

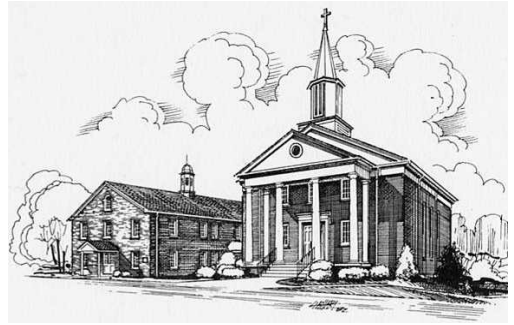
The Lessons Appointed for Use on the

Sunday Closest to June 15

Proper 10

Year A

RCL



Track 2

Romans 8:12-25
Psalm 86:11-17
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 86:11-17

Inclina, Domine

- 11 Teach me your way, O LORD,
and I will walk in your truth; *
knit my heart to you that I may fear your Name.
- 12 I will thank you, O LORD my God, with all my heart, *
and glorify your Name for evermore.
- 13 For great is your love toward me; *
you have delivered me from the nethermost Pit.
- 14 The arrogant rise up against me, O God,
and a band of violent men seeks my life; *
they have not set you before their eyes.
- 15 But you, O LORD, are gracious and full of compassion, *
slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.
- 16 Turn to me and have mercy upon me; *
give your strength to your servant;
and save the child of your handmaid.
- 17 Show me a sign of your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed; *
because you, O LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

Romans 8:12-25

Brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

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

The world in which we live is a sordid mess. The world we are promised is one of peace and light. The question for Christians is this: “What are we to do in the meantime?”

I spoke a few weeks ago from Paul’s Letter to the Romans about living in a world ruled by sin. That’s an uncomfortable thing to say. We want to protest that God is the ruler of this world, but Paul tells us that Creation waits in hope that it will be set free from its bondage to decay when the children of God are revealed and all Creation obtains the freedom of the glory of the children of God. That’s where we are, now – tilling sin’s garden.

We don’t think of sin as an influence on our world such that we could speak of being ruled by sin. Rather, we think of sin as the bad things other people do out of sheer badness. This view allows us to entertain the thought that if our criminal laws are pursued with sufficient strictness, our world will become less of the sordid mess that it unquestionably is. That completely misses the point. Sin isn’t what bad people do. Sin is an influence within the world which leads us along wrong paths, and excuses the bad things we do by convincing us that they weren’t bad to begin with.

In the parable of the weeds, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a situation in which the owner of a farm, who has sown good seed, finds his crop to be compromised.

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.

It’s important to make two observations before we begin. First, in the Greek text, it is clear that the kingdom of heaven isn’t the person who sowed the good seed. The kingdom of heaven is the entire story related in the parable, good seed, through corruption, to harvest. In his opening words, Jesus relates what was (the sowing of good seed), what is (the mixed good and evil in his fields) and, finally, the assurance of that which is yet

to come (the weeds will be taken away, leaving only the good harvest behind). The present state of the world, Jesus says, is that the good seed, the children of the kingdom, have been sown but the world remains corrupted by sin. Judgment is promised, even though we can't see it yet. As Paul says,

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Our hope in the promise of the harvest which will set the world right is our salvation and the source of our strength. This is precisely our present place in the parable – the world in which we live is mixed good and bad. However much we might desire to live within a “pure” community of believers, withdrawing into self-proclaimed, self-righteous enclaves, the Son of Man instructs his slaves not to pull up the weeds prematurely. Instead, we are to make our way within a world containing both good and evil, cleaving to the Word of God. How to manage that feat is the challenge of being a Christian.

The rule of sin in our time manifests itself in the attitudes and assumptions that seek, subtly, to convince us that the Gospel is something other than what it is. Often, only by looking backward on past societal sins of which we have repented can we see what fools we were to fall for the whispering of sin. This week, Massachusetts erected a monument to the 19 men and women who were hanged as witches between February 1692 and May 1693 by people who had been convinced by the ruler of this world that they were acting within the righteousness of God. Jesus' teaching is to love even your enemies, yet this community allowed themselves to be convinced that hanging 14 women and 5 men was their responsibility as Christians!

Sixty years ago, the sin-ruled world taught that people of color were less than human, and that any contact with them would corrupt white people. We accepted without question the implication that even a small portion of a black person's body touching the water of a whites-only swimming pool would so thoroughly contaminate that water as

to require its complete removal and replacement, lest white swimmers flee in disgust:

On June 11, 1964, Martin Luther King, Jr was arrested for trespassing at the Monson Motor Lodge after being asked to leave its segregated restaurant. This (and other things) helped spur on a group of protesters, black and white, to jump into the pool as a strategically planned event to end segregation at motel pools. The pool at this motel was designated “white only.” Whites who paid for motel rooms invited blacks to join them in the motel pool as their guests. This swim-in was planned by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and two associates. The motel manager, Jimmy Brock, in an effort to break up the party, poured a bottle of muriatic acid into the pool, hoping the swimmers would become scared and leave. ¹

Can you believe that? There was a time, and not so long ago, in which sin whispered that it would be acceptable to pour muriatic acid into a motel swimming pool rather than to permit people of color to swim there, and we bought into it! There was a time when much of white society did not protest over this, finding it acceptable, or at least not their business. That’s what a world ruled by sin looks like. Our job is to reflect into the culture what a world ruled by God will look like at the harvest.

If we would be honest with ourselves, we would prefer to putty over the reality of living in a world ruled by sin rather than deal with it. If we would be honest with ourselves, we would prefer to imagine a nice, clean, and untroubling Christianity of favorite hymns sung by the faithful in clean, untroubling churches far away from a world ruled by sin. We would like to rush the harvest, in other words, tearing out the weeds NOW. That is not Jesus’ instruction at all.

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.’”

A good harvest depends on our taking seriously the demands of being a Christian in

¹ <http://www.snopes.com/dandridge-drained-pool/>

just the sort of world we inhabit, and that means turning our backs on the whispers of sin which seek to rob the calling of Christian of its most demanding, and hence its most important, meaning – bringing the light of Christ into a world ruled by sin.

To call oneself “Christian” is an outrageous thing to do. If you don’t see it as outrageous, you’re not doing it right. To call oneself “Christian” is to proclaim to the world that you live in the hope of the world to come, that you accept no judgment other than that of the Father, that whatever the cost to you in loss of the esteem of those about you, all this is nothing by comparison to the blessings to come.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

Were we to agree with the ruler of this world that calling oneself “Christian” means nothing more than “good fellow, moral and ethical” while denying the challenges of bringing the light of Christ to a world ruled by sin, we will have abandoned our calling to wait patiently for the harvest while bringing the light of Christ to the present world.

Wait for the harvest in hope, church.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

We are involved in a great debate over health care. The rule of sin would have us withdraw into our churches to focus on stories about people long dead or notions so brutally spiritualized as to have no real meaning in the world today. Whichever side of the argument you favor, heed Isaiah's words.

**Woe to those who make unjust laws,
to those who issue oppressive decrees,
to deprive the poor of their rights
and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people,
making widows their prey
and robbing the fatherless.²**

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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² Isaiah 10: 1–3 NIV