

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST—PROPER 20

September 20, 2020 – 9:30 a.m.

PRELUDE “Let the Whole Creation Cry” -Paul Manz, Salzburg, Charles Callahan

Words for meditation by Stopford A. Brooke, 1832-1916:

Let the whole creation cry, “Glory to the Lord on high!”

Heav’n and earth, awake and sing, “Praise him, our almighty King!”

Praise him, angel hosts above, Ever bright and fair in love;

Sun and moon, lift up your voice; Night and stars, in God rejoice.

Men and women, young and old, Raise the anthem loud and bold,

And let children’s happy hearts In this worship take their parts;

From the north to southern pole Let the mighty chorus roll:

“Holy, Holy, Holy One; Glory be to God alone!”

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Pastor: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

Pastor: Our help is in the name of the Lord,

People: who made heaven and earth.

Pastor: If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

People: But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.

Pastor: Since we are gathered to hear God’s Word, call upon Him in prayer and praise, and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of this altar, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

People: Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

Pastor: Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

People: Amen.

SALUTATION AND COLLECT OF THE DAY

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Pastor: Lord God, heavenly Father, since we cannot stand before You relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

FIRST READING *Isaiah 55:6–9*

“Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

EPISTLE *Philippians 1:12–14, 19–30*

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. . . . for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 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 on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again. Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Pastor: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

HOLY GOSPEL *Matthew 19:27 – 20:16*

Pastor: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the nineteenth and twentieth chapters.

People: Glory to You, O Lord.

Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first. The kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, 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 a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ So the last will be first, and the first last.”

Pastor: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

People: Praise to You, O Christ.

APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

SERMON "The Last Will Become First" Matthew 20:1-16

I. Bookends

- What didn't Ancient Greek and Hebrew literature have?
- What is an *inclusio*?

II. Workers (v.1-8)

- Was being a laborer easy?
- Why does the master hire workers at 5:00 p.m.?

III. Wages (v.9-15)

- What are last workers paid? The first?
- Where else is the word, "friend/*epaire*" used?

IV. The first will become last, and the last first

- God deals with us not on the basis of what we think is fair or earned, but on the basis of His _____ and _____
- Our entrance into this Kingdom is because the _____ became _____, so that the _____ could become _____.

Could you imagine reading a book or newspaper article without quotation marks? That would certainly have its challenges since it would be unclear of who is speaking, and what they exactly said. However, I think we could do it. Let me make it a little harder, now. Could you read something without quotation marks and paragraph breaks? It would be difficult to see where a new thought or idea ends, and a new one begins, but, again, it would be doable. Let's make it even harder. Could you read something without quotation marks, paragraph breaks, and spaces between words? It certainly could be done, but it wouldn't necessarily be a quick or enjoyable read. Last one: could you read something without quotation marks, paragraph indentations, spaces, *and* periods? It would be quite an adventure to try to track the flow of an argument, idea, or basic thought without them! All of these together would be quite difficult!

Ancient Greek and Hebrew literature, like the Bible, didn't have any of these things. They didn't have punctuation or paragraph breaks. They had no spaces between words and sentences (it is why people read out loud; hearing it could help in understanding it). So, to signal a new idea, structure, or change, the author would need to be creative, and use a variety of literary devices to help convey this. One of these ways is what we call an *inclusio*.

An *inclusio* is a pattern where a paragraph or longer reading ends in a similar way in how it began. We might call it "coming full-circle" or "bookends." Something can begin and end with a similar location, character, story, or *saying*, like we have in our Gospel text. Our parable today begins and ends with an *inclusio*: "The first will be last, and the last first." Jesus frames His parable around this thought and idea. This concept is the interpretive clue and key to understanding today's text. The text is literally sandwiched between this saying. God's reign in Jesus functions in ways that are opposite and unlike anything we expect. "The first will be last, and the last first."

Jesus compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a master who goes out at 6:00 a.m. to get laborers for his vineyard. Being a laborer was a tough fate in the ancient world since it meant that you had no regular and

consistent employment or income. For no work equals no pay. No pay equals no food. No food equals a hungry family. As the master hires these laborers, they agree upon a denarius for the day's wages. It is a generous amount considering that a denarius wasn't always guaranteed. Roman soldiers would demand that a denarius would be the starting amount for the day's pay. And, having agreed upon the wage, the laborers go to work.

At about 9:00 a.m., three hours later, the master goes out to the marketplace to get more help. He sees some people standing idly, without work, and hires them, too. It would be their lucky day; they would be hired, after all. The master then promises them that a fair wage would be given for what they worked.

Now, again, the master goes out three hours later, at noon and three, to get more workers. He will pay them accordingly, too. Like the others, they too, would get some fair pay and provision. They would be hired, after all, as well.

And for a fifth time, the master goes out. This time, it is at 5:00 p.m., an hour before quitting time. Finding some people idly standing, he asks, **"Why do you stand here idle all day?"** **They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.'** In other words, no one wanted us. We weren't needed and weren't desired. These are the least desirable workers and are "last" in more than a temporal sense. Feeling charitable, the master hires them, too. He tells them, **"You go into the vineyard, too."**

About an hour later, the master summons his foreman to tell him to gather the workers for their pay. He wants the last paid first, and the first paid last. As the 11th hour workers step forward and put out their hands, a denarius is dropped in of them! The master pays them a full day's salary for just 1/12th of a day's work. Doing something like this is a great way to go out of business, and fast. The master is extremely generous to them for the amount worked. They take their denarius and head home.

Having seen what the last guys got, the first workers get excited. If they worked a 1/12th of the day and got a full day's salary, what would they get? Three times, six times, twelve times the amount? After all, they bore the heat of the day. They worked in the hot sun, and they were tired, exhausted, sweaty, and smelly. They reached out their hands and received a denarius, and that only. The master's hand does not reach back out to give them more. These guys are mad, and can you blame them? They grumble: **"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."**

The master hears their complaint, and responds, "Friend, *epaire*." This word for friend is never good. When this word for friend is used, it is *always* in the context of that person being in the wrong. Judas is called this when he betrays Jesus, and the man without the wedding garment is addressed this as he is thrown out. Certainly not the company you want to be in! It is like, "Hey, *buddy*." And denotes association, not personal affection.

The master tells them, **"Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you."** Isn't he right? His decision to be generous to the last doesn't mean that he shortchanged the first. The master chose to be generous with what is his. What is that to this laborer? The master can do what he wants, and will do what he wants with his stuff.

And so he gets to the issue at hand: **"Do you begrudge my generosity?"** Or, literally, "Is your eye evil because I am good?" To have an evil eye is to be stingy. The master asks, "Are you envious because I'm gracious? Are you jealous because I'm merciful? Are you trying to get more because you think you earned it?"

Jesus concludes by bringing it full-circle with His inclusio: **"the last will be first, and the first last."** That's the point, isn't it? God's reign in Jesus functions in ways that are opposite and unlike anything that we expect. God deals with us not on the basis of what we think is fair or earned, but on the basis of His grace and mercy. We all get the same; it doesn't matter! God gives equal grace to those who enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. For God doesn't reward the rewardable. He doesn't give more to people who work harder to get into His Kingdom. It goes against every human inclination and thought, but God's ways are not our ways (to quote our Old Testament reading).

You might have two people; you might have a guy who is baptized as an infant, grows up in the church, and is always active. He comes every week, is a faithful volunteer, cheerful giver, and is a great spouse and father. He dies surrounded by his loved ones at an old age, and enters the Kingdom of Heaven. He is one of those 6:00 a.m. workers.

On the other hand, you might have a scoundrel. He was abusive, an addict, a horrible person, and spent some time in prison. He only cared and lived for himself. However, on his deathbed, he repents, comes to faith, and he, too, is received into the Kingdom of Heaven. He is one of those 11th hour workers.

How much will these two guys receive? Each receives a denarius; each has received mercy and grace in Jesus. When it comes to the Kingdom, it is not about merit, or what I have done. It is not about earning a way into God's favor, or earning a way to stay in God's favor. It is about that which God desires to give us in Jesus: His mercy and grace.

For our entrance into this Kingdom is because the First became last. The opening verses of Hebrews says this about Jesus: He was **"appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of His power."** But, this one, became last. Paul says that Jesus **"did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant...."** Psalm 22 calls Jesus "a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people." Isaiah said He "was despised, and we esteemed him not...smitten of God, and afflicted...brought as a lamb to the slaughter...numbered with transgressors...yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him" and He "put Him to grief."

Why? So that we who were lost and last because of our sins, could become first in the Kingdom of Heaven. Once we were not a people, but now we are the people of God by the blood of Christ. We are the elect of Him, a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, the apple of God's eye, and kings and priests to Him. Is this not the heart of the Gospel? We who are last have become first, because He Who was first became last. Thank God that His reign in Christ functions in ways that are opposite and unlike anything we expect or deserve! "The first will be last, and the last first." Amen.

QUILT BLESSING

Pastor: Beloved in the Lord, our God has shown us an everlasting love and kindness through His Son Jesus Christ. As His people, we live our lives in joy and in service to our Lord and to others in response to what God has done for us. Hear the Word of the Lord from 1 John 3: "By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." On this day, we ask for God's blessings on these quilts as they go to others in need. Since the Lord has taught us in His holy Word that everything is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer, it is fitting that we bless and sanctify these quilts for those who receive them. Let us pray.

O God, Your mercies and wonders are new every morning. We thank You for your wonderful provisions and our daily bread that You give us each and every day. We thank you for the labors and time of those who created these quilts, and ask that you would continue to bless and flourish this ministry. We ask that You would bless these quilts and those who receive them and that through these quilts, those people would be pointed to Your love, kindness, and provision. Let these quilts that are given out of love and kindness point people to Your Word and to Your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

Pastor: The Lord Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, bless these quilts and those who use them.

People: Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

MUSIC DURING PREPARATION "Jesus, Lord and Precious Savior" -arr. Paul Manz

Jesus, Lord and precious Saviour,
All my comfort and my joy,
Graciously extend thy favor,
Let thy word my soul employ.

Jesus, come, abide with me,
Let me ever be with thee. Amen.

PREFACE

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Pastor: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them to the Lord.

Pastor: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

Pastor: It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, for the countless blessings You so freely bestow on us and all creation. Above all, we give thanks for Your boundless love shown to us when You sent Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into our flesh and laid on Him our sin, giving Him into death that we might not die eternally. Because He is now risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity, all who believe in Him will overcome sin and death and will rise again to new life. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

SANCTUS

People: Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth adored;

Heav'n and earth with full acclaim shout the glory of Your name.

Sing hosanna in the highest, sing hosanna to the Lord;

Truly blest is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Pastor: Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of all creation, for You have had mercy on us and given Your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

In Your righteous judgment You condemned the sin of Adam and Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit, and You justly barred them and all their children from the tree of life. Yet, in Your great mercy, You promised salvation by a second Adam, Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and made His cross a life-giving tree for all who trust in Him.

We give You thanks for the redemption You have prepared for us through Jesus Christ. Grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may faithfully eat and drink of the fruits of His cross and receive the blessings of forgiveness, life, and salvation that come to us in His body and blood.

Hear us as we pray in His name and as He has taught us:

LORD'S PRAYER

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

THE WORDS OF OUR LORD

Pastor: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My T body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament in My T blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

PAX DOMINI

Pastor: The peace of the Lord be with you always.

People: Amen.

DISTRIBUTION

You are invited to receive the Lord's Supper if you believe and confess that Jesus Christ is your Savior from sin, you are a baptized child of the Triune God, and you believe that He gives you His body and blood in the bread and wine you receive. White grape juice can be found in the center of each tray for those who cannot receive alcohol. Children are welcome to come forward for a blessing.

Music during distribution: "Beautiful Savior" -Robert Hobby

"Schonster Herr Jesu" -Charles Callahan

Words for meditation:

Beautiful Savior, King of creation,

Son of God and Son of Man!

Truly I'd love Thee, Truly I'd serve Thee,

Light of my soul, my joy, my crown.

Fair are the meadows, Fair are the woodlands,

Robed in flow'rs of blooming spring;

Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,

He makes our sorrowing spirit sing.

Text: Public domain

POST-COMMUNION COLLECT

Pastor: Let us pray. We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

People: Amen.

BENEDICAMUS

Pastor: Let us bless the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

BENEDICTION

Pastor: The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.

People: Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

POSTLUDE "Hark, the Voice of Jesus Calling" LSB 827

1 Hark, the voice of Jesus calling,

"Who will go and work today?

Fields are white and harvests waiting—

Who will bear the sheaves away?"

Loud and long the Master calleth;

Rich reward He offers thee.

Who will answer, gladly saying,

"Here am I, send me, send me"?

2 Some take up His task in morning,

To their Lord responding soon;

Some are called in heat of midday,

Others late in afternoon;

Even as the sun is setting,

Some are sent into the fields,

There to gather in the bounty

That God's Word so richly yields.

3 For as rain and snow from heaven
Water seeds in dusty soil,
Causing them to bud and flower,
Giving bread to those who toil;
So the Lord sends forth His promise,
Words of life and joy and peace—
Never void to Him returning,
Bearing fruit with great increase.

4 Hearken to the Lord whose coming
Marks the time when grace shall end,
When with His angelic reapers
He in glory shall descend.
Soon the night, the final harvest;
Soon the time for work shall cease.
Then the souls His grace has garnered
Shall enjoy His Sabbath peace.
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ANNOUNCEMENTS

GENEROSITY THOUGHTS: *Matthew 20:9* – “*And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius.*” Behold the generosity of God! He gives out of His grace, not what we deserve to receive. Living a godly life means living in imitation of God, and His generosity is surely one of the foundations of God’s being.

QUILTS: The 23 quilts hanging in our sanctuary these last weeks in September were the combined effort of our Emmaus Quilters and the Quilting Queens, a community group which meets in our social hall and donates the pieced tops and other fabric. Following their dedication, they will be donated to several relief organizations with collection sites here in the Twin Cities.

CHALK-THE-WALK: On September 26 Emmaus will be chalking all of the sidewalk surrounding the building from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. We hope to fill it with drawings, inspiring messages, and Bible Verses, while enjoying each other’s company while social distancing. Each family and participant will receive their own sidewalk chalk box to use and keep from the event. ALL are welcome, and so are ALL ages. Don’t feel like “chalking,” just come and do some “talking” with those that are there. Don’t feel comfortable with the potential COVID-19 risk, or not able to come, but want to? Please let us know, and we can save you some squares and your own chalk kit to come and use at any time that is convenient for you. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask Pastor Kooi or Dawn. We hope to see you there!

THANK YOU to those who have sewn face masks for Lutheran World Relief. The masks will be taken to the LWF warehouse by September 15th so masks that you have made should be dropped off at Emmaus by September 13th. The kits for mask making will be available at Emmaus on an ongoing basis for future sewing. Thank you for your time and efforts for this project.

MISSING YOUR FRIENDS? Come join us Thursday evenings in the parking lot and reconnect with Emmaus members face to face. Bring a lawn chair, yourself, a beverage and reconnect. The gathering will start at **6:30 pm** but you are welcome to come when you are able. This event will happen through the month of September.