

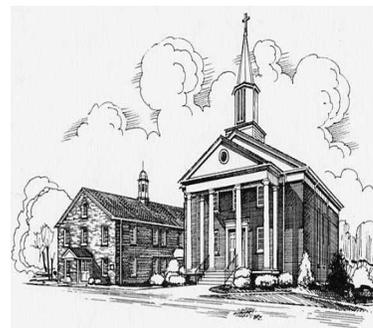
The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday closest to July 20

Proper 11

Year A

RCL



Romans 8:12-25

Psalms 139: 1-11, 22-23

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

The Collect

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God,

now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 139: 1-11, 22-23 Page 794, BCP

Domine, probasti

- 1 LORD, you have searched me out and known me;
you know my sitting down and my rising up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
- 2 You trace my journeys and my resting-places
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- 3 Indeed, there is not a word on my lips,
but you, O LORD, know it altogether.
- 4 You press upon me behind and before
and lay your hand upon me.
- 5 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.
- 6 Where can I go then from your Spirit?
where can I flee from your presence?
- 7 If I climb up to heaven, you are there;
if I make the grave my bed, you are there also.
- 8 If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
- 9 Even there your hand will lead me
and your right hand hold me fast.
- 10 If I say, "Surely the darkness will cover me,
and the light around me turn to night,"
- 11 Darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day;
darkness and light to you are both alike.
- 22 Search me out, O God, and know my heart;
try me and know my restless thoughts.
- 23 Look well whether there be any wickedness in me
and lead me in the way that is everlasting.

Romans 8:12-25¹

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “*Abba*, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the

¹ Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® All rights reserved worldwide.

^a Romans 8:15 The Greek word for adoption to sonship is a term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture; also in verse 23.

^b Romans 8:15 Aramaic for father

will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

c Romans 8:21 Or subjected it in hope. 21 For

Matthew 13:24-30,36-43

Jesus put before the crowd another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind

them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.””

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears

listen!”

SERMON

By now the entire world has heard of the death of four little boys playing on the beach in Gaza in an Israeli air strike. Israel said,

“The IDF has no intention of harming civilians dragged by Hamas into the reality of urban combat. We are carefully investigating the incident in question. Based on preliminary results, the target of this strike was Hamas terrorist operatives. The reported civilian casualties from this strike are a tragic outcome”.

The Gaza strip is about the size of Detroit, its 1.8 million people living in just 139 square miles. Gaza is one of the most densely populated places on earth. Any military operations in such close quarters will, inevitably, result in civilian casualties. Both sides know this, yet Hamas continues to fire largely ineffective rockets at Israel and Israel continues to respond with high explo-

sives. Both sides insist that it all started when he hit me back and their actions are thus justified. Now, four children are dead. How can God permit such evil to continue?

One thing you can be sure of. If a question has been around so long that it has its own name, it is one tough question. That's the case with the area of philosophy known as "theodicy". Theodicy addresses the question, "If your God is such a big deal, how come Adolph Hitler? How come the Jews and the Palestinians are rocketing each other to oblivion? How come there's so much rottenness in the world?" That's a pretty tough question, alright. If God is good, how come He permits so much evil in His creation?

The ancient peoples had it a little easier. Their gods often had a nasty streak and they could attribute bad stuff that happened to one of their gods having a bad

day. Other ancient people solved this nasty logical problem by cooking up two gods, a good one and a bad one. Depending on which one was prominent, some days, they would say, you're the windshield, some days you're the bug.

Today's texts give us two answers to the problem. Paul has one, Matthew a second. Our job is to listen to both of them and decide what we think about it, while at the same time not giving in to the temptations suggested by the ancient peoples. God and the devil are not locked in mortal combat. There is only one God, and he doesn't have migraines.

Let's start with Paul's letter to the Romans, his masterpiece. This is probably the most kicked-around letter ever written. It's not an easy letter to read, so folks mostly find passages they particularly like and quote that instead. That's a great shame, but what are you go-

ing to do? People think they don't have time to read it in depth, so they pick it to pieces. Starting with a chicken, it is easy to make chicken stew. Starting with chicken stew, it is impossible to make a chicken.

Nevertheless, in the passage for today, Paul takes up the question of why there is so much evil in the world and he says:

For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that^c the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

God has subjected all of creation to witnessing the frustration of a world gone wrong so that all of creation shall wait in expectancy for the time when God's children will be revealed as God's agents.

^c Romans 8:21 Or subjected it in hope. 21 For

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.

A true son must be about his father's business. When the church doors close behind you you must return to the world and live with the frustration to which all of creation has been subjected by God so that at the chosen time, you will have reason to celebrate when God's children are revealed.

So in Paul's view, evil exists in the world that we might see its fruits and thus welcome the children of God, those who are led by the Spirit of God, when they are revealed. How does Matthew approach the problem?

In Matthew, Jesus speaks in parables, as he often does. Again, he draws on an agricultural motif.

The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.

This is the place where we need to be on our guard. In his parable and his later explanation

The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil

Matthew speaks of “the devil” as the enemy of God, and if we’re not careful, we will conjure up a mental image of a guy with red skin, horns and a nasty little goatee who somehow possesses the power to confront God and occasionally to best Him. That is the solution the ancients came to – a good god and a bad god – but

we do not believe in two gods. Isaiah reminds us:

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.
Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before me.
Who has announced from of old the things to
come?
Let them tell us what is yet to be.
Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?
You are my witnesses!
Is there any god besides me ?
There is no other rock; I know not one².

Matthew's solution to the problem of evil in the world is that an enemy has sowed weeds where the Son of Man sowed good seed. If we want to be good Bible scholars, we have to notice and admit that Matthew sees the world as divided into two kingdoms — the kingdom

² Isaiah 44:6-8

of God and the kingdom of the devil. Matthew is a dualist, and it comes through clearly in this writing. But if we want to be good Christians, we also have to admit that any power we mentally grant to a devil to act independently and in opposition to God must come at the expense of God's omnipotence. Finally, if we want to be good gardeners, we have to notice and admit that no one has to sow weed seeds in our gardens for weeds to appear. Weeds appear because fertile soil grows prolifically! If we, God's children, had no capacity for evil, we would similarly have no capacity for good, for evil consists in the pursuit of good aims in the wrong ways, or to too great an extent and so Matthew extends the parable in this way.

**'Then do you want us to go and gather them?'
But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds
you would uproot the wheat along with them.'**

Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

The expungement of evil from God’s creation is not a job for us. We’d damage the harvest! It is a job for God. When we get ourselves pumped up to think that we are the judges of God’s creation, we have entered into evil ourselves. It is then that we begin to shoot rockets at each other for we are very bad judges indeed of good.

I had lunch with Rev. Pittman this week, and we were discussing this very point. She related that she lived for a time in Okinawa (her father was a military chaplain). A classmate of her brother was from Hawaii. She overheard him complaining of the hardships of living in Hawaii, one of which was the need to pull weeds from the gutters. The “weeds” he was speaking of, she said,

had another name — orchids. In Hawaii, orchids grow from the house gutters, and are seen as a something to be pulled out and destroyed. We are not very good at seeing the good in either things or people that get in our way.

So. We have two views on the question posed by theodicy, why does God permit so much evil in the world? Paul tells us that it is so that we can see the results of “living in the flesh” and yearn for the time when God’s children will be revealed. Father De Mello seems to come down on Paul’s side of the argument, as do I.

One day the Master said, “You are not ready to ‘fight’ evil until you are able to see the good it does.” This left the disciples in considerable confusion, which the Master made no attempt to clear.³

Witnessing the fruit of evil prepares us to welcome the

³ Awakening: Conversations with the Masters (Anthony De Mello) Highlight on Page 175

kingdom.

Matthew sees two kingdoms at war on the earth, but cautions that separating the wheat from the tares is not our calling, but God's. In fact, we're part of the problem for our limited wisdom can often lead us to view orchids as weeds.

C.S. Lewis reminded us that our response to evil is evil, and we see that so clearly in Gaza. Both sides proclaim that it all started when he hit me back. Both sides staunchly believe that they are acting to oppose evil with God's approval.

If the two sides in Gaza could stop screaming "It all started when he hit me back" and try to come to an understanding of their enemy's motivation, perhaps the rockets would stop. But neither side has thus far suffered enough to tempt them to do so. We seem to learn only through suffering. Until the Children of God are

revealed and can lead the world into the kingdom, it is our calling to bind the wounds inflicted by evil upon the peoples of the earth. A son must be about his father's business.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

In place of my benediction, my gift to you this day is this piece from Izzeldin Abuelaish, a brave Palestinian father whose family were destroyed in 2009, printed this week in The Guardian.⁴

Insanity, as Einstein said, is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. We Palestinians and Israelis have experienced many destructive wars and the result is always the same: more deaths, more terrible injuries, more bloodshed, more animosity and more hatred. What do we expect to be the result of any war?

The current conflict has led to at least 260 people being killed, more than 1,600 severely wounded, more than 2,300 Israeli air strikes, more than 1,300 rockets fired from Gaza and at least 600 houses and institutions

⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jul/18/father-children-gaza-bloodshed-palestinians-israelis>

demolished and destroyed. The children of both sides are traumatized and all aspects of daily life paralyzed. The Palestinians are under attack while millions of Israelis facing attack are forced to hide in fear in bomb shelters. But the consequences of war go far beyond what we see on our screens. What we don't see is 10 times what is visible and both sides are suffering.

After the killing of my three daughters by an Israeli shell in January 2009 I concluded that if my daughters were the last sacrifice on the road to peace between Palestinians and Israelis, then I accept their loss. I promised that I would continue to fight with the only means available to me: wisdom, courage, strong words and meaningful action.

But what I learned from that war that scarred my family so irreparably was that all of us (Palestinians and Israelis) take a defensive position to justify our acts. This

originates from fear and from past experience. Only when we start to take responsibility and reconcile ourselves to new thinking will we get a different result.

Conflict is the result of fear, mistrust and suspicion. We need to smash these artificial barriers we have created in our minds because nothing will change until we change what is in our own hearts, minds and souls.

I understand intimately the meaning of unbearable suffering, loss, the absence of security and what it is to live in terror. And I understand and feel the suffering of the Israelis who have lost loved ones and are forced to live in fear. But what is the best way for Palestinians and Israelis to resume hope and life? We need to heal our people and close the wound completely, not in stages or in ways that leave part of it open.

Nothing is impossible but we need to act before it becomes irreversible. Palestinians and Israelis have been

angry for a long time but we need to ask what our anger has achieved? It has brought destruction and injustice to ourselves and to others. When the war ends, and I hope it happens soon, all will celebrate the victory but in reality, all are losers from war.

What kind of victory produces orphans or maimed children and wounds to the soul that never heal? As a wounded, bereaved father who lost his three beloved children I feel the suffering of all human beings but I call for an end to this bloodshed.

This is a moment in history that must be captured. The hope and the future safety and freedom of Israel are linked to the security, safety, freedom and future of Palestinians. We are like conjoined twins and any harm induced to one will impact the other.

The courageous thing for both sides is to embrace the dignity, grace and strength of the other. We have no

choice but to work together to heal our wounds, wipe our tears and, while learning the lessons of the past, to look forward. George Orwell said that the further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it. We all bleed the same color and the life of all is equal and precious. No cause justifies the killing, intimidating or threatening of human beings.

Let us build a new generation that believes advancing human civilization is a joint project and that the most sacred things in the universe are humanity and freedom.

I would only add this quote from Fr. De Mello:

“What is the cause of evil?”

“Ignorance,” said the Master.

“And how is it dispelled?”

“Not by effort, but by light. By understanding, not by action.”

Later the Master added, “The sign of Enlightenment is peace. You stop fleeing when you see you are being pursued only by the fantasies your fears have fabricated.”⁵

⁵ Awakening: Conversations with the Masters (Anthony De Mello) Highlight on Page 148

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

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