

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost
October 4, 2020

(Read the prayers and scripture readings and recite the Creed aloud, even if you are by yourself, in order to hear with the ears each one. Sing or read the final hymn aloud.)

Prepare for worship: Sit in silence or with soft music for a few moments

Call to Worship:

Be Present at Our Table, Lord (UMH 621)

Be present at our table, Lord;
be here and everywhere adored;
thy creatures bless, and grant that we
may feast in paradise with thee.

Centering Words:

The presence of the God who unites all people in communion is with us in this time of worship. May we be drawn closer to God, to each other and all people throughout creation.

Prayer of the Day:

Cornerstone of our faith, do not abandon us when we fall away from you. You are the true master of the vineyard. We are here to work in your fields and make disciples throughout the world. Bring us into your kingdom, that we might taste the sweetness of your mercy and share the joy of your grace which comes through Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray: (*Abingdon Worship Annual, 2020, 215*)

The Lord's Prayer:

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. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith: 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, dead, and buried; the third day he rose from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

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

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Old Testament Reading: Exodus 20: 1-4, 7-9, 12-20

Psalm 19

Epistle Reading Philippians 3: 4b-14

Special Music

Gospel Reading Matthew 21: 33-46

Sermon: *Worthless Credentials*

Hymn:

Song of Hope (TFWS, 2186)

May the God of hope go with us every day,
filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.
May the God of justice speed us on our way,
bringing light and hope to every land and race.

Praying, let us work for peace;
singing, share our joy with all;
working for a world that's new,
faithful when we hear Christ's call

Benediction:

Let us go forth remembering that our entrance into the Kingdom is not based on who we are but upon whose we are. Let us live in the way of the one to whom we belong.

Response:

God Be with You till We Meet Again (UMH 673)
God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Matthew 21: 33-46 Philippians 3:4b-14

We love credentials. When we hire somebody for a job, we want to know they have the right credentials. We want to know they have been properly trained. We want to know they have the experience on the job. You don't want the orthopedist who is replacing your knee to say that you are the first one he or she has ever done. You want the one who has done a couple hundred at least. You want know that the person working for you is the best qualified with the best credentials possible.

But sometimes you may get the most qualified person with impeccable credentials, and they just don't work out. Maybe their personality is not right. Maybe they are the "we are going to do it my way or not at all type", like insisting on painting the room mauve when you want rose. Maybe they are the "this way of doing it was fine in my old job" type and will not do it the way it should be done in this job. Maybe they just are not willing to listen to new ideas. They are not willing to change the way they do things as the way things are done changes. They may have perfect qualifications and credentials, look good on paper, but just don't cut it in reality.

To a degree this is what this parable of the wicked tenants is about. The chief priests, elders, and Pharisees had impeccable credentials. The chief priests had been working in temple service since the return of the exiles from Babylon and the rebuilding of the temple. Not only that, they had to trace their lineage all the way back to the Levi, the tribe of Moses and Aaron. The elders had experience and wisdom. The Pharisee had studied the Torah. They knew and kept every tittle and jot of the law. If these folks were not qualified to be in the Kingdom of God no one was.

Oh, and look at Paul. Paul had every credential in the book. Everything in his life was done according to the law from birth. He had the right genealogy, training, even enthusiasm. By this he was definitely qualified to be in the Kingdom of God.

Yet when the message of God's kingdom was delivered by the prophets to the people in authority, both political and religious, it was rejected. Throughout the course of the history of Israel, the word of God's kingdom which came through

the prophets was rejected. Some were beaten. Some were imprisoned. Some were killed. Now God was sending the Son with the message that the Kingdom of God was near, and they would kill him. In spite of their impeccable credentials to be in the Kingdom of God, God would take the Kingdom from the chief priests, elders and Pharisees.

Even Paul states that all his credentials are worthless when it comes to entering the Kingdom of God. All of Paul's "credentials" are not the reason he may enter the kingdom of God. So, if Paul's credentials are not getting him in the Kingdom and the Kingdom is being taken away from all those that have impeccable credentials, how does one get into the Kingdom of God?

In the original Greek, the phrase that is translated as harvest is the "season of the fruit". It is the time when the grapevines bear fruit. Notice in verse 43, Jesus says that the kingdom will be taken from the chief priests, elders and Pharisees and given to people that produce the fruits of the Kingdom. Jesus is saying that entrance into the Kingdom of heaven is not based on one's credentials, but on whether or not they bear the fruits of the Kingdom. They bear the fruit that comes from living by the rule of God.

Living by the rule of God is not living according to every tittle and jot of the law, but living according to the heart of Torah, to love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. So, the fruit of the Kingdom of God is to worship and obey God alone as the ruler of your life and to show love for all neighbors. The rejection of the message of the Kingdom of God given by the prophets to Israel was their failure to worship God alone and their not caring for the widows, orphans, poor and resident aliens. As those in power in Israel did not bear this fruit, the Kingdom was taken from them and given to those who did bear fruit.

Our entrance into the Kingdom of God is not based upon any of the "credentials" we think we may have. It is not based on any theology degree one may have. It is not based on how many years of service in the church one may have. It is not based on how good a teacher or preacher one may be. It is not based on how many "good" works one may have done. It is not based on our race, nationality or even our religious affiliation.

Our entrance into the Kingdom of God is based on whether we bear fruit of the Kingdom. Do our actions, our service, our teaching, our preaching, our good works come from our love of God and neighbor? Do we show love for all people, especially the marginalized and outcast? Our entrance into the Kingdom of God is based on our love for God and for our neighbor, down the street and on the other side of the world.

Today is World Communion Sunday. We share the body and blood of Christ with people throughout the world. We share the fruit of the vine with all who bear the fruit of the Kingdom. We will partake under the oak tree, remembering that we are in union with Christ and with those who may be partaking under a baobab tree in Africa, a palm in South America, a teak in Asia, or a beech in Europe. We come bearing the fruit of love and unity in a world that is so divided. We join in communion with all who bear the fruit of the Kingdom in solidarity that God's rule of love will conquer all earthly kingdoms.