

October 22, 2021 – English Worship Service – 30th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Invocation

Send your Holy Spirit into our hearts, Almighty God, to rule and direct us according to your will, to comfort us in all our temptations and afflictions, to defend us from all error, and lead us into all truth; that we, being steadfast in the faith, may increase in love and in all good works. Through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Hymn: *Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound*

<https://youtu.be/N5Dz6Rch3n4>

1. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!
3. Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.
4. The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.
5. When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we'd first begun.

Call to Worship [*Adapted from Psalm 134:1-8*]

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad.
O magnify the LORD; let us exalt his name together.
I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from my fears.
Look to him and you will never be ashamed.
This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble.
The angel of the LORD protects those who fear him, and delivers them.
O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him.

First Scripture Lesson: Hebrews 7:23-28

23 Furthermore, the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; ²⁴but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever. ²⁵Consequently he is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

26 For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷Unlike the other high priests, he has no need to

offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; this he did once for all when he offered himself. ²⁸For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God!

Prayer of Confession (Unison)

Remember that our Lord Jesus Christ can sympathize with our weaknesses, since in every respect he was tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with boldness approach the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need. Let us confess our sins before God and our neighbor.

Lord of grace and power, we confess the ways we remain blind to the needs of the world through the wasting of our gifts and withholding our love. Selfishness prevents us from seeing the ways that our actions or our inactions affect others. We remain silent in the face of injustice and refuse to acknowledge your presence when you are near. Have mercy, Lord. Restore us by your power. Empower us with the vision to see where you lead, so we may follow in the way of righteousness.

Silent Prayer

[Lord, continue to hear our prayer as we confess to you in silence...]

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. Know that you are forgiven, and be at peace. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

O Lord our God, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, that we may be obedient to your will and live always for your glory; through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

Second Scripture Reading: Mark 10:46-52

⁴⁶They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. ⁴⁷When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁸Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" ⁴⁹Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." ⁵⁰So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. ⁵¹Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again." ⁵²Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

Hymn: Open My Eyes, that I May See

<https://youtu.be/tO87dwn-IQ>

1. Open my eyes, that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp and set me free.

Refrain

Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes (ears, heart), illumine me,
Spirit divine!

2. Open my ears, that I may hear
Voices of truth Thou sendest clear;
And while the wave notes fall on my ear,
Everything false will disappear. (Refrain)
3. Open my mouth, and let me bear,
Gladly the warm truth everywhere;
Open my heart and let me prepare
Love with Thy children thus to share. (Refrain)

Sermon: *Believing is Seeing*

I've mentioned before that Myra and I once traveled to the Middle East about fifteen years ago as part of a seminary class. In addition to the usual tourist destinations that are typical of such a journey, our faithful group of pilgrims also visited the city of Jericho in the West Bank on our way from Jordan to Galilee. It was there that we saw the site where archaeologists were carefully excavating the ancient walls which once surrounded the city – the same walls which are the setting for our scripture lesson today. Some often refer to the Holy Land as “the fifth gospel” for the way that it tells the physical story of the Good News. It's quite humbling to see the same landscape and experience the same environment that Jesus and his disciples would have known, which helps one form a connection between then and now.

Even though we saw some amazing sights during our tour, the modern political realities of the region were difficult to escape. One might even describe our experience in Jericho as “eye opening” – one which unfortunately, most Americans will not have. We only arrived in the city after passing through a series of military checkpoints, where we saw heavily armed Israeli youths standing mere meters away from their Palestinian counterparts, with little more than barbed wire separating the two. And as we made our way into Jericho, the evidences of the ongoing occupation of Palestinian territory by Israeli defense forces were everywhere, revealed in destroyed infrastructure, the absence of basic public services, closed hospitals, shuttered schools and boarded up storefronts. And yet, even though the American government is largely responsible for financing the occupation of Palestine, never once did our group hear anyone say something like “Death to America” or even “Death to Israel”. Whenever we would ask native Palestinians about the occupation (regardless of whether they were Christian or Muslim), they would each say the exact same thing: “Go home and tell people what you see.”

The story of Jesus healing Bartimaeus is miraculous, but at the same time, it's kind of a letdown. As Jesus' ministry gains momentum in Mark's gospel, it appears as if Jesus' miracles become more and more spectacular as the story goes on: walking on water, feeding five-thousand people, raising the dead, and so on. And yet, by the end of the tenth chapter, as Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem to meet his fate, his chances to amaze the crowds are dwindling by the hour. Thus, compared to what we have seen so far, the healing of just another blind man seems redundant and banal. Perhaps Jesus is simply teaching his followers about the nature of Christian mission – as it is rarely, if ever, exciting or spectacular, but more often a process of endless repetition – doing what you can to help the next person in line. Such tediousness can make it difficult to see the miracle within the miracle that is experienced, not with healing necessarily, but through restoration.

In the Gospel of Mark, people often struggle with Jesus' identity. Even the disciples, those closest to Jesus, never truly know who he is. They see many amazing things, and still Jesus must

admonish them constantly for their lack of understanding [4:13, 6:12, 7:18, 8:17, 21]. Yet every now and then in our story, we encounter someone who gets it – someone who does in fact understand. And rarely does this person come from a place where one might expect. They do not come from among the pious or the privileged, but from the margins of acceptable society and religious life. Yet no matter if they assume the form of a man struggling with demons, a desperate mother, a blind beggar, or even a sworn enemy, such persons teach valuable lessons to the faithful about what it truly means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

After all, how does one measure the success of Christian mission? Does one gauge it in terms of great religious movements, profound theological insights or huge cathedrals spiraling toward the heavens? Does one measure it by church attendance, successful educational programs or by the amount of the weekly offering? According to the Gospel of Mark, by those standards, Jesus' earthly ministry was a colossal failure, for he would go to the cross abandoned and alone. No, true success in Christian mission comes from something greater, not only knowing and believing in Jesus Christ, but understanding who he is – and only by understanding who he is, can we truly understand what it means to be his disciples.

No matter how physically or morally strong we may consider ourselves to be, to our Lord, we all appear as blind beggars on the side of the road. By our nature, we are limited in our capacity to conceive of the world that exists beyond our immediate senses. The story of Bartimaeus teaches us that if we truly want to see, we must have the courage to cry out to our Lord to seek restoration and wholeness. And when people try to silence us either by ridiculing us or by holding us back, we should proclaim the coming Messiah with even greater zeal. And once we finally have our Savior's attention, we should shrug off all pretense to present ourselves to the Lord as we truly are, exposed and vulnerable as a newborn child, as we await the power of his healing touch.

But wait. Let's take a step back and think about this for a minute. Is that what we really want: To have our sight restored? Are we truly prepared for what it means to finally open our eyes? Oh, we can imagine how wonderful it will be to see the interesting people and places and the pretty colors, but this doesn't mean that we'll only see the good stuff. It means witnessing some rather unpleasant things as well – things we do not wish to see – things like poverty, hunger, cruelty and oppression. It means becoming aware of the harm that we (knowingly or unknowingly) inflict upon others. It means looking across the wire to see our enemy as a beloved child of God. Being restored means being empowered to do the work of our Lord. It means accepting responsibility for others who cannot see, so that we may guide them in ways of righteousness and peace. But before any of this can happen – before we dare enter the presence of the living Christ to demand our own restoration, we must want it – we must know that we need it – and we must not let anything or anyone stand in our way.

There's no doubt that life would be a lot less complicated if we just kept quiet in our little corner and didn't bother anyone. But the Lord requires disciples with vision, and not just in troubled places like Israel-Palestine, but in our nation and in our community as well. When Jesus heals someone in the gospels, he's not just relieving them of a physical burden. Through restoration, the Savior issues an invitation to join him in the hard, unpleasant, and often unrewarding task of the gospel. For the Lord needs people who are able to look beyond their immediate desires. The Lord needs people who are prepared to speak out and be heard (even when it's unpopular). The Lord needs disciples who will accompany him on that hard road – not just part of the way, and not just most of the way – but all the way to the cross. Should any of us have the courage to open our eyes to follow where he leads, then the glory of God's kingdom will be ours to behold.

In the darkness, you hear the news that Jesus is coming. What will you do?

Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. **Amen.**

Interlude

Hymn: *Lord Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing*

<https://youtu.be/aGzMd1i92lo>

1. Lord, dismiss us with Thy blessing;
Fill our hearts with joy and peace;
Let us each, Thy love possessing,
Triumph in redeeming grace.
O refresh us, O refresh us,
Traveling through this wilderness.
2. Thanks we give and adoration
For Thy gospel's joyful sound;
May the fruits of Thy salvation
In our hearts and lives abound.
Ever faithful, Ever faithful
To the truth may we be found.
3. So that when Thy love shall call us,
Savior, from the world away,
Let no fear of death appall us,
Glad Thy summons to obey.
May we ever, May we ever
Reign with Thee in endless day.

***Affirmation of Faith:** from *The Heidelberg Catechism*, Question #1

Leader: What is your only comfort, in life and in death?

People: That I belong—body and soul, in life and in death—not to myself but to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil; that he protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, that everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him. Amen.

Announcements

Offering

Offertory

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the God the Father. Inspired by the abundance of God's generosity, let us return gifts of gladness and thanksgiving through our offerings.

**Prayer of Dedication*

Gracious Lord, who makes all things possible, we once again give you thanks for all that you have given us through the grace and love of your Son Jesus Christ. Accept these humble offerings as a symbol of our gratitude, so that may shape them (and us) according to your will and for the glory of your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Prayers of the People & the Lord's Prayer

Gracious Lord, we thank you for acts great and small which inspire us to follow you. Open our eyes, not only to seek you, but to make us more aware of the world which surrounds us. Help us to see the faces of those who are subject to violence, oppression or exploitation so that we may

be moved to alleviate their suffering. Empower us with the vision that we need to be your faithful servants so that we may, through our words and actions, declare you to be Lord of all.

As always, we pray for your church that it may be an instrument of your love in the world. Give wisdom to our leaders and all who have been entrusted with power, so that all people may know your peace and justice.

Empower those who face adversity: those who are sick, those who grieve, those in prison; the lonely and the addicted.

Give strength and consolation to those who live with special needs.

Give us the compassion that we need to provide for the poor, to shelter those who are without homes and to comfort those who grieve.

Liberate souls trapped by fear or uncertainty, and bolster those with fading hopes.

Strengthen those who we entrust with the well-being of our community. Encourage all who use their gifts as a means of serving you.

Lastly, we offer our thanksgiving for the example of all who have come before us in the faith, and who now rest with you. Allow our voices to echo their praise, so that we too may behold the wonders of your kingdom.

We pray for these things in the words that our Lord Jesus Christ taught us saying...

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 debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Charge & Benediction

Be watchful, stand firm in your faith,
be courageous and strong.
Let all that you do be done in love.

May the God of hope
fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia! Amen.