and Spiritually?

Our scripture this morning from 1 Peter is all about where our heart leads us. It's about leading a life that matches our testimony to our faith. It's about keeping the renewed soul we receive at baptism and cleaning any blemishes that may try to soil us as we continue on life's journey. But it's not always an easy walk, is it? The world around us, the world we live our human lives in is full of temptations to distract us, to lead us away from our baptism, away from the commandments, or teachings of Christ, that we are to keep in our reading from John today. However, we may not realize all the ways we are being led away from those commandments.

What do you think of when you think of sin and temptation? Is it the Ten Commandments, Old Testament law kinda sin? Or does it encompass a little more than that? In Matthew 5, Jesus tells us he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them. Christ defines how all those laws affect how we are to relate to each other. And it's being in relationship with each other that the core of those teachings is found. How do our actions affect our relationships with others, not just our friends, but those we disagree with as well? Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 to love our enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. The second of the two most important commandments is to love your neighbor as yourself. Do you see everyone, even those you disagree with vehemently, as your neighbor? Is the path you're on seeking to truly redeem your adversary through love and compassionate prayer, or is it merely to make yourself feel better?

In our passage from 1 Peter, he talks about the potential persecution the early Christians would suffer for their testimony. And that testimony is not only sharing the Good News that has radically changed their lives, but living that life as a statement of that testimony. Living a good, honest ethical life wouldn't have led to persecution even in that time. Roman and Greek cultures had similar ethical ideals. But what set the early Christians apart was refusing to participate in the self-absorbed norms of those societies. They refused to sit idly by and let others starve while they lived comfortable lives. They cared for those who suffered from illness, taking whatever steps were necessary to provide for others during times of plagues and pandemics. The needs of the "other" were as important, if not more important, than the needs of the "self." In short, they stood for a just way of living, one that tried to live out the Sermon on the Mount, the teachings of the prophets like Isaiah, Hosea, and Micah, and looked to see their Savior's face in the "least of these." But the core principle to all of this was their personal testimony. That testimony was living the life they were called to without fear, boldly stating with their actions the Gospel that was their hope and motivation in life. But it was a life of action, not talk.

They sought to address the problems, not just debate them in the forum of the city. They were problem solvers. Like Jesus, they didn't point to scapegoats and place blame for the issues of society. They stepped in and did something about it. Yet, that was a pretty scary position to put oneself in, isn't it? To openly criticize many of the norms of those around you, to oppose the power structure of the culture in which you live? And what about us? How is our witness and testimony in our daily lives? Do those around us know we are Christians? As Peter indirectly asks, do we have a clean conscience? Part of the Good News is that we do not do this on our own. In our reading from John, Jesus tells us that we will have support. He sends "another advocate" from the Father to be with us. But that term "advocate" is not the best translation of the original Greek word "parakletos," or the English version, "Paraclete." While advocate is one synonym, it means so much more. Comforter, encourager, consoler, helper are all included in the definition of that word.

There's a story about a children's membership class that was learning the Apostles Creed. Each child had been assigned a sentence to repeat. The first one said, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth." The second child said, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son..." When he had completed his sentence, there was an embarrassing silence. Finally, one child piped up, "Teacher, the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit isn't here." While that is an amusing little example, it highlights a common problem in many people's faith walk. It often seems like the Spirit seems to get lost in the shuffle today. How much do we focus on the leading of the Spirit? I'm sure we all pray for guidance and intercession, but do we seek the Spirit's guidance in our daily lives? And what does that look like and are we open to it? Maybe we experience the Spirit when we find ourselves doing or saying something that is contrary to the worldly wisdom of the day. Or maybe it's that still small voice in the back of our mind that keeps nagging us about something.

However we experience the Spirit, it's important not to ignore it. Too often I fear we pray ourselves blue in the face while the leadings of the Spirit has had the answer in front of us all along. And it isn't always what we would choose, or what makes sense to us. Which is sadly why we often make different choices, only to find ourselves back at square one.

Several years ago, Gatorade had an ad with Michael Jordan where he was covered in orange drops of sweat. The image says clearly that Michael Jordan is so full of Gatorade that it is literally pouring out of him like sweat. That's an appropriate image of the Holy Spirit in us. If the Holy Spirit is living inside of you, there's going to be evidence. Whatever is inside of you is eventually going to come out of you. If you squeeze a grape, you're going to get grape juice. If you squeeze an apple, you're going to get apple juice. If you squeeze a prune, you're going to get prune juice. Whatever is on the inside is eventually going to come out. And if the Spirit is in us, it will come out in our lives through those same definitions as earlier: comfort and compassion, encouragement, consolation, and assistance. Take note that none of those words are negative. But it starts with our hearts. Is Christ in our heart? Is our life defined by love, even for those who epitomize all that we see as wrong and evil in the world?

It's a tough path but maybe that's what these scriptures are talking about. We won't make either side of the public discourse happy if we side with the just, yet show love and compassion to the unjust, even the most iconic representation of all that we see wrong today. But even more importantly, what are we doing to change it? Talk is cheap, and blame games solve nothing. Today we have very serious problems that affect a great many people. The question for us, is where can we find the Spirit at work, and how is the God's Spirit leading us? The compassionate choice that actively builds the kin-dom is where the Spirit is at work, not the choice that builds worldly kin-doms at the expense of others. This Spiritual life is the path we are called to, and our testimony of faith and promise to a world in such need of any beacon of hope. May we seek to radiate that Spirit of hope and love in all we say, and more importantly DO. Amen.

Call to Serve

Today we call upon you as Children of God to share in the love and work of Jesus. We, as the gathered Church, the Body of Christ, continue in our day to witness and work on behalf of our Lord, returning our gifts, tithes and offerings.

Let's give thought to how our actions can show the Spirit within us, and how we can work to be problem solvers and Kin-dom builders.

A Time for Reflection

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

May these gifts, O God, become action and intention, fulfilling Christ's commandment to love. Amen.

Hymn

Spirit of God! Descend

502

Benediction

You are not alone. When the ways of this world press down on you, Christ takes upon your yoke. When the fears in this world entrap you, faith opens the door. When despair sucks the air out of the room, the Spirit blows in. You are not forgotten. You are loved, and Your strength is renewed by the faith and love of others. You can do this. You will make it. You are not alone, for we are all with you, and Christ is with you. Amen.

Postlude