

GAYLORD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
318 4th STREET, BOX 385, GAYLORD, MN, 55334
16th Sunday after Pentecost
September 20, 2020



MORNING MEDITATION

Henry David Thoreau, 19th century
"It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants.
The question is: What are we busy about?"

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

"WELCOME TO CHURCH"

THE CALL

Psalm 145:1-8

I will extol you, my God and Ruler, and bless your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless you, and praise your name forever and ever.
Great is God, and greatly to be praised; God's greatness is unsearchable.
One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts.
On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate.
The might of your awesome deeds shall be proclaimed, and I will declare your greatness.
They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness, and shall sing aloud of your
righteousness. God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

PRELUDE

STACY PAULY

WELCOME AND NEWS OF THE CHURCH

NO MATTER WHO I AM, NO MATTER WHERE I AM ON LIFE'S JOURNEY, I AM WELCOME HERE.
NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE ON LIFE'S JOURNEY, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

ONE: WHO ARE YOU? **ALL: I AM A BELOVED CHILD OF GOD!**
ONE: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? **ALL: I AM A PERSON OF WORTH TO BE VALUED!**
ONE: THEN WHAT WILL YOU DO? **ALL: I WILL LIVE A LIFE OF LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE OF MYSELF
AND ALL GOD'S PEOPLE!**

GATHERING HYMN

"A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD"

VIRTUAL CHOIR #4

CALL TO WORSHIP (*inspired by Matthew 20:1-16*)

One: Our eyes are heavy. Our hope is soaring. We wait in the marketplace.

People: Our God is gracious.

One: Our feet are tired. Our expectations rise. We are hired first.

People: Our God is merciful.

One: Our backs are sore. Our spirits are low. We are paid last.

People: Our God is slow to anger.

One: Our tempers flare. Our anger rages. We take what belongs to us.

People: Our God abounds in steadfast love.

INVOCATION *(inspired by Matthew 20:1-16)*

Call all the laborers, O God,
Call your laborers who woke early,
Call your laborers who came late,
Call your laborers who feel wronged,
Call your laborers who feel overlooked,
Call your laborers who have no employment,
Call your laborers who can't feed their children with this wage,
Call your laborers who know they are working in your fields,
Call your laborers who use their wage to increase your love,
Call all your laborers, O God, tell us to roll up our sleeves.

For we know that we have work to do.
Let us find you in the work we share here and now,
in Christ's presence we pray.

Amen.

CONFESSING OUR HUMANNESS

Paul told his churches:

“Live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel...”

Let us spend a quiet minute reflecting on where we have failed to “strive side by side”...
for the Gospel

Silence

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Beloved in Christ rejoice!
In grace and mercy, God abounds in steadfast love.
Forgives us, and sets us free to grow in grace.
Bless God's name forever!

PIANO

“DOXOLOGY”

LECTIONARY TEXTS

Jonah 3:10-4:11 • Philippians 1:21-30 • Matthew 20:1-16

Jonah 3:10-4:11

When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.

But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord! Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? That is why I fled to Tarshish at the beginning; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing. And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live." And the Lord said, "Is it right for you to be angry?" Then Jonah went out of the city and sat down east of the city, and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade, waiting to see what would become of the city.

The Lord God appointed a bush, and made it come up over Jonah, to give shade over his head, to save him from his discomfort; so Jonah was very happy about the bush. But when dawn came up the next day, God appointed a worm that attacked the bush, so that it withered. When the sun rose, God

prepared a sultry east wind, and the sun beat down on the head of Jonah so that he was faint and asked that he might die. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the bush?" And he said, "Yes, angry enough to die." Then the Lord said, "You are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labor and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

Philippians 1:21-30

For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well--since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Matthew 20:1-16

[And Jesus said:] "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the market-place; and he said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.' So they went. When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why are you standing here idle all day?' They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You also go into the vineyard.' When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, 'Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.' When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?' So the last will be first, and the first will be last."

SERMON

"IT'S NOT FAIR"

PASTOR DENNIS

It's not fair! I wonder how many times we have heard that? How many times we have said that? If you are a parent, how many times have you heard things like: "It's not fair. She got more than me! How come he gets to stay up later than I do! How come you spend more time with her than with me. It's not fair. It's not fair." It's like there is a clock and a calculator in every child's head. And these inner calculators and clocks keep counting and ticking even when we become adults, don't they? "It's not fair. They are getting something that they don't deserve. It's not fair they are born into money and I'm not. It's not fair, the neighbors have it better than I do." We all know that terrible feeling when we are certain we've been cheated and so we say, "It's not fair!"

In both our OT and Gospel readings appointed for today, we hear the phrase, "it's not fair." We first hear it from Jonah. Jonah's story is one of our Sunday School favorites isn't it? As far as anyone can tell, Jonah was an ordinary Jewish man, minding his own business, when one day God tells Jonah to go at once and preach to the people of Nineveh. And Jonah doesn't want to go. Because the Ninevites were not only different than his people, they were his people's enemies. Jonah thinks "I'm not going to them. They don't deserve to hear from God. Why would God want to have anything to do with those people?"

And so instead of going to Nineveh, Jonah gets on the next boat headed in the opposite direction and nearly gets everyone on board killed before God sends a taxi in the form of a whale (big fish). And this is the part we remember from SS, Jonah is followed and swallowed. He ends up inside the big fish for three days the whole time he's sitting inside the fish, Jonah complains. He complains about everything. Jonah complains about the injustice of the whole situation. It is not fair!

Finally, God tells the fish to spit Jonah out on shore, and don't you think the fish was pretty happy to get rid of Jonah?!! I do! Now he's on dry land and that's where today's reading picks up, when "the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." And God says to Jonah, "I'm not kidding. Get up. Go to Nineveh. Bring them the message I've sent you to deliver. Realizing now that running away isn't a viable option, Jonah goes against his will. He comes sulking into town, trots just a few steps into the city, and with all the excitement of a boy forced by his parents to apologize to his snotty little brother, he says, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." That's it- only 8 words- an 8-word sermon. Don't you wish I could be so concise?

But in spite of Jonah's half-hearted effort, the whole city repents. All the people, 120,000 of them, even the animals we are told, hear Jonah's half-hearted message and they repent- they turn to God. Instead of giving Nineveh the destruction it deserves, God is merciful and forgives Nineveh and saves the city. And you would think, wouldn't you, that Jonah would have been thrilled with the results of his sermon. Every preacher that I know would like to have results like Jonah did. However, Jonah is angry, furious and outraged! How could God do this? How could God be so unfair to be so merciful to a city that did not deserve it. And so, shaking his head and walking away in disgust, what do you think Jonah is saying out loud, "It's not fair! It's not fair!"

Jonah is a lot like the workers in the vineyard in our Gospel whose manager at the end of the day pays those who worked a 12-hour day the same as those who worked only an hour. And they complain, "This is not right. This is not fair!" And the landowner in Jesus' parable calmly replies, "Did I not pay you exactly as we had agreed? I have done no wrong. I just chose to give to the last the same as I give to you." And then he adds: "Are you envious because I am generous?"

Both the story of Jonah and Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard, are about God's love. God's generous love for all people and the lengths to which God goes to express it. You see, we have a God who loves all people without limits. Both of these stories try to drive home to us the message that the way we love others is absurdly too small. Too limited. Too filled with exceptions. Too filled with conditions and exclusions. But this is not the way of God. God loves with NO limits. God's love is generous- even for people like you and me who don't deserve it (haven't earned). God's love is expansive- it is so superabundant and expansive.

The way God smears love around on all people, reminds me of the way my Aunt Lucy used to smear jam on toast when we were at her house! At home, we would have toast for breakfast with peanut butter and jam. Mom would fix it and have it ready when we got to the table. It was one of my favorite things when I was a child (and still is). It was great! Then one time my sister and I were at Aunt Lucy's house and she fixed us some toast. There was no peanut butter, but the jam was piled high and went from edge to edge of the piece of toast! Wow! Sometimes it even spilled over the sides! Mom's toast was great. Aunt Lucy's was generously wonderful!

--We have a God who smears love and mercy around so liberally- no one is left out- all are included. The lesson today is that God's grace extends to all. We are so quick to keep score, tallying all the ways others fall short. But it seems to me that such "bookkeeping" closes us off from God's grace. We've had it drilled into our heads that people get what they deserve. There's no such thing as a free lunch we say- you don't get anything for nothing. But when it comes to God's love and mercy and forgiveness, it's not a question of who deserves it. It's a gift- needed by all and freely and generously given to all.

--And this is good news for us because we are the Ninevites who have been spared God's wrath and we are the workers who showed up at the last minute and still get a full day's wage. We are the ones who have not earned it yet somehow receive mercy. God's grace extends even to us.

--And it is this grace that we've experienced that hopefully unlocks our own capacity to be gracious toward others who we don't believe deserve it. And it's our own experience of a God who is generous in doling out grace to us that empowers us to work for justice and wholeness and equality for everyone.

--There are certainly systems in our world today, aren't there, that are indeed, not fair. There are powers and principalities that are outrageously unjust. There are still lots and lots of tables that not only need to be overturned, but also thrown out a window and burned as firewood. You see, our innate sense of fairness can be channeled in a good way and when it is, it can become the foundation for justice and equality for all people. Then we have a passion about things like:

- It's not fair that two people who have committed the same crime will end up with wildly varying punishments based only on the color of their skin.
- It's not fair that some go to bed hungry while others have so much that they fill up landfills with what is left over.
- It's not fair that some are paid a lesser salary just because of their gender- even though they do the same work as those who receive more.
- It's not fair that some whose God-given sexual orientation is gay, lesbian and transgender are marginalized in our day and are far too often the victims of hate crimes or ostracized by their families, just because of the way God Almighty created them.
- It's not fair that some have affordable healthcare and others have to wait for care until their condition is so desperate, they'll go to the emergency room.
- It's not fair that some have safe water to drink, while others do not.

Yes, our innate sense of fairness can lead to a strong and life-giving sense of justice!

- The good news today is that God is not fair, at least not by our definition of the word. God is more than fair.

CALL TO PRAYER

"THANK YOU, LORD"

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

CALL FOR THE OFFERING

When our eyes are heavy, we dream of another world.
When our spirits are low, we turn to each other.
When our anger flares, we need each other's gifts most.
We give our gifts of tithes and offerings to create your kingdom of heaven.

DEDICATION OF THE OFFERING

O God, you have called your laborers to give their gifts.
Bless these offerings so that they reflect the work of the kingdom of heaven.
With Christ, our servant, we pray. Amen.

SENDING SONG

“SPIRIT SONG”

BENEDICTION *(inspired by Philippians 1:21-30)*

One: Let us continue in our work.

People: Let us live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

One: Let us be in one spirit, striving side by side,

People: Let us find Christ in our struggles,

One: Let us be surprised by the joy in our faith,

People: Let us find you, O God, in all our work. Amen.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

STACY PAULY

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Remember in Prayer: Sandy Wentzloff recovering from surgery, Ewald Keller, Bill Cowell, Eunice Gasow, Aggie Schue and Mike and Renee Hoffman (Margaret Hoffman’s son and daughter-in-law). We pray for others who have been ill or are home bound and others at Oak Terrace and Golden Hearts. We pray for health and healing for all people everywhere. Pray for the ministries of our church. Pray for those serving in the military and for our local and national leaders during these trying times.

If you have a prayer request or would like to receive a call from Pastor Dennis call his office at 237-2595 (leave a private voice mail) or his cell 763-258-3371.

Pastor Dennis is usually in the office each Tuesday and Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. He can be reached at the office, 237-2595 (private voice mail) or his cell: 763-258-3371. E-mail: dmckee545@gmail.com • Website at listen2god.org

Giving our Gifts to God:

**Tithes and Offerings can be sent to Gaylord United Church of Christ
P.O. Box 385 Gaylord, MN 55334 or donate on our website
or drop off at the church office on Wednesday between 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Thank you for your continued support for the ministries of this church.**

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- ❖ **Offering plates will not be passed but you can still give! You can deposit your offering in the plate located at the entrance to the sanctuary.**
 - ❖ Our **From the Heart Offering** in **September** is for **gas and food vouchers**, which provide help to those who express need when visiting our church.
 - ❖ We will be **collecting school supplies** for our **Backpack Project** through September.
 - ❖ We are also collecting **Basic Necessities** for families and single adults who might be experiencing financial difficulties in our county. Deposit your items on the table in the entry way. **Items include: Diapers, wipes, toothbrush and toothpaste, lotion, soap, feminine products, toilet paper, shampoo and conditioner, dish soap, Band-Aids, hair brushes, razors, tissues, lip balm and deodorant.**
 - ❖ **Men’s Fellowship** meets every **Wednesday at 2:00 p.m. at church by the front windows.**