



Church of the Epiphany

FROM THE MOUNTAIN TOP

Pentecost 21 • Cloudcroft, New Mexico • October 13, 2024



Pentecost 21, Proper 23

O God, our refuge and strength, true source of all godliness: Graciously hear the devout prayers of your Church, and grant that those things which we ask faithfully, we may obtain effectually; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Readings for Pentecost 21

Amos 5:6-15
Psalm 90:1-12
Hebrews 3:1-6
Mark 10:17-31

Good morning! I am thankful today that we do not live in an area of the world where the threat of hurricanes is a part of our daily lives. But then the threat of forest fires is real enough for us here on the mountaintop.

And I pray that the Scriptures we read today are real enough for us all. Remember in the old Sunday School days, we were often challenged to try to inject ourselves into the story in the reading and think about what it would have been like and how we would have reacted. That method can still help make each story more real for us. But maybe a more up to date strategy would be to revise the Scripture presentation into a "Frequently Asked Questions" format. Our Anglican Catechism is set up that way. I suspect most, if not all, of us have encountered the "FAQ" section on a website when researching something. All too often, however, my experience has been that either my question is not one that is frequently asked, or if it is, the website does not have or does not want to provide a useful answer.

Consider today's Gospel reading. The man who ran up to Jesus presented what is no doubt a Frequently Asked Question, verse 17, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Now even if that question is not at the top of your FAQ list, I'll bet it is in the top five! Strangely enough, Jesus acts a little like an evasive website - He takes His time about providing an answer. Jesus first asks His own question, verse 18, "Why do you call me good?" Then follows the interchange about the commandments and the man confidently

responds that he has kept all the commandments since his youth, Jesus - note particularly these words in verse 21, "**And Jesus, looking at him, loved him.**" Then Jesus confronted the man with the truth. Jesus first LOVED him, then began to answer the question, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said - and remember he is answering **this** man's question - this is not a parable. So He said to **this** man, still in verse 21, "You lack one thing; go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Now as we read further, we learn that the man chose not to do what Jesus required of him. And Jesus went on to explain things further to His disciples. His teaching centered on how riches can pre-occupy us to the exclusion of all else, particularly to the exclusion of the Lord of all life. His disciples struggled to understand, asking essentially the same Frequently Asked Question as did the man. Now recall Jesus' response to them, beginning in verse 29, where He told His disciples that there is no one who has left behind all they have left behind, "for my sake and the sake of the Gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, **with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.**" His answer is pointing first to the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth, in this life, and then to the Kingdom of Heaven for eternity.

Please take note of the context. Jesus began by answering one man's question. No doubt, with His loving gaze, Jesus was able to discern that, despite his apparently wholehearted obedience to the commandments, the man's heart was not fully devoted to Jesus as Lord. Unlike the disciples, the man was unable to leave behind all that was important to him "for my sake and the sake of the Gospel."

In the same way, please note that Jesus was not presenting a new teaching. He was affirming the imperatives we heard in the other readings today, beginning with our Old Testament lesson. "Seek the Lord and live," urged the prophet Amos. In that short, five-word imperative, Amos

summed up the call of God that echoes throughout Holy Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Would that it were that simple - that we who have been created in the image of God would readily choose to seek Him and live, to seek Him and live into the fullness and richness of His promises. But choices for us have never been that easy. Like Eve in the Garden, we want to do our own research, to weigh the pros and cons and consider the reviews like we were shopping at Amazon. Reading on a little further in v. 6 gives us the consequences otherwise, "Seek the Lord and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour." Amos also provides the Creator's perspective on us, v. 12, "For I know how many are your transgressions and how great are your sins." That has not changed and will never change - we can accept the absolute certainty of judgment for sin. But that is precisely what makes victory in Jesus such a magnificent gift, a promise that still brings us to our knees at the foot of the Cross.

With that in mind, we can see how it fits with our Gospel reading. For in it, the man who had come to Jesus, "went away sorrowful." In other translations, he went away "grieving." And so we may find ourselves wondering why, why exactly is it that this person "went away grieving." From Matthew's and Luke's versions of the story, we learn that the man was young and rich and a ruler. So he would have had an excellent education. No doubt he had read the law and the prophets and knew all the rules. And he had abided by every single one. Moreover, in that culture, someone who was wealthy was considered to have been blessed, blessed by God. But my sense is that with all his education and, yes, privilege, he did not expect to be seen and judged on the thoughts and intentions of his heart. No one dared confront a rich young ruler that way. Yet that was exactly what Jesus did. But note again that Jesus did so **through eyes of love**. Through eyes of love, maybe what we might call **tough** love, Jesus

saw what was most important to the rich young ruler and He saw that it was keeping him from total surrender to the sovereignty of God. When challenged to let it all go and follow Jesus as Lord, the rich young ruler was sorely disappointed. He got an answer to his petition, but clearly it wasn't the answer he wanted or expected. He got the truth. But he did not go away grieving because Jesus rejected him - Jesus didn't reject him. The man went away grieving because, as a person with an awareness of the cost of things, he realized that the cost of following Jesus was more than he was willing to pay. You might say that the rich young ruler thought he had taken obedience as far as he needed to take it. But Jesus told him to go with Him one step farther. Perhaps the man's basic salvation was not at risk - Jesus never said that it was, and apparently the man did believe in Jesus as the Christ. What Jesus **was** clearly saying was that, in order to receive **all** that I have to give, particularly in this life, you need to turn loose of all of that which you are loving more than me, even that which you see as the very foundation of your identity, so that **I** might become that foundation.

So where do we see ourselves in this story? We too may be driven to run up to and kneel before Jesus. Even though we are assured of our salvation by what Jesus did on the Cross at Calvary (we know that by grace we are saved through faith), we still find ourselves desperate for answers to everyday life's most frequently asked questions. Yet we sometimes hesitate. Despite all the good news in the Gospels, we may still fear that the answers to our frequently asked questions will not be what we want to hear. We hear Jesus' call to us, "Come unto me" but, perhaps having in mind this Gospel story, we are afraid that if we do so, we might have to change. We might have to leave something behind, something we treasure, something we love very much.

Yet sensing that the door is open, we forge ahead - at least I hope we do - perhaps even with some urgency. Remember in the Gospel reading the man "ran up" to Jesus and knelt before Him. The man was desperate for an answer, and

he wanted it right now. So he must have felt some urgent need. Jesus' response? Leave your riches behind. Put ME first. Everything else will flow from there and your riches will no longer be important. Sadly, the man decided that the cost was too great.

Now Jesus did provide the disciples with an explanation in the balance of the Gospel reading, and so perhaps they came to at least some understanding. And I pray that **we** understand, for Jesus promises not just eternal life, but also victory over the power of sin and death TODAY. He promises new life, beginning TODAY, new life that is free of the need to depend on our riches in whatever form. He is inviting, perhaps encouraging, each one of us to prayerfully consider if there are any roadblocks to going on and growing with Him. If there are, we can expect that He will answer our prayer and bring them to mind, so that we can then take them to the foot of the Cross and leave them there. And not go away grieving. Ever.

AMEN

Fr. Frank



Prayer List - 10/13/24

Gran Pastor, Fresnillo, Mexico
Senior Warden, Norma Rodriguez, Missionary
Meredith Omland

Bishop Steven and. Tricia

Those who need your healing care and strength:

Norman Bloom III
Annette Fazenbaker
Carolyn and Frank Wilson
Wayne Conine Jr.
Ellie
Clyde Brewer and family
Jean Jameson
Fr. Tom and Marilyn Atamian
Chip & Alyssa Taylor and baby
Julius
Gayla & George Chapman
Ron & Linda Westerfield

Those in the Armed Forces:

Dominick Rankin, US Army, Ft. Bliss, TX
Gabiella Murley, Ft. Bliss, TX
Mason Gregg, Camp Courtney, Okinawa
Creed Napier, US Air Force,
J.W. Grove, US Navy
Nicholas Tran, Joint Base Lewis-
McChord,
Shawn Zima, Hong Kong
Wyatt Green, US Navy

We pray for our Epiphany family:

Paul and Annette Fazenbaker;
Madeleine Fazenbaker;
Matthew Flores,
Al and Kathy Osborn
Becca & Doug Price
Debbie and Scooter Roof

Lessons for Pentecost 21 - Proper 23

October 13, 2024

Anglican Lectionary
year B

Old Testament Reading

Amos 5:6-15

6 Seek the Lord and live,

lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph,
and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel, 7
O you who turn justice to wormwood and cast
down righteousness to the earth!

8 He who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns
deep darkness into the morning and darkens the
day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out on the surface of the earth,
the Lord is his name; 9 who makes destruction
flash forth against the strong, so that destruction
comes upon the fortress.

10 They hate him who reproves in the gate, and
they abhor him who speaks the truth. 11 Therefore
because you trample on the poor and you exact
taxes of grain from him, you have built houses of
hewn stone, but you shall not dwell in them; you
have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not
drink their wine. 12 For I know how many are your
transgressions and how great are your sins— you
who afflict the righteous, who take a bribe, and
turn aside the needy in the gate. 13 Therefore he
who is prudent will keep silent in such a time, for it
is an evil time.

14 Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and
so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, as
you have said.

15 Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice
in the gate;

it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be
gracious to the remnant of Joseph.



Psalm 90:1-12

- 1 Lord, you have been our refuge *
from one generation to another.
- 2 Before the mountains were brought
forth, or the earth and the world
were made, *
you are God from everlasting, and
world without end.
- 3 You turn man back to the dust; *
you say, "Return, O children of
men."
- 4 For a thousand years in your sight are
as yesterday, *
even as a day that is past.
- 5 You scatter them as a night-watch that
comes quickly to an end; *
they are even as a dream and fade
away.
- 6 They are like the grass, which in the
morning is green, *
but in the evening is dried up and
withered.
- 7 For we consume away in your
displeasure *
and are afraid at your wrathful
indignation.
- 8 You have set our misdeeds before you, *
and our secret sins in the light of your
countenance.
- 9 For when you are angry, all our days are gone; *
we bring our years to an end, as a tale that is
told.
- 10 The days of our life are seventy years, and
though some be so strong that they
come to eighty years, *
yet is their span but labor and sorrow; so
soon it passes away, and we are gone.

11 But who regards the power of your wrath, *
and who considers the fierceness of your
anger?

12 So teach us to number our days, *
that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom

New Testament Reading Hebrews 3:1-6

3 Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, **2** who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. **3** For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. **4** (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) **5** Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, **6** but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.



The Holy Gospel

Mark 10:17-31

17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

18 And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. **19** You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'" **20** And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." **21** And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." **22** Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

23 And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" **24** And the disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how difficult it is[a] to enter the kingdom of God! **25** It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." **26** And they were exceedingly astonished, and said to him, [b] "Then who can be saved?" **27** Jesus looked at them and said, "With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God." **28** Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you." **29** Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, **30** who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. **31** But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

