

Hear what the Spirit is saying

Sunday Morning at St. Hugh's in Idyllwild, California

September 27, 2020 | Pentecost +17

Collect for Proper 21

O God, you declare your almighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: Grant us the fullness of your grace, that we, running to obtain your promises, may become partakers of your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. ~BCP 234

Ezekiel 18:1-4,25-32 NRSV

In the Hebrew scripture lesson the Lord insists that individuals are responsible for their own sins and that the people must now repent, no longer blaming their troubles on the sins of their parents

¹ The word of the Lord came to me: ² What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”? ³ As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. ⁴ Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.

²⁵ Yet you say, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? ²⁶ When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. ²⁷ Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. ²⁸ Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. ²⁹ Yet the house of Israel says, “The way of the Lord is unfair.” O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

³⁰ Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. ³¹ Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? ³² For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live.

Philippians 2:1-13 NRSV

Paul bids the new disciples to be of one mind in love, knowing how Christ Jesus accepted the condition of a servant and was obedient to the point of death. We now confess him as Lord and are called to an obedient working out of our faith.

¹ If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ² make my joy

complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷ but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸ he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death -- even death on a cross

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father

¹² Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Matthew 21:23-32 NRSV

In a response to a question about authority, Jesus tells a parable of two sons who obeyed their father differently, and he indicates that it is the same with those who are apparently obedient and disobedient in this age.

²³ When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?" ²⁴ Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'" ²⁶ But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

²⁸ "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹ He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. ³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into

the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.”

Psalm 25:1-8 BCP 614

Our Psalm Response is a prayer for forgiveness and guidance and an expression of trust in the Lord.

- 1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul; my God, I put my trust in you; *
let me not be humiliated, nor let my enemies triumph over me.
- 2 Let none who look to you be put to shame; *
let the treacherous be disappointed in their schemes.
- 3 Show me your ways, O Lord, * and teach me your paths.
- 4 Lead me in your truth and teach me, * for you are the God of my
salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.
- 5 Remember, O Lord, your compassion and love, *
for they are from everlasting.
- 6 Remember not the sins of my youth and my transgressions; *
remember me according to your love
and for the sake of your goodness, O Lord.
- 7 Gracious and upright is the Lord; *
therefore he teaches sinners in his way.
- 8 He guides the humble in doing right *
and teaches his way to the lowly.

Two Prayer Responses to the text of Philipians

Eternal God, the light of the minds that know thee, the joy of the hearts that love thee, the strength of the wills that serve thee; grant us, so to know thee that we may truly love thee, so to love thee that we may freely serve thee, whose service is perfect freedom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. [Gelasian Sacramentary](#) (7th century)

O gracious and holy Father, give us wisdom to perceive thee, intelligence to understand thee, diligence to seek thee, patience to wait for thee, eyes to behold thee, a heart to meditate upon thee and a life to proclaim thee: through the power of the spirit of Jesus Christ our Lord. Attributed to [St Benedict](#) (480–543)

Christopher Herbert, [Pocket Prayers: The Classic Collection](#)
(Pocket Prayers Series). Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd. Kindle Edition.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:6 NRSV



Commentary on Philippians 2:1-13. A Pastoral Perspective.

By Gilberto Collazo, Vice President for Missional Development and Operations, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis, Indiana

The celebrated pacifist Mohandas Gandhi is reported to have said, “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.” He made this observation in the midst of his struggle for justice for a people in the face of the occupation of his native India.

We are called to be imitators of Christ, to live in a way that allows other people to see Christ in us. What is an imitator? There is a great difference between an impersonator and an imitator. Impersonators take great pains to make people believe they are who they are not. On the other hand, imitators are clearly aware that they strive to live up to the challenge of being a reflection of the person they look up to. It is so hard to walk in the footsteps of others. Many younger siblings for years wither in the shadow of an overachieving older sibling, who sets the standard so high that it is a constant frustration to try to be like him or her. We look up to those people in church whom we consider spiritual giants and wonder if we will ever be as spiritual as they appear. At work there is always that coworker who is the top salesperson, who makes us wonder if we really have what it takes to live up to those high standards, no matter how hard we try.

Deep down inside, many of us have the clear understanding that we will fall short of a perfect imitation. That is all right. Ultimately Paul’s admonition is not about impersonating Christ, but about adopting Christlike attitudes in all aspects of our life. When we try to live up to God’s standards on our own, we become impersonators. That is a tall order and an unrealistic expectation on our part, and it is not what God expects of us.

So then, what does it mean to be called a reflection of Christ? This is not a call to perfection but, rather, an invitation to be honest with ourselves and to understand that God is doing something unique and special in each and every one of us. This is God’s challenge for us to live

in a manner that is counter-cultural. For example, when we face a national crisis such as a severe economic downturn, do we run around like Chicken Little screaming, “The sky is falling,” or do we reflect Christ by remaining calm and believing God’s promises of provision for our lives? When bad news reaches our ears, do we respond like those who live without faith, or do we reflect Christ by our reactions to the bad news?

For years as a pastor I accompanied many people through their death processes and then helped their families deal with grief and loss. Then it was my turn. I had just turned forty when I suffered my first significant loss. My father had terminal cancer and less than two months to live. The time for my test had come. Would I be a reflection of Christ and face this crisis with faith and peace, or would I give into the ranting, raving accusations against God that I had seen in so many of the individuals that I had accompanied through the loss process?

I did rant and rave. It is one thing to be on the outside looking in, and a completely different experience to find yourself directly impacted by the situation. In the midst of it all, I was able to recognize that God understood that I was human and was losing a father. Through the two final months of my father’s life, God worked in my life, as I allowed the divine presence to do so.

People saw my struggle. Even the members of my church understood I was working through something that was new and painful for me. I could have put on a happy face and hidden my sorrow, but that would have made me an impersonator of Christ. Rather, I admitted that I needed God’s presence in my life in a way I had not known before. I sought God’s presence in ways I had never done before. Some days, like Job, I sparred with God. Other days, I held a negotiation session. There were days when I had nothing to say, because I was so angry at a God who was taking my father, when there were so many others who really should have been called from this world. In the end, I was able to give my father over to God’s presence with tears in my eyes, but with peace in my heart. People would later comment on how I had been a source of comfort to them as they came to support my family and me.

Christian living is a process. God’s timeline for each one of us is unique, and only God knows what the final product is going to look like. We do not expect an instantaneous transformation of our life’s attitudes and actions, but rather an ongoing process of change that results from the ever-growing awareness of our need to be at a different place if we are to be true Christ followers. The process begins with our conscious

decision to become reflections of Christ in our actions and reactions to life.

Can the world see Christ in us? Our imitation of him is not about being complacent and well behaved. As the United States deals with immigration issues, many churches have once again declared themselves to be sanctuaries for all who need a safe place. I see Christ in the actions of these faith communities. Allowing the world to see Christ in us means that we are willing to step up to our prophetic role in the world. Can people see Christ in you?

When times get difficult, when injustices are prevalent among the people, when a word of hope is needed, let us pray that all can see Christ in us—for that is our calling: to be imitators, and not impersonators, of Christ.

Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: Year A, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, vol. 4 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011).

Imitators, not Impersonators

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(Philippians 2:1-5)

From our Outline of the Faith

Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?

A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons.

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

Prayer for Vocation in Daily Work BCP 261

Almighty God our heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth: Deliver us in our various occupations from the service of self alone, that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.