

Worship Service “ Out Loud ”

4th Sunday of Pentecost, Year A

25th June 2023

Romans 6:1b-11 NRSV / Matthew 10:24-39 NRSV

Prelude

Welcome/Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty* 37

Call to Worship (responsive)

One: In a world filled with violence and war,

All: **We gather together to celebrate the promise of peace.**

One: In a world filled with tyranny and oppression,

All: **we gather together to celebrate the promise of justice for all.**

One: In a world filled with hunger and greed,

All: **we gather together to celebrate the promise of plenty for all.**

One: Our hope is in the name of the Almighty God,

All: **the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of heaven and earth.**

Invocation

Loving God, you call us to turn away from our own selfish interests, to take up our cross, and to follow you. To find our lives, may we live them in service of your mission.

As we come before you this morning, give us open hearts and open hands. Make us eager to hear your voice and seek your guidance.

Open our minds to your ever-present spirit that is always moving within and around us. Open our spirits to your nudging and open our lives to your love.

Epistle Reading **Romans 6:1b-11 NRSV**

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?

By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin.

For whoever has died is freed from sin.

But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him.

The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

O God, you possess all beginnings and all endings. In the morning you are the cradle of the world and in the evening you are the world's comforter. You are the morning dew kissing the buds of the flowers and the evening mist rising through the falling leaves. You are the early sun announcing the dawning of a new day and the twilight whispering the secrets of another.

You possess all beginnings and endings, all failings and risings, all living and dying. All of your people, all of your creation swells with the rhythms of life and death and rebirth. These rhythms compel us to sing, to laugh, to dance, to dream. We sing of sorrows borne despite anguish and of joys known despite fear. We laugh at mistakes made in our weakness and at changes begun in our strength. We dance to the harmonies of the universe and to the melodies within our own breasts. And we dream of unknown worlds on the strength of the world we know.

We stand as a people of faith, convinced not by the persuasion of our minds but by the experience of our lives. We are convinced that all is as you say it is—that you do number every hair on every head and see our every step.

We believe, O God. But when faith ebbs, we feel the pain of the world, and it spatters into the still waters of our lives. Infants die without drawing a breath. Wheat fields burn while standing ripe for the harvest. Old friends suffer diseases whose cures are years away. Natural disasters rob rip homes and livelihoods away.

Innocent citizens are caught in the crossfire between governments.

Workers lose the jobs they have held for years, while the unemployed have been turned away so many times they have traded hope for tears. And the children — abused because they wear the wrong color skin, speak the wrong language, live under the wrong flag, worship the wrong god—have no hope to lose.

The list is long, O God. But, somewhere in the midst of our sorrows, you are walking, holding hands, lifting up, mending wounds, breathing new life, and receiving the old. This we believe, and in this belief we find strength to remember and respond.

You have numbered us from the first to last. We pray that you might grant us the compassion to count one another daily. Let us reach to those who stumble, and break their fall; to the fallen, and pull them to their feet. Let us be caught when we are about to faint; and be lifted up, when we are struggling to rise.

Hymn ***God Sent His Son*** **345**

Gospel Reading **Matthew 10:24-39 NRSV**

‘A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master;

it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

‘So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.

What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father.

And even the hairs of your head are all counted.

So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;

and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Message – Out Loud

It has been said that the only person who likes change is a wet baby. There may be some truth to that. None of us likes to embrace change, particularly as we get older. We find comfort in the familiar, safety and security in what we know. But if there is one theme that ties both scriptures this morning together, it's one of the changes we experience when we become followers of Christ, and the impact that can have on our lives. The imagery in both passages is pretty dramatic. When we accept Christ and are baptized, we die to sin, we die to our old life. We die to some of those same things that give us comfort. We're expected, of course, to give up our sinful ways, to not test grace. But we also die to "going with the flow," to not making waves and just fitting in with what the world expects of us.

Matthew makes it clear that we are not to be silent when we are resurrected with Christ into new life. The truths we have learned, the gospel, the good news, is not to be kept in quiet whispers among ourselves, but shouted from the rooftops. And that truth won't always make us friends. When what you support upsets the status quo that everybody relies on for that same comfort, that same safety and security, you may make a few enemies. That is the sword Jesus is referring to. We should have a keen edge to us, one that doesn't accommodate values that deviate from the teachings of Jesus. Our friends, even members of our own families, may not agree with us. Being a Christian is not without its own risks and potential loss.

Imagine how it must have been for the first Christians, embracing a new faith in the midst of family and friends that were firmly entrenched in the existing faiths of the day. How difficult was it for them, when their spouses, children, parents, and in-laws did not embrace this new faith, viewing them as heretics to the Jewish faith, or in the Gentile world, traitors to the Empire. Are things that different now?

While Christianity is firmly established in today's world, there are certainly many within some of our families who don't accept the Christian faith as the basis of their lives. But I would expand that to even those who claim a faith in Christ, but mold that faith to fit the cultural values of our community. Instead of making clear the difference between the

values Jesus presents in the Gospel, and some of the values of our culture which deviate from those teachings, they just go with the flow and fit in, valuing tradition and culture over Christ.

A number of years ago, a riot took place in the Kansas House of Representatives. That body opens every session with a prayer, but on that particular day, the prayer was a little different. I'll read an excerpt from that prayer: "Heavenly Father, we come before You today to ask Your forgiveness and seek Your direction and guidance. We know Your Word says, "Woe to those who call evil good," but now that's exactly what we've done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and we have inverted our values. We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery, and neglected the needy and called it self-preservation...abused power and called it political savvy. We have coveted our neighbor's possessions and called it ambition"...that's just a portion of the prayer, but you get the idea of the gist of it. Is it that far off the mark? Maybe it hit a little too close to home, and led to such an intense reaction.

It's easier just to focus on avoiding the well known moral failings of the bible: drinking, stealing, lying, cheating, etc. and leading an upright moral life in public as your witness. Now not that I'm saying avoiding temptation and sin is always a walk in the park. But publicly opposing views that may be popular in your community, but contrary to the values Jesus interprets and promotes, that can lead to discord. That can lead to loss of friends, estrangement from family, losing the popularity contest. Just as Christ indicates in Matthew. We're all given the gift of grace and a new life in Christ. And that gift is free. But the expectation of our Lord and Savior is that gift will create change in our lives. We share in his death and resurrection. Like Christ, we are given our own crosses to bear. Today's passage from Matthew 10 is part of Jesus' larger missionary discourse to his disciples. In this section, he talks about committed discipleship in the face of conflict. Jesus said that he came "not to bring peace, but a sword."

When people follow Jesus, they can expect to have conflicts, even with their own families. Choosing loyalty to anyone other than Christ disqualifies a person from being a disciple of Christ. Peace, or shalom, is the practice of refining everything that is not part of God's righteous realm; not just the absence of conflict, but a commitment to the well-being and wholeness of all of God's creation. Once all is made whole again, righteousness and justice will reign. Shalom will realign our priorities and relationships. It's like a fruit grower who prunes dead branches from his fruit trees. The surviving branches will bear even greater fruit. Being Jesus' disciple is not just an invitation for glory. It is an invitation for sacrifice and suffering in the presence of powerful opposition. Jesus never promised us an easy life if we become his disciples. In fact, being Jesus' disciple is one of the hardest things we can do.

Rome and ancient Judea were famous for persecuting both the prophets and Jesus. If they were persecuted for their faith, we will also face persecution. This does not mean that we are to provoke persecution. That will come naturally when we expose evil, challenge power, demand change or undermine the status quo. Persecution will come naturally when we do what Christ asks us to do. Telling the world that they've given sin respectable names and are in need of a Savior doesn't go over very well, as the story I told you about the government in Kansas illustrates. Even though we are not to actively seek persecution and suffering, we must still take up our cross. If we are persecuted, we are to accept it because God will give us the strength we need to cope. Those of us who trust in God do not have to fear anyone else or anything else. In fact, we are told not to be afraid to be persecuted for our faith. We should instead fear the consequences of not following Jesus' instructions.

For example, we must not be afraid to proclaim his teachings. We must proclaim the truth boldly and in love. We are free to share the good news because nothing is secret or hidden about the kingdom. We are free from fear because of the goodness of God. It governs even the smallest or most mundane matters of our lives. God cares about everything he created, even a tiny sparrow.

In this passage, a tiny sparrow has become a symbol of something of little value. If God cares for something that has little value, he will care much more for his children, especially if they are his disciples. The focus of our discipleship is on our relationship to Jesus. To be worthy of Christ we are to put him first. To be worthy of Christ we are to take up our cross and identify with him, to accept the scandal of identification with him, and to suffer the consequences of those who promote ideas contrary to his teachings. To be worthy of Christ we are to choose him and his life instead of foolishly preserving our own way of life. Finding the selfish satisfaction of life in this world's terms, means losing life of value, and missing its larger fulfillment. To lose our own interests for the sake of Christ is to find life.

We acknowledge Jesus and God by our deeds and our words. If we worship Jesus with our words but not our deeds, our witness is compromised. For example, we can acknowledge Jesus with words by regularly attending worship services, but if our behavior the rest of the week silently denies Christ, we are being hypocritical. Our words and deeds have to be consistent if our witness is to be effective. There are more people paying attention to our words (*or silence*) and actions than you may ever be aware of. Christians are living witnesses who should "walk worthy" of the calling they have received.

In her biography of Marie Antoinette, Carolly Erickson tells about the queen's attempts to disguise herself and attend parties incognito, but her walk gave her away. "When she walked, she strode like a man. Her swift, purposeful gait was her trademark. It was said that

she could never successfully disguise her identity at masked balls, for no matter how she dressed, she still walked like an Empress.”

F.W. Boreham tells a story from the life of Francis of Assisi. “Brother Francis said one day to one of the young monks at the monastery, “let us go down to the town and preach!” The novice, delighted at being singled out to be the companion of Francis, obeyed with alacrity. They passed through the principal streets, turned down many of the by-ways and alleys, made their way out to some of the suburbs, and at length returned, by a circuitous route, to the monastery gate. As they approached it, the younger man reminded Francis of his original intention. “You have forgotten, Father, that we went down to the town to preach!” “My son,” Francis replied, “we have preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We have been seen by many; our behavior has been closely watched; it was thus that we preached our morning sermon. It is of no use, my son, to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere we walk.”

Can we say the same? Do we preach everywhere we walk? Like Marie Antoinette, does our walk give us away every time as the Christians we claim to be? Are we willing to risk relationships to boldly stand up for the values that Jesus taught? This morning, let's consider our own walks, as individuals and as a community of faith, and think about whether they highlight the values found in Christ's teachings, or whether they reflect something less admirable. Do people see the building at 95th and 5th as a place full of people that promotes justice, righteousness and shalom? Or do they just see a building with a cross on the top? I hope and pray we can make sure we are the disciples we are called to be, and can work to literally be the shining light on a hill. Amen.

Call to Serve

Having received the grace of God in the redemption of Christ, we live strengthened in the faith, with hearts overflowing with thankfulness. From the depths of our hearts, we offer to God the very best we have. May our offering be a true act of worship and thanksgiving.

A Time for Reflection

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Generous God, our lives are renewed as we remember your goodness. You have made us in your image and placed in our hearts the memory of your love made flesh in Jesus Christ. That memory calls us to give and to embrace your world as we offer these gifts. May our lives invested through these offerings create a new reality and extend your grace in remembrance of Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Benediction

May there be peace in your mind, that you are on the path of justice and restoration. May there be peace in your body, that you are made in God's image, and are God's beloved.

May there be peace in your heart, knowing you are loved and forgiven by God, whose steadfast love endures forever.

May there be peace in your soul, the deep peace that comes from God, knowing that the struggles you currently face will not outlast the love God has for you, the hardship will not overpower the light that shines within you. You are God's child, and God is well pleased with you.

Go and live out the commandment to love one another. Amen.

Postlude