

GAYLORD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
318 4th STREET, BOX 385, GAYLORD, MN, 55334
17th Sunday after Pentecost
September 27, 2020



MORNING MEDITATION

Alexander Pope, 18th century

"A man should never be ashamed to own that he has been in the wrong, which is but saying in other words that he is wiser today than he was yesterday."

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP *"ALWAYS WELCOME"*

THE CALL Psalm 25:1-9

To you, O God, I lift up my soul. O my God, in you I trust;
Make me to know your ways, O God; teach me your paths.
Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.
Be mindful of your mercy, O God, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.
Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O God!
Good and upright is God; therefore, God instructs sinners in the way.
God leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble God's way.

PRELUDE

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 *"ALL HAIL THE POWER OF JESUS' NAME"*

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Watch and listen for the wonders of our God.
People: Our God is among us.

One: Watch and listen for the goodness of our God.
People: Our God moves among us.

One: Watch and listen, for God is here.
People: Our God dwells among us.

GATHERING PRAYER

One: Let us pray. . .

All: Amen.

CONFESSION

One: Let us pray:

People: **Disturb the habits of our sin, O God.**

Rouse us from the sleep that cradles sin's embrace.

One: In the name of Jesus, we pray – Show us your ways, highlight what we can change.

People: **And change what we cannot.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Good friends: God is at work in you!

God is alive in us! God lives – but sin is dead.

And our sins are forgiven, through Christ, our Savior.

People: **Alleluia! Amen.**

Video: **Genealogy of Jesus**

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 21:23-32

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But if we say, 'Of human origin', we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him."

SERMON

MISPLACED AUTHORITY

PASTOR DENNIS

As I reflect on today's gospel reading, I'm reminded of a story about a governor of Massachusetts who was running hard for a second term in office. One day, after a busy morning of chasing votes and having had no lunch, he arrived at a church barbecue. It was late afternoon and he was famished. As he moved down the serving line, he held out his plate to the woman serving chicken. She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next person in line. "Excuse me," the governor said, "Do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?" "Sorry" the woman told him, "I'm suppose to give only one piece of chicken to each person." "But I'm starved," the governor said. "Sorry" the woman said again, "only one to a customer." The governor was a modest and unassuming man, but he decided that this time he would throw a little weight around. "Do you know who I am?" he said. "I'm am the governor of this state; a person of authority." "Do you know who I am?" the woman replied. "I am the lady in charge of the chicken. Move it along, mister!"

I share this because the topic at hand in our Gospel reading is authority. “By what authority, the chief priests and elders ask Jesus, are you doing these things.” In the verses prior to this Jesus has cured the blind and the lame and entered the Temple in Jerusalem and drives out those money changers who were exploiting people. And the Jewish leaders want to know, “Jesus, who gave you the right to do these things? By what authority do you do these things?”

Now when it comes to authority, there’s one thing we need to keep in mind: it’s given. Authority is given. This is the primary difference between power—the sheer ability to do something or bring something about. Authority, in short, is power that has been given and directed to achieve a particular end. The lady in charge of the chicken was delegated with the power to make sure only one piece of chicken was given to each person. Authority is always and only something given. But authority is given in two ways. That is, not only is authority given by those “above” with the power, it’s just as often given by those “below” who decide to accept the authority of another.

Here's the thing; in about 99% of cases of our life, those with authority over us have it ONLY because we give it to them. The person who slights us, the child who disappoints us, even the spouse or parent who abandoned— in each case the person in question may have actually done something hurtful to harm us, yet the way we regard the action and the person who hurt us is something we get to determine. Over time, if we are still feeling angry, hurt, disappointed, or upset, it is because we have decided to give authority to that person or to that event to continue to influence and dominate our lives. We may have been victimized, but we choose whether or not we will live as a victim.

You see, it is only against this background that I can make sense of the parable Jesus tells today! I mean, what does this story of 2 sons have to do with authority. Pretty much nothing. But it has everything to do with how we regard the past. One son says he will help out and does not follow through. The other son, however, is the focus of the parable. For he says he will not help, but he eventually does. Whatever may have motivated his initial response—maybe he was already committed, or feeling overwhelmed by prior obligations, or maybe he nursed a grudge about a time he felt his father didn’t help him—whatever the reason—this son recognizes that the future is always open. He can still respond to his father’s request and invitation, and as he does, he proves himself faithful and lives into his father’s hopes for him.

You see, in this simple parable, Jesus is inviting the chief priests and elders into an open future. It’s a future not dominated by the arguments and opposition of the past, but one that is open to the movement of God’s spirit to heal, restore and make all things new. But the chief priests and elders don’t accept this invitation. They have too much at stake in the past. The past has created for them their primary identity. Whatever its limitations, they have become dependent on that identity—and so they refuse to trade that past for an open future. But there are those who are down and out; who discover that the identity created by their past does not bring them life. In our scripture they are the tax collectors and prostitutes. These two categories of people whose actions supposedly remove them beyond the pale of decent society, grab hold of Jesus’ promise with both hands.

People of God, Jesus makes this same promise to you and me as well. No matter what we have done, no matter what may have been done to us, the future is still open. Whatever hurt we may have experienced or done in the past is, ultimately, in the past. We do not have to allow it to determine or dominate our future. We do not have to drag the past on our back the way a snail does its shell. The future is open. Now please know that it may be hard to let go of the past. It is hard because it is comfortable, it is what we know. Whereas the future is so open it can seem scary. And yet Christ invites us to an open future and even promises to walk into it with us.

And so, authority is something given. And sometimes we give authority to the past, or we give authority to something that has been done to us or to something said about us. But Jesus calls us into an open future! I'd like to invite you today to consider to what or to whom have you given authority in a way that may not be serving your life. Maybe you have been giving authority to the past—to the way things have always been done. Remember the story of a woman who when she cooked the ham for Easter, she would always cut off both ends of the ham. Her daughter asked her why she did that. The woman said, "That is the way my mother cooked the Easter ham. And so, the granddaughter asked her grandmother, "Why did you cut off both ends of the ham?" "Because," said the grandmother, "that is the only way it would fit into my pan." How often do we give a lot of authority to the past in such a way that it keeps us from a new future? OR maybe we give authority to other people because it is easier. . . OR maybe in our life we have done things or things have been done to us—and we've been giving these regrets and hurts in our life too much authority by hanging on to them and nursing them and rehearsing them in our minds and hearts.

Today, Christ invites us to walk into an open future. . .into a future not defined by the past. . . not defined by resentments or hurts and neither defined by a fear of something different because what we are accustomed to is so comfortable. Evaluate once again to whom you give authority. Don't let the chicken lady determine your future. The future is always open.

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses and we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For you are the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

INVITATION TO OFFERING

God promises to hear the prayers asked in the name of Jesus.

And God's people have asked.

God's people have asked for support and resources, for direct aid, for money and food. They have asked in the name of Jesus.

And in the name of Jesus, we respond.

DEDICATION

People: These gifts represent the best of ourselves, O God – Given with joy. Receive them with our prayers. Take and use them for your goodness. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

BENEDICTION

CHORAL BENEDICTION

"GO NOW IN PEACE"

Remember in Prayer: Sandy Wentzloff recovering from surgery, Ewald Keller, Bill Cowell, Eunice Gasow, Aggie Schue and. 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.

Our sympathies, thoughts and prayers go out to Kathy Tourtellott and family for the loss of her two brothers Don and Ken.

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. *You can also 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.

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ Women's Fellowship (all women of the church) will be having a meeting on Wednesday, September 30th at 7:00 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall. We will be discussing the possibility of having an election day drive through luncheon or supper, women's Christmas party in November, Hanging of the Greens and the future of the Women's Fellowship. Everyone is welcome to attend this meeting if interested in helping.
- ❖ Men's Fellowship meets every Wednesday at 2:00 p.m. in church by the front windows.
- ❖ Gaylord UCC will once again be delivering Meals on Wheels for the Forever Young Senior Center for the month of October.
Volunteers are as follows:
 - Oct. 5-9 Chuck Klimmek and Pauline Marlinski
 - Oct. 12-16 Harriet Troidahl
 - Oct. 19-23 Howard and Fran Armstrong
 - Oct. 26-30 Donnie Swenson

Thank you for volunteering your time!