

Order of Service for September 12, 2021 - Pentecost 16

GATHERING

Confession and Forgiveness

P - In the name of the One who creates us, who walks with us, and who calls us, the Holy Trinity (†), we confess who and what we are, trusting in God's mercy and forgiveness.

[*Short pause*]

Loving, compassionate God

C - We come to you, admitting our need, admitting our lack, admitting our brokenness. We have neglected our responsibilities to you, to our neighbour, to your creation, and even to ourselves. Forgive us. Remind us of your love. Show us a new way, that we may trust your promise, live more fully, and follow more faithfully. We pray in the name of Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

P - God's mercy inspires repentance. Therefore, as a called and ordained minister in the church of Christ, I declare that you are forgiven in the name of Jesus (†). May the Spirit of peace fill you to overflowing with the love of God.

C - Amen.

Gathering Song - 808, Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song

Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey.

I'll tell everybody about you wherever I go.

You alone are our life and our peace and our love.

Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey.

Lord Jesus, I'll praise you as long as I journey.

May all of my joy be a faithful reflection of you.

May the earth and the sea and the sky join my song.

Lord Jesus, I'll praise you as long as I journey.

As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant.

To carry your cross and to share all your burdens and tears.

For you saved me by giving your body and blood.

As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant.

I fear in the dark and the doubt of my journey;

but courage will come with the sound of your steps by my side.

And with all of the family you saved by your love,

we'll sing to your dawn at the end of your journey.

(Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)

Greeting

P - The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

C - And also with you.

Kyrie

We confess that we are too eager to judge others, and claim forgiveness for us. Lord, have mercy. We confess that we have turned our backs on the image of God in our neighbours. Christ, have mercy.

Responding to God's call, we claim mercy for *others*; we claim *responsibility* for ourselves.
Lord, have mercy.

Prayer of the Day

P - Let us pray. O God, through suffering and rejection you bring forth our salvation, and by the glory of the cross you transform our lives. Grant that, for the sake of the gospel, we may turn from the lure of evil, take up your cross, and follow your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord.

C - Amen.

WORD

Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia. Christ suffered for sins once for all.

The righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. Alleluia

Gospel Reading

Mark 8:27-38

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

The gospel of the Lord.

Sermon

If you were paying attention at all last week, you were totally aware of the fact that last Saturday was the 20th anniversary of 9/11. Personally I was inundated by people asking, "Where were you when you heard about the attacks?" And yes, I remember, and I suspect most of you do, too.

But as a very wise friend of mine said on Saturday morning, the actual anniversary, "Today I don't want to talk about machines and buildings. I want to talk about people." He had no need to rehash details of the planes or the towers. He wanted to focus on the people.

That strikes me as a good priority.

One story of one person that I have just recently heard was that of Father Michael Judge. He was a Roman Catholic priest who served as the chaplain to one of the fire stations in Manhattan. When word came of the attack, Fr. Judge headed downtown, so he could be present with the other first responders, and help whoever he could. I don't know the details of what

happened, but he was killed quite soon after arriving. He is considered, by some reporters anyway, to be the first “first responder” on the ground to be killed.

When that happened, the firefighters carried his body into a nearby church and laid his body on the altar, and when their day was finally done, they went back to the church and carried his body to the place where other victims’ bodies were being taken care of. If you see the photo of that procession, it looks like an honour guard. And I’m sure that the firefighters meant it to be that way.

I think Fr. Judge is a wonderful example of someone doing exactly what Jesus describes in the portion of Mark’s gospel that we just heard.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

Following Jesus is a risky thing to do. It will put us in harm’s way, it will expose us to dangers that we can’t even imagine, and it will sometimes result in death.

But here’s the thing. When we **think** about taking up the cross, I can’t help but suspect that we are thinking in terms of rushing into burning buildings, or diving into freezing rivers, or flying in helicopters in hurricane winds to find a sinking boat. We are thinking about the big events, the splashy news, the massive headlines. And when our lives don’t have those moments, it’s too easy for us to assume that this whole “taking up your cross” thing isn’t really about us. We assume it’s about the professional heroes, not “little old me.”

We have all heard about the last night of Jesus’ life. He has gathered with his friends, had a meal, and, as he did in today’s reading from Mark, Jesus tells his friends that it is his destiny to die, and as part of that process, he tells his friends that they will abandon him.

Peter, his best friend, jumps up and yells out, “No way! **I** won’t leave you, no matter what! Even if it means a very public death, I will **never** turn my back on you!”

But again, I can’t help but think that Peter was thinking in terms of a very public, very headline-grabbing scene. And, of course, the challenge is that most of life is not lived in the headlines! Most of life is small. Most of life is hidden. Most of life is out of sight. And we see this, quite clearly, in how Peter’s story plays out.

After Jesus is arrested (and do note that Peter ran away when the arrest took place!), Peter was following Jesus from a safe distance, moving around in the shadows. The woman who let him into the courtyard asked him if he was a follower of Jesus, and Peter said, “No, I’m just interested.”

A bit later, some others asked him if he was a follower, and Peter pretended he couldn’t understand them because of their accent.

And finally, they pushed him into a corner and said, “Your accent shows that you are from the same region that Jesus is from. You **must** be a disciple!” Peter took his opportunity to make a grand and glorious statement, all right. It was headline time! But what Peter said was, “In the name of God, I do not know the man!”

Peter needed to learn, as do we, that this is why taking up the cross is so risky. It is in these small moments that we are called to take up the cross. It is in these small interactions that we are called to take up the cross. It is in these nearly invisible encounters that we are called to take up the cross.

And the primary way we do this is by being intentional about serving our neighbour. **Even if**, and maybe **especially** if, it impinges on our own convenience.

We live in a society where we are expected to look after ourselves first and foremost. And in this age of hyper-individuality, we are being encouraged to look after ourselves almost exclusively. We see this in spades in the misguided protests taking place at some hospitals lately,

in which people are protesting vaccinations by interfering with the medical care of others. Having opinions is fine; protesting is fine. But the target of your protests needs to be “the powers that be,” not the helpless, not the sick, not the weak who cannot fight back.

We, especially followers of Jesus, are called to take up our cross by *servicing* the helpless, the sick, the weak, not by using them as pawns in our power games.

And there is one more item which has been in the news lately, which you will have heard about if you’ve been paying any attention at all. That is, of course, that there is a federal election coming up next week. And this is a great opportunity to take up our cross on behalf of our neighbour. No one will see your vote. No one will know what motivated you to vote. Voting is a prime example of those small moments, those small interactions, those nearly invisible encounters, where we are called to follow Jesus by not voting for ourselves or our wallets, but by voting for our neighbour. We are quite possibly being called by Jesus, to vote against ourselves, and vote for those who have no vote. People like school children, who are too frequently used as pawns. People like convicted felons, who have had their right to vote taken away by the legal system, and who will never be forgiven by that legal system. People like refugees, who aren’t even Canadian, and who are labelled potential terrorists simply for trying to get their families out of danger.

Taking up our cross, on behalf of our neighbour, is not convenient. It’s the exact *opposite* of a convenience! It will put us on the spot, it will put us in harm’s way, each and every day. And we don’t even have to rush into burning buildings.

It will be a hard journey. We will frequently fail. And when we do, we will discover the risen Jesus reaching out to us, welcoming us back, and inviting us again, to take up our cross.

As Clifton Black, a professor at Princeton has said,

In no Gospel does Jesus say, “It is my responsibility to die for you, while you applaud my heroism.” Instead: “The Son of Man is ordained by God to suffer, die, and be raised. And so are his followers. Are you coming?”

Amen.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Hymn of the Day - 685, Take My Life, That I May Be

Take my life, that I may be consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days; let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice and let me sing always, only, for my King;
take my lips and let them be filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use ev’ry power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

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Prayers of the People

A - Let us offer our prayers for the world God loves, the church God calls, and for all people according to their needs.

[*Short pause*]

A - God of the cross, the cross, in *any* of its forms, is not convenient. It's not comfortable. It's not the way we want to go. Forgive our self-centredness, and move us toward you. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of the cross, you call us to give up our self-serving ways so that we may serve our neighbours, love our enemies, and care for our planet home. All this "giving" frightens us. Strengthen our faith, and move us toward you. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of the cross, we are encouraged to look after number one, to treat our desires as needs, to demand instant gratification. Free us from the distracting voices which crave our attention, and move us toward you. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of the cross, you call your church to a life of service, even to the point of giving our lives. Open us to sharing your love, whatever the cost to ourselves, or to our congregation. Move us toward our neighbour. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of the cross, you do not demand suffering from us, but following Jesus will result in suffering. Remind us of your presence in the middle of our pain, that we may share that presence with those who suffer around us, including those we name before you.

[*Long pause*]

Move us toward our neighbour. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - God of the cross, following Jesus has never been convenient, has never been easy. Move us beyond what "comes naturally"; move us beyond our fears and our doubts; move us toward our neighbour, whoever that may be. God who is with us,

C - Hear our prayer.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who continues to teach us to pray,

Lord's Prayer

C - Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread, and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

SENDING

Benediction

May almighty God,
The inconvenient Father who created us to live in love,
The inconvenient Son (†) who died and rose to bring us new life,

And the inconvenient Spirit who pushes us to the hard parts,
bless us all, now and forever. Amen.

Sending Song - 733, Great is Thy Faithfulness

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not;
as thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Refrain

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided;
great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. *Refrain*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! *Refrain*

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Dismissal

P - Go in peace. Take up your cross.

C - Thanks be to God!

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