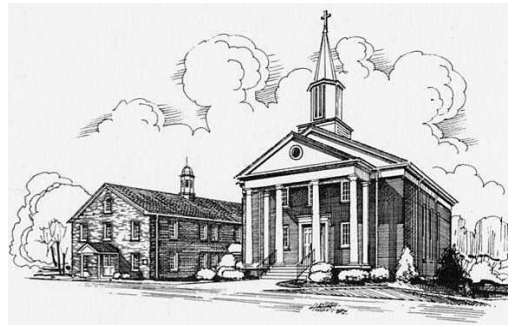


The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday Closest to June 15



Proper 12

Year A

RCL

Romans 8:26-39

Psalms 105:1-11, 45b

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

The Collect

The Collect

O God, the protector of all who trust in you,
without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy:
Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that,
with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass
through things temporal, that we lose not the things
eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives

and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Amen.

Psalm 105:1-11, 45b

Confitemini Domino

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD and call upon his Name;
make known his deeds among the peoples.
- 2 Sing to him, sing praises to him,
and speak of all his marvelous works.
- 3 Glory in his holy Name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD re-
joice.
- 4 Search for the LORD and his strength;
continually seek his face.
- 5 Remember the marvels he has done,
his wonders and the judgments of his mouth,
- 6 O offspring of Abraham his servant,
O children of Jacob his chosen.
- 7 He is the LORD our God;
his judgments prevail in all the world.
- 8 He has always been mindful of his covenant,

the promise he made for a thousand generations:

9 The covenant he made with Abraham,
the oath that he swore to Isaac,

10 Which he established as a statute for Jacob,
an everlasting covenant for Israel,

11 Saying, “To you will I give the land of Canaan
to be your allotted inheritance.”

45b Hallelujah!

Romans 8:26-39

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also

glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

Jesus put before the crowds another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in

his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“Have you understood all this?” They answered,

“Yes.” And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

SERMON

I left home, made three left turns and returned home to find two masked men. Who were they?

The catcher and the umpire, of course.

We're going to pretend that I know the first thing about baseball in aid of a thought that crossed my mind this week. My impression is that many people think of God as a divine umpire – one who is not involved in play but stands in judgment of it, standing behind home and handing out rulings, a uninvolved God, the punisher of evildoers, the welcoming presence to heaven for the righteous.

Well, you can certainly find passages in the Bible in support of this position, so I won't be critical of it. I would point out, though, that this is a crippled

view of God, a one dimensional representation of the much bigger reality which is God. One of our most frequently encountered mistakes is to imagine that the God we think we understand is the same as God, Himself. C.S. Lewis noted

The most dangerous thing you can do is to take any one impulse of your own nature and set it up as the thing you ought to follow at all costs. There is not one of them which will not make us into devils if we set it up as an absolute guide.

This is a riveting thought to me, a real show-stopper. Pick something that you feel you must follow at all costs, that thing to which you feel all righteous people should adhere. Then remind yourself of Mr. Lewis' observation. That precious position you would defend with your life will turn you

into a devil if you set it up as an absolute guide. Only God can handle that sort of responsibility.

If that doesn't humble you, if that doesn't teach you the wisdom Micah offered that we are to "walk humbly with your God", I don't know what will. Politically, our nation is sharply divided, with each wing worshiping those sacrosanct positions which define their very existence. What we have are two groups of blind devils competing for their own, self-defined, righteousness. An uninvolved divine umpire in a distant heaven would put demerits in the permanent records of those who behave in this way, then punish them for all time when it is too late for them to do anything about it. An involved God, would intervene, sharing our distress.

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

My mother, when her patience was exhausted, would proclaim herself “exasperated”. When I read of the very Spirit sighing with sighs too deep for words, I think of my mother and her exasperating brood. Our God, the creator of all, must be similarly exasperated by being constantly forced, by the pride with which we humans are cursed, into the role of uninvolved umpire when all of Scripture cries out that God is a present and active player.

The opening prayer today addressed God as, “the protector of all who trust in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy” and prayed that

God would, “Increase and multiply upon us your mercy; that, with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal.” Does that sound to you like an uninvolved, inactive umpire? However much the understanding of the world might be pleased to move God from the surface of His creation to some safe distance in a heaven unconnected with us poor creatures save to hand out rewards and punishments, God insists on being an active participant in the here and now, even though His powerful influence is sometimes so subtle that we miss it.

Whether or not we are awake enough to perceive it it is still there, still effective, still active.

The first two of Jesus’ parables from Matthew

speak of the great influence over the world today by an active God we mostly fail to notice.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

The tiny seed carried within it the potential for a great tree. A bit of yeast transforms matzoh into soft bread. God’s present, active presence is easy for us poor blind humans to overlook, but its effect is immeasurable.

The next two parables speak of humanity’s response to God’s presence in the world.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

Once recognized, the value of God's presence is unmistakable. One who perceives it values it above anything else, sacrificing all he has to obtain God's guidance and approval.

The final parable speaks of what comes next.

The kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil

from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So we have the kingdom in five succinct parables: God doesn't fly about His Creation with a big "G" on his chest, performing miracles for the amazement of the multitudes. Rather, the Kingdom of Heaven is a tiny seed, sown by an involved God who tends it in anticipation of the inevitable harvest when its presence will be obvious to all. The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast mixed into the world we live within by a skilled baker who knows that even a small amount of yeast will transform the loaf. The world, and we who live within it, is not a fixed existence judged by an uninvolved umpire in a distant heaven. We are constantly being

transformed by an active present God,

I want to share a story of how the yeast of God transforms our world. You remember Cody Gollihue and the #RACK movement. Here's what happened this week:

At Starbuck's Tuesday, two soldiers came in. I wanted to do a random act of Cody kindness, so I signaled to the manager that their breakfast was on me. "I got it already", he replied. Swing and a miss, strike one!

I called a taxi to get me to church. As we rounded the curve behind the mall, I saw a man with a leg brace down on the sidewalk. "Let's go check on him", I told the driver. We made a U turn, and I rolled down my window. "You OK, partner?" I asked through the window.

"Yeah", he said. I'm just waiting on a bus that I don't think is coming."

“Where you going?” the driver interrupted.

“Food stamp office”, he replied.

The driver said, “Get in. I'll take you.” I added, “I'll pay for it” but the driver responded, “No need. I won't charge him.”

Swing and a miss, strike two! I've got one more at bat, and you better believe I'm looking carefully for my chance!

Talk is cheap. The leavening of God is seen in the actions of those who have been touched by it.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

I was on an elevator at UK Med Center once when a young mother and her child boarded. The mother pointed at me and told her child, “If you’re not good, that policeman will come and take you away.”

That’s the wrong message about policemen. It’s also the wrong message about God’s relationship to His children.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be

gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and
give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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