

Trinitarian Congregational Church
TakeOut
October 25, 2020

Announcements

Prelude “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child” Lynne Walker
 traditional spiritual arr. John Carter
 [Video https://youtu.be/wUTy_hfdzj8]

Call to Worship

One: Come all who are thirsty, whose soul is fainting.
 Come all whose troubles seem overwhelming.
All: The source and Creator of all things welcomes us.
 God hears our cries and is ready to help us.
One: Come all who are pure, upright and blameless.
 Come all who dwell day by day in God’s realm.
All: The Messiah, our Teacher, continues to instruct us.
 Jesus leads us from self-seeking pride to humble service.
One: Draw near, then, and hear the word of our God.
 Open your lives to the Spirit who fills all things.
All: We feel the mercy of God eager to embrace us.
 We sense the presence of truth seeking to engage us.

Gathering Prayer

We praise you and thank you, Loving God, for your gracious counsel and faithful care. We have come here from anxious toil and lonely hope seeking a quiet time of restoration and renewal. We bring the burdens we carry, knowing that your love makes them seem lighter. We bring our pretenses, seeking to lay them aside in honest humility. We long to lead lives worthy of the best we know. Speak your word to us once more, to sharpen our hearing and guide our actions. Amen.

Gloria Patri [Video - <https://youtu.be/OLz3R1hnUjs>]

Scripture Readings

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

⁹You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. ¹¹As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, ¹²urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. ¹³We also constantly give thanks to God for this,

that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

Matthew 23:1-12

¹ Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, ² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; ³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach. ⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. ⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. ⁶ They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues, ⁷ and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi. ⁸ But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all students. ⁹ And call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father--the one in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called leaders, for you have one leader, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Special Music

“Hymns of Adoration”
arr. Phillip Keveren.

Chris Harris and Lynne Walker

[Video (arr. Hayes) <https://youtu.be/JTwlvDYVlk4>]

Sermon

“As You Are”

“Remember, Cinderella, you must leave the ball before the bell strikes midnight.” We remember. We all love fairy tales. And we know what happens next. Cinderella goes to the ball and has a wonderful time. She meets the prince, and they fall in love. Then, before you know it, the bell is tolling, and Cinderella must flee. Why? We all know why. Because the golden coach will turn into a pumpkin, the snow-white steeds will all become mice, and her beautiful gown will once again turn into rags. And Cinderella? She will be exposed for who she really is.

It is all so familiar to us. Put on a show. Impress the crowd. Win the favor of the powerful. How? Well, present yourself as something more than you are. That is until the bewitching hour strikes, and it all comes tumbling down.

In today's passage we are approaching the bewitching hour, when what is true will be revealed. The debates between Jesus and the religious leaders have come to an end. And now Jesus speaks truth to his followers, using those same leaders as a type of example. But it is not so much a negative example, as an honest example. In the midst of all the pomp and bluster Jesus says ‘I know who you really are’. Yes, you, Scribes and Pharisees. And I know you too disciples. So pay attention!

Jesus recognizes the position given to the priests and scribes and Pharisees. “they sit on the seat of Moses”, and he tells his listeners “listen to what they say, but do not do what they do; for they preach, but do not practice.” Jesus knows these people have the authority as religious leaders and they know their stuff, but there is the rub. In spite of appearances, in spite of

knowledge, in spite of position, they are missing the mark. They have an important role to play as leaders, only they aren't leading, at least not in the direction that counts.

Why? Because a leader, especially a religious leader, is first and foremost a follower. To be one set aside for God's use, is to be set aside for God. Leaders are meant to care for others, as they know God cares. They are to oversee and help others to live in, and live out, what is good and right. As the leaders of Israel their purpose is to lead the people of God into the presence of God, that together they might all know God's grace.

That is an awesome call. So what has gone so wrong? The problem, it seems, is that they have gotten caught up in trappings of faith. They take stock in big Bible notebooks, and fancy robes. They live for their reputations and titles, for recognition and honor. Now, it's bad enough that it gets in their way, but it is getting in everyone else's way too. Their ideas and ideals have become a burden that no one, including themselves, can live under. And Jesus says to all this, Hey you, disciples of mine, watch out! It can happen to you too!

As a minister, I must admit this passage makes me cringe! And you all know why, right? OK, yes I like my robes, and I like stained glass windows, and I like beautiful organ music. Don't you? I am also pretty good around the Scriptures, spent decades studying in fact. And I don't think you are quick to dismiss that either. But here is the problem for me, and I expect for you. There is no way I can keep up with all that I know and teach. At least that is what I say to myself. But I am your leader, I have been chosen by God, ordained by the United Church of Christ, and called by you. Lucky you! So how am I to live as your pastor? And how are you going to live with me? After all, the church, and any institution, is based on power and position, authority and roles. It has been that way since the days of Moses and David, and since the days of Jesus, Peter and Paul.

The good news is that, by the grace of God, there is a way through this conundrum. Do you remember Judge Judy? She has had a television show for 25 years, settling disputes in a t.v. courtroom. In an interview she told how she once asked her husband, who was also a judge, to take out the trash. And he griped, "Why should I have to do it, I'm a judge" Her reply? "OK, then put on your robes, and take out the trash". It fits the bill, doesn't it?

That is God's corrective measure for all of us, high or low, known or unknown – put on your robes and take out the trash. Jesus says the corrective to false leadership, and the mark of true discipleship is humble service. We need both. And we often resist both.

Of course, humility is tough to bear, mostly because we really don't know what humility is. We think being humble is being a door mate, allowing others not just to step over us, but to step all over us. That is not humility. The word humble has its root in the word 'humus' and it means 'from the ground' or 'from the earth'. To be humble is to know where you really come from, to know who you really are - and to live with that truth. We all have humble beginnings. God formed mankind from the earth, and breathed into them the breath of life. That is true for me, and that is true for you. So there is no need for either of us to get uppity with one another, regardless of our titles or positions. That is Jesus' expectation for all of us – to be truly humble. That is why he tells us to lay aside the honorifics of Father, Rabbi and Leader. Because we are

all on a level playing field before God - our Father, our Teacher and our Lord. And living level is what humility is, whether you are a doctor or a doorman.

And just as much as we need to have the right attitude of humility we are also expected to live in right action - which means being a servant. It is just the opposite of what we might want or even expect. But it does make sense. To be a servant is to be without much status, or many claims for yourself. To be a servant means you are not concerned for who you are, you are concerned with what is needed. You can recognize others needs because you are not caught up in your own.

In 1953 a man arrived at the Chicago railroad station to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. He stepped off the train, a tall man with bushy hair and a big mustache. As the cameras flashed and city officials approached with hands outstretched to meet him, he thanked them politely. Then he asked to be excused for a minute. He walked through the crowd to the side of an elderly black woman struggling with two large suitcases. He picked them up, smiled, and escorted her to the bus, helped her get on, and wished her a safe journey. Then Albert Schweitzer turned to the crowd and apologized for keeping them waiting. One member of the reception committee told a reporter, "That's the first time I ever saw a sermon walking."

The living sermon Albert Schweitzer preached, is the lesson Jesus would teach us today. Jesus would have us live a life of integrity, you know the saying 'what you see is what you get'. That is what God is asking for. Christ is trying to reach our hearts with this great truth. You do not have to be perfect, God knows you all too well for that, and so does everyone around you. But we can make it if we can live with that fact- knowing who we are, and who we are not; and if we are willing to truly care for one another, love one another, forgive one another, help one another, be servants to each other, in all humility and hope.

Amen.

***Hymn**

“Dear Lord and Father of Mankind”
Whittier, Maher

Lynne Walker

[Video <https://youtu.be/1KcjZ2pYstM>]

1 Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.

3 O Sabbath rest by Galilee,
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!

4 Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

5 Breathe through the pulses of desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm!

Joys and Concerns

As you meet with God in prayer, please lift up the joys and concerns shared through the Trumpet Blast. God is eager to be your help and strength, to listen to you and meet your needs. Prayer is a gift we can always use.

Prayers of the People

Gracious God, we thank you for your remarkable patience and kindness toward us. We thank you that you know us as we truly are, and have accepted us with open arms. We thank you for Jesus Christ, who came among us as your humble servant, to restore us to you and to true community with each another. We thank you for your Spirit, who meets us in our need, heals our brokenness, and leads us to follow Christ in humble service. And so we come to you now, O God, seeking your guidance and power.

And so we pray, for your church and for this congregation. Help us to be honest with you and with one another, that we may grow in grace and love, compassion and caring that reflects your goodness and grace. Free us from our self-concern that we may become genuine representatives of your gospel.

We pray for all who are called as leaders in this world. Grant them the humility to recognize the common bond of humanity and the responsibility you have placed on them. Grant that all people, high and low, subjects and rulers, may receive from you the fullness of your blessings. We especially pray for all who are in need today. Grant your healing to the ill, your comfort to the sorrowful, and your aid to the needy. We also lift before you the needs of ... and we thank you for....

We praise you, Glorious God, for all your goodness to us, through Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray...

Lord's Prayer

Choral Response [Video - https://youtu.be/lAivVHv_mbc]

Offering

When we recognize the fullness of God's goodness toward us, it opens our hearts to gratitude and humility. When we realize God's concern for all the world it compels us to genuine, gracious service. Today we acknowledge both through our generous offerings. Let us pray.

We offer these gifts, O God, not to exalt ourselves before others, but to lift up the world to you. May they support the work of this church in teaching your truth, and sharing your loving-care. May they be a witness to the depth of your grace and the power of the gospel. Amen.

Doxology [Video - <https://youtu.be/5I7PEGUPAXQ>]

Common Commission

Let us go forth into the world in peace, being of good courage, holding fast to that which is good, rendering to no one evil for evil, strengthening the faint-hearted, supporting the weak, helping the afflicted, honoring all persons, loving and serving the Lord, and rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Benediction

Go now into the world,

Doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord, Amen.

Postlude

"Go Now in Peace"
Don Besig/Nancy Price.
[Video https://youtu.be/U_yAqjMg798]

Lynne Walker