

Worship Resources “On The Edge ? ”

Pentecost 6, Sunday, Year A

9th July 2023

Romans 7:15-25a NRSV / Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 NRSV

Prelude

Opening Music

[A Noble Theme \(Psalm 45\)](#)

Sons of Korah

uploaded to YouTube by Mahima Loungani, visit <https://sonsofkorah.com/>
to support this artist. <https://youtu.be/3uLIA5TbdeY>

Welcome/Announcements

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn

There is a Place of Quiet Rest 5

Call to Worship

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary, and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Come, let us worship God, And may we find rest and renewal In Christ Jesus our Lord.

Invocation

Come to us, Holy One, And immerse us in the beauty of life with you!
Come to us, Holy One, And enliven our community with the intensity of your love
Come to us, Holy One, And embolden our community with the urgency of your
Justice in the name of the One who calls us to play and to work in community,
Jesus, our beloved.

Epistle Reading

Romans 7:15-25a NRSV

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.

Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good.

But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand.

For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self,

but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin

A Time of Prayer

Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer

Holy and Gracious God, we give thanks for all the blessings of this life. For, the degree to which we know freedom and justice, for the leaders of our nations for the those who strive to bring peace into the world, may we know your mercy And act with compassion.

We give thanks for family, friends, and those care for us. May we know your love in them, through them.

May those we know and love, be safe this day, protected from all trials, comforted in strife, healed in illness of mind, body, or spirit.

We give thanks for this earth, the various lands we live in and on, for water, that it may be clean for those who need water, for those struggling with drought, wildfires, forest fires, or an over abundance of water, may they know balance and relief.

We give thanks for food, that all may be well fed, that those who are in need, will be satisfied, that those who have plenty will share, that all will filled and nourished.

We give thanks for our health, and ask your blessing on those who suffer for any cause. May they be comforted.

We give thanks for the gift of Jesus, your love in the world, who comes to share our burdens, that they may be light.Amen.

Hymn

Just As I Am, Without One Plea

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Gospel Reading Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30 NRSV

‘But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market-places and calling to one another,

“We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.”

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon”;

the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!” Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.’

At that time Jesus said, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;

yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’

Message ***On The Edge***

When we think about our journeys of faith, do we think of them as challenging, or an easy walk in the park? I think most of us would probably agree that they inherently have their hurdles, those tasks that require some work on our part to honor the commitments we make when we accept this particular walk.

Often when we think about living out our faith, avoiding sin is one of the main points that comes to mind for many of us as a challenge we face. But what exactly is sin, and what is required of us?

The original Hebrew work for sin, hata, literally means missing the mark, as in archery when your arrow misses the bull's eye. It's not meeting our goal, falling short of what we were aiming for. We often think of sin as failing to observe God's laws and expectations for our life. That's certainly at the core of it. There's an element of disobedience to God, of not being

faithful when we sin. Those laws are meant to keep us faithful, on the right path. But in large part, they keep us in the right relationship, with God, and with each other. They are made with our well-being in mind.

Starting with Adam and Eve, God knew eating the fruit of the forbidden tree would give us knowledge that would cause our lives to become a never ending struggle so he forbade it. Yet they gave in to temptation, and lost perfection and ideal fulfillment.

When we sin, our focus often shifts from our relationship with God and others, to our own self-interest and gratification, or the worldly life around us, and we put our focus and trust elsewhere. When something else becomes more important than God, isn't that just another form of idolatry? Likewise, sin often affects our relationship with other people. When we indulge in things we shouldn't, or behave poorly, we become selfish and greedy, not thinking about others and how they may be affected by our actions. We can become dishonest and lacking in the love and compassion we are called to show to others. Often our sin can actually cause harm and loss to those we care about, which should include everybody.

But where does temptation come from? Paul expounds on this in our reading from Romans today. He talks about his sinful nature, the sin in him, that is constantly waging a war against the desire to obey God in his mind. Yet it is often the sin that wins the war. He even goes so far as to say that it is not his mind that chooses to sin, but his sinful nature, the sin in his flesh that chooses to sin.

I'm not so sure I can agree with that assessment. God gives us the power to choose, to pick which path to follow. It can be all too easy to put the blame somewhere else, like Satan. Too often I think we make Satan the scapegoat for our own weaknesses and failures. We can feel better about ourselves and not have guilt if we can put the blame elsewhere. But is it really Satan, or our own human weakness?

The literal definition of the Hebrew word Satan is adversary. How often are we really our own adversary? After all, we are all children of Adam and Eve. We all are subject to temptation, to wanting self-gratification, to wanting something to provide us comfort and security, to make our daily walks easier. The problem is, those feelings of comfort and security we get from sin are temporary. Like drugs, we need to keep coming back for more to keep that satisfaction going.

But we rationalize it to ourselves. We deserve a break, right? I've earned a little selfishness, a little me focus. While self-care is very important, it too can lead us astray when all our attention is pointed inward. Sadly, those attitudes are supported by the cultural norms of our society. That's just the way the world works, right? We need money to live. The logic is, the more we have, the better life will be. We'd be happier if we had a nicer TV, a nicer car, a bigger house. Those are the things that promise us security, an easier life.

But in the end, achieving material success and goods leaves us no more fulfilled than we were when we started. So we must need more. And when that doesn't work, sometimes we look to other vices to give us fulfillment. Things like chemicals, food, sex. But in the end, they fail to satisfy us as well.

Like the ancient pagans, we have our own golden calfs, our own Ba'als that we turn our attention to. And like those pagan idols of old, they pull us away from the life God would have us lead.

One only has to turn on the TV or go on the internet to see how what has become the "cultural norms" of our society are often the opposite of the values Jesus promoted. Instead of a values based on love and compassion, everything today is "us vs. them." We see great wealth as the ideal and show after show highlighting gossip and backstabbing as "reality."

Whole groups of people are dehumanized, viewed as not worthy of rights and fair treatment, and more and more seem to be viewed as expendable, not worthy of the basic needs of life. It all boils down to what our priorities are in the end.

In our gospel lesson today, Jesus makes the comparison between John the Baptist and himself. John preached a very dour, repentant message, full of guilt. That was too much of a downer for people and they ridiculed his spartan life and strict adherence to simplicity and leading an ascetic lifestyle. Yet Jesus lived a life immersed in welcome and fellowship with the undesirables, the outcasts of his culture. And people balked at that as well. They called him a glutton and drunk because of his willingness to develop real relationships with those his society judged to be unworthy sinners.

To walk his path would mean becoming outcast from society oneself, to no longer being part of the "in" crowd. It's much easier to try to find a middle walk, isn't it? To try to be the repentant sinner John calls us to be, and show a surface concern for the outcasts of our own day, but only going so far. Only expressing the concern that is socially acceptable, staying within the polite parameters that won't jeopardize our standing in our social circles. And therein lies the difficulty for many of us. Which path do we choose and how do we decide? What parameters do we use? If sin is literally "missing the mark," how do we adjust our aim?

Well, it may not be as complicated as we think. We keep our focus on God, not on the world. We don't follow and worship the false idols the world lifts up. When we are attracted by something, we need to ask ourselves three simple questions. Does this distract me or turn my attention away from God? Will this have a negative affect on others? Is this in sync with the teachings of Christ? They may seem like simple questions but you may be surprised by the things in your life that you take for granted as OK, but that don't meet those criteria. We tend to become so ingrained in our communities, and our culture, that cultural norms we take for granted become comfortable to us and we become complacent.

Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish theologian & philosopher, told this parable, which he called "The Wild Duck of Denmark; A wild duck was flying northward with his mates across Europe during the springtime. En route, he happened to land in a barnyard in Denmark, where he quickly made friends with the tame ducks that lived there. The wild duck enjoyed the corn and fresh water. He decided to stay for an hour, then for a day, then for a week, and finally, for a month. At the end of that time, he contemplated flying to join his friends in the vast North land, but he had begun to enjoy the safety of the barnyard, and the tame ducks had made him feel so welcome. So he stayed for the summer. One autumn day, when his wild mates were flying south, he heard their quacking. It stirred him with delight, and he enthusiastically flapped his wings and rose into the air to join them. Much to his dismay, he found that he could rise no higher than the eaves of the barn. As he waddled back to the safety of the barnyard, he muttered to himself, "I'm satisfied here, I have plenty of food, and the area is good. Why should I leave?" So, he spent the winter on the farm. In the spring, when the wild ducks flew overhead again, he felt a strange stirring within his breast, but he did not even try to fly up to meet them. When they returned in the fall, they again invited him to rejoin them, but this time, the duck did not even notice them. There was no stirring within his breast. He simply kept on eating corn which made him fat. Like the duck, we need to be careful not to get too complacent with the norms of our community that they become the values we cling to, superseding what scripture tells us.

Those comfortable norms may not always pass the three questions test. Everything our North American culture considers as the norm is not necessarily Christian. It can be all too easy to be caught up in the rhetoric and the rational argument supporting those norms that we lose sight of what is sin, and what is right. But it's not all gloom and doom. We are human, with our flaws and capacity to sin. However, God wants us to enjoy our human lives. The guidance God gives us is so we can truly have fulfilling lives.

Jesus tells us the ways of living that lead to the kin-dom of Heaven that draws near. Those teachings are meant to be freeing, not restrictive. God knows that money, stuff, and overindulgence do not bring long term fulfillment, only shallow pleasure that soon fades. Simplicity, humility, love and compassion bring long-term happiness. It's a completely different mindset that is always in contrast to the world around us.

We need to spend time in scripture, studying the ideal life God would have us live. And not just reading, but studying what that lesson meant to the audience of that time, and then deciding how we can apply that same meaning to our own time. And we need to listen to our conscience, to that inner voice telling us something doesn't feel right. Might that just be the Spirit at work in our life? Do we always listen?

But most important of all, we need to resist. Resist the temptation to do those things that pull us away from God. Resist those things that pull us away from each other. Resist those "norms" of our culture that do both: the greed, the calloused and mean-spirited, the us vs.

them, and the violence in all its forms, and probably most important, the justifications for stepping back from embracing those most in need.

I'd like to close today with a story about the famous sculptor Rodin. The French sculptor Auguste René Rodin, an innovative and sometimes controversial artist, created masterpieces such as The Man with the Broken Nose, St. John the Baptist, The Bronze Age, or the uncompleted Gates of Hell. But he is most likely known for his work entitled The Thinker. You've seen it. The unnamed man, seated, hunched over, leaning on his knees, hand on his chin: contemplating, thinking.

Art historians believe that Rodin meant to create Adam who was at the moment thinking, contemplating the choices of righteousness or sin. We must contemplate as well. For we have a choice like Adam. Will we choose the fulfilling life of righteousness, or the empty life of sin, of missing the mark. I pray we always make the right choice. Amen.

Call to Serve

The treasure of God's glory is Jesus, shining in our hearts. We hold this treasure in the earthen vessels of our lives. Let us share freely of the gifts we have been given, that the glory of God may be known in the works of community, justice and peace.

A Time for Reflection

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Take and receive these gifts dear God, bless and multiply them that they may show the world your glory, shining through our lives.

Hymn *Open My Eyes, That I May See*

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Benediction

Go forth in peace to live into Jesus' most joyful command: Come to me!
And may we follow him into a rest that bears fruit in justice, love and peace
for each of us, and all of us.

Postlude