

Sermon September 1, 2024

Faith Formation

Labor Day Opening Prayer

Worker God,
your hands built the earth,
molded our bodies,
and sowed the stars across the sky,
we gather in your presence this morning
with praise and thanksgiving for your mighty deeds.
Meet us here, O God;
strengthen our hearts and our hands to work creatively with you
in the building of a world filled with justice and peace.

Activity

M&Ms - class of 20

Asia	12	5 candy
Europe	2	7
South America	2	1
Africa	3 people	0
North America	1	all

Ask them for reflections on the experience become asking them what they think would be the best course of action to take, and then solicit reactions again after this action has been taken.

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23

A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.

The rich and the poor have this in common: the LORD is the maker of them all.

Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity, and the rod of anger will fail.

Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

Do not rob the poor because they are poor or crush the afflicted at the gate,

for the LORD pleads their cause and despoils of life those who despoil them.

Mark 7:24-37 (NRSV)

From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.' But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.' So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be

opened.' And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'

Feast of Fairness

Today's scriptures remind us that we are called to be responsible to one another because each of us is created and loved by God. "The rich and the poor have this in common, God made them all," we are told.

"Of course!" we say, "we know that!" Until we get to the gospel lesson, where against all expectations, Jesus refuses to heal a little girl because she is not Jewish. What happened to let the children come to me? What happened to all are welcome in God's Kingdom? Maybe Jesus was just having a bad day.

"It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs," he tells the mother as he denies her plea. But like all Mama Bears, she doesn't take no for an answer.

'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Something changes and he sees the human need and desperation in her eyes. Her daughter is healed. It is the only time we hear of Jesus turning away someone in need and this unnamed woman changed him.

This is Labor Day, a day when we remember those who work hard every day, and sometimes have little to show for it. For some this is purely an economic issue. In the United States and around the world, inequality is growing, and Covid made the fissures in our society bigger. The poor are falling deeper into poverty, the rich are getting richer. Billionaires race to *outer space* while millions beg for the crumbs they leave under their tables. And those in the middle have seen incomes stagnate or decline and inflated prices, wondering if their jobs will be the next to disappear.

But this is not just an issue of the economy. Fair balance is needed in every aspect of human life. Where one experiences abundant health, another

physical need; Where one has abundant family support, others feel unmet needs and abuse.

Whenever anyone feels pushed aside, whenever an extravagant welcome is missing, we are missing the mark. The Body of Christ is meant to be a place where all are fed, all are loved, all are welcome.

Today I would like us to look at our responsibilities and obligations to each other, within this church and within the greater Body of Christ. Love is a verb. As James reminds us, we are called to be "doers of the Word." The Faith without action is dead and meaningless. The Word, found in the first moments of creation and made visible through Jesus Christ, continues whenever we act in love towards one another.

When we proclaim love of God and love of neighbor, we need to be able to show it.

Look towards your neighbor and take a few minutes to discuss the ways we can lift up those who are disconnected or broken.

Write down a prayer concern

Write down what you will do to help bring about a fair balance (maybe financial, mission work, volunteer)

Light a candle to remind us of the ongoing light of love.

This is the Body of Christ, broken, pulled apart. As long as people are broken, the Body is broken like the bread we share at the Table.

But remember this, immediately after his encounter with this unnamed woman, he reminded everyone who his healing touch opens up a man's ears,

so that he can hear the songs of the birds, the cries of a child and the calling voice of God.

In love, we are called out to reach out to friend, neighbor, stranger, enemy. In love we are called to forgiveness and mercy. In love, we are called to make the Body whole again.

Jesus said, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven.... For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance.'

Let us always turn to the abundant God who sends us out in love

Invitation to Give

We are told that "Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor."

Let us celebrate our blessings with generosity as we bless our various offerings for the work and worship of this congregation.

Benediction

Beloved, remember this:

No matter how uncertain the road ahead may be,
God is with you every step of the way
and the light of Christ will guide us.

As you journey forth, the Holy Spirit is found
in the space between all things,
closer to us than our next breath,
binding us to each other,
until we meet we again,

Go in peace, my Beloved. Amen