

The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday closest to July 6

Proper 9

Year C

RCL

Galatians 6:1-10

Psalms 66:1-8

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

The Collect

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Galatians 6:1-10

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads.

Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher. Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing

what is right, for we will reap at harvest-time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

Psalm 66:1-8, Page 673, BCP

Jubilate Deo

- 1 Be joyful in God, all you lands;
sing the glory of his Name;
sing the glory of his praise.
- 2 Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds!
because of your great strength your enemies cringe before you.
- 3 All the earth bows down before you,
sings to you, sings out your Name.”
- 4 Come now and see the works of God,
how wonderful he is in his doing toward all people.
- 5 He turned the sea into dry land,
so that they went through the water on foot,
and there we rejoiced in him.
- 6 In his might he rules for ever;
his eyes keep watch over the nations;
let no rebel rise up against him.
- 7 Bless our God, you peoples;
make the voice of his praise to be heard;
- 8 Who holds our souls in life,
and will not allow our feet to slip.

Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before

you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’

“Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me.”

The seventy returned with joy, saying, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” He said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

SERMON

My friend and teacher, the Reverend Dr. Lon Oliver, recommended a book to me titled “*Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be*”. The book was sparked by a scene in the film “*Grand Canyon*”. In the movie, a wealthy lawyer is stuck in traffic and tries to bypass it. His route takes him along progressively darker streets, until his car stalls in a place where wealthy lawyers in expensive cars should not be stalled and he has to call for a tow truck. Before the tow truck can arrive, he is surrounded by five street toughs. Just in time, though, the tow truck operator arrives. The driver is an earnest, genial sort of fellow, and he sets about hooking up the expensive car. The street toughs object. They have found their victim, and the tow truck driver is getting in the way. The driver takes the leader of the group aside and says, “Man, the world ain’t supposed to work like this.

Maybe you don't know that, but this ain't the way it's suppose to be. I'm supposed to be able to do my job without askin' you if I can. And that dude is supposed to be able to wait with his car without you rippin' him off. Everything's supposed to be different than what it is here."

Well, that's pretty clear. The world is not supposed to be the way we find it. The real question is, "Why is it this way?" We're all guilty of thinking that the reason that the world is not the way is supposed to be is because of the other guy. If everybody was like me we think the world would be the way it's supposed to be. That's just wrong. As pleased, overall, as you may be with yourself, God did not create you as the ultimate model for the family of man. We're all Bozos on this bus. We're in it together, and the fault is upon all of us. Embracing the myth of the good guys and the bad guys

is the way we hide our sin from ourselves.

You see, the world isn't the way it's supposed to be because we all act from divided motives, every one of us. We think we do as we intend and intend as we do, but we don't. Even Paul confessed, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."¹

We do this because we are so very adept at hiding our motives, even from ourselves. I saw a story this week reporting that the Georgia Governor won't support Wilcox High School's attempt to organize their first integrated prom. He says it's tradition. You and I might conclude that there is something darker going on. The power of the human mind to construct good reasons for doing bad things is virtually limitless.

A rich guy shows up at the pastor's study every

¹ Romans 7:15

year, checkbook in hand, and asks the same question: “Remind me how much we pay you, preacher.” He then proceeds to write the church a check for that amount, leaning on the pastor’s desk to do so insuring that the pastor is reminded again from whom all good things flow. He would insist that he is just making a gift to the church. His actual motives, to control the preacher and secure his position of power and influence with the church, are hidden in the dark.

Or, consider the 1919 World Series. We all know what happened. Shoeless Joe Jackson and some of the other White Sox players, corrupt men who sold their integrity, took money to throw the Series. But is that really the full story? I would suggest that it is not.

Baseball is a pleasant enough pastime. People enjoy throwing the ball around, and people enjoy watching other people throw the ball around. So long as it is done

for the joy of it, all is well. The demon of darkness we call greed, though, whispered that there was money to be made, and so professional baseball came to be. After that, baseball had little to do with throwing the ball around. Now it had to do with making money, not that anyone would admit that. The demons of darkness had staked out a place at the table.

White Sox owner Charles Comiskey was notoriously miserly and underpaid his players. However much he might protest that he loved baseball, his real motivation was to make money and retain power. The owners instituted a rule called the “reserve clause”. Players had to take the salary offered or no other club could hire them. They became indentured servants of the owners, whose goal was to extract the maximum amount of money from their franchises, not that any of them would admit it.

As is always the case when one person acts abusively toward another, the result was seething resentment. The covert evil lurking in the darkness, the demons of greed and power, had successfully bruised the souls of all involved, Comiskey, by blinding him to the misery his greed was inflicting on the players, and the players, whose anger with Comiskey was eating away at their very souls. Resentment built until a plot was hatched with the hidden powers of the underworld to throw the series. This would not only wreck Comiskey's day; it would pay off handsomely. The hatred the players held for the club owner forged them into an unholy alliance that spoke to them from the darkness that they weren't corrupt; they were pursuing justice! Lawyers have a saying, "If the client tells you 'It's not the money – it's the principle of the thing', it's the money." However much Charles Comiskey might

protest that he loved the game of baseball, it was the demons of greed and lust for power that controlled his actions. However much the players might protest that they were only seeking justice, it was the money.

In the end, heeding the words of darkness destroyed their careers and even the careers of others who were not directly involved. Ironically, one of those whose involvement in the scandal was never proved and whose guilt is still sharply contested was “Shoeless” Joe Jackson, who has nevertheless become the poster child for the Black Sox scandal. It’s not supposed to be this way, but the dark forces of chaos had won.

Divided motives. The very world we live in is like that, twisted and distorted by darkness we do not acknowledge. The old radio drama, “The Shadow” opened with these words: “Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!” Does the

call of Christ impose upon us any requirement to address the divided motives of the world we live in?

All through the New Testament there are references to light and dark. Over and over again, we are told that we are the children of light and taught the importance of dispelling darkness. Paul tells the church at Ephesus, “Live as children of light — for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.” To the church at Thessaloníki, “... for you are all children of light and children of the day.” In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus says, “No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.” Christians are, indeed, called to address the secret evil that lurks in the hearts of men, and by exposing them, exorcise them.

I’m not convinced that all, or even most, contemporary Christians perceive a call to confront the demons

that twist our country and our own thinking today. A great many Christians just don't think about it at all. They have a general idea along the lines of the question once posed to Jesus, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?", but little specific information about what "being a Christian" might mean. Until we are willing to confront the evil within us, we will, at some level, think that we're just fine the way we are and don't need a Savior. That's not a good thing at all. We have responsibilities to God, to our own integrity, and to our brothers and sisters which we cannot discharge until we confess our own weakness and recognize our sin. Then what?

In Paul's letter to his church in Galatia, he counsels:

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness.

Notice that Paul does NOT say, "If anyone is de-

tected in a transgression, throw the bum out.” That’s the course our nation has decided to follow and, as a result, we imprison more people than any other country in the world. Paul speaks of restoring the one who transgresses in a spirit of gentleness. We throw the bum out. We tell ourselves that this is “justice”, but if we were to confront the darkness within us, what might we find to be motivating us? Could we be trying to build ourselves up by comparing ourselves to the sins of others rather than to the example set by Jesus? Aren’t we telling ourselves something like, “I may do wrong things, but at least I’m not a criminal. They’re the real bad guys, not me”? Paul is aware of this danger, for just after telling his church to restore a transgressor with gentleness, he adds, “Take care that you yourselves are not tempted.” He then adds, “For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves.”

We are conflicted, double-minded creatures. We do not speak the truth, either to others or to ourselves. There is a riptide of duplicity tugging at our feet, washing the very ground from beneath us, threatening to upend us at any moment, a serpentine evil which trips us up by hiding our motivations even from ourselves. The ancients called these forces “demons”. We think of that as superstition. That’s as may be, but the forces the ancients characterized as demons are nevertheless real, and entrap even postmodern us. These voices from the dark places in our soul which hide motives and deceive us are what we call ‘sin’. This covert evil has been with us since the beginning. It is within you and it is within me. It is real, but it cannot bear the light of day. It is the calling of the Children of Light to confront it, to bring it into the light and thereby exorcise it. But first, we must admit its existence. Insisting that we are much too

evolved to believe in things like demons is the primary way we blind ourselves to the reality and power of evil and grant to it the darkness it needs to brew its poison. All that is necessary for evil to prevail is for men of good will to blind themselves to it and do nothing.

Jesus sent out seventy elders, and they reported back, “Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!” [Jesus] then said to them, “I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.”

Many of my friends would tell me that this is the instant in which Satan was expelled from heaven. They would then construct an elaborate theology about that, but I don't want you to do that. If the expulsion of Satan was, indeed, a one-time event two thousand years ago, why, then, was Shoeless Joe's career wrecked in 1919? Why, then, are things indisputably not the way they are supposed to be? There still are demonic forces at work,

constantly dragging us away from the kingdom into chaos and it is the task of Christians to expose them and to gently restore those haunted by them. Satan must be made to surrender his place in the unseen realms, and to be exposed by the light of Christ every day, not just once.

So, here's the challenge we face in post modern America. We believe, really believe in the myth of good guys and bad guys. Why would we not? We have been fed it virtually every waking minute. We watch police dramas and cowboy films where the good guys wear white hats and the bad guys do bad stuff for the sheer joy of it, and, best of all, we are invited to see ourselves as the good guys. While we're focused on the phony bad guys on television, under our radar, slithering around our feet is the real, covert evil that is sucking the life out of our country, and we're so hypnotized we

never notice. “Being a Christian” means to confess the evil within all of us, and to gently restore a world which transgresses daily. Do we still retain the courage and the moral fortitude to do so?

AMEN

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

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