

**The Lessons Appointed for
Use on the
Sunday closest to June 22**



Proper 7

Year C

RCL

Isaiah 65:1-5
Psalm 22:18-27
Galatians 3:23-29

The Collect

O Lord, make us have perpetual love and reverence for your holy Name, for you never fail to help and govern those whom you have set upon the sure foundation of your loving kindness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Isaiah 65:1-5

I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask,
to be found by those who did not seek me.

I said, “Here I am, here I am,”
to a nation that did not call on my name.

I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people,
who walk in a way that is not good,

following their own devices;

a people who provoke me

to my face continually,

sacrificing in gardens

and offering incense on bricks;

who sit inside tombs,

and spend the night in secret places;

who eat swine's flesh,

with broth of abominable things in their vessels;

who say, “Keep to yourself,

do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.”

The Response

Psalm 22:18-27

Deus, Deus meus

- 18 BE not far away, O LORD; * you are my strength; hasten to help me.
- 19 Save me from the sword, * my life from the power of the dog.
- 20 Save me from the lion's mouth, * my wretched body from the horns of wild bulls.
- 21 I will declare your Name to my brethren; * in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.
- 22 Praise the LORD, you that fear him; * stand in awe of him, O offspring of Israel; all you of Jacob's line, give glory.
- 23 For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither does he hide his face from them; * but when they cry to him he hears them.
- 24 My praise is of him in the great assembly; * I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.
- 25 The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who

seek the LORD shall praise him: * “May your heart live for ever!”

26 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, * and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.

27 For kingship belongs to the Lord; * he rules over the nations.

Galatians 3:23-29

NOW before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

SERMON

In his letter to his church in present-day Turkey Paul of Tarsus, the Apostle to the Gentiles, wrote:

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.

What does he mean by saying that Christians are no longer subject to a disciplinarian? Aren't we supposed to be the good guys, the decent, inoffensive, law abiding sorts our mothers urged us to be? And if we can't be that sort of person because we're human and subject to sin, isn't it important that we appear to be that sort of person, so that the world can see what a Christian looks like? Once, a friend confessed that he loved to drink a

beer occasionally, but that he never did so in public because he feared someone in his church would see it. We all do this. We should not, but we do. Surely, the business of being a Christian is more than looking good!

Before we go off the tracks here, we need to remember that when Paul speaks of “the Law” he isn’t talking about the Ten Commandments or the odd construction lights in West Virginia that don’t blink to tell you to slow down until the police pull you over. He is speaking of the 613 mitzvot contained in Torah which govern every aspect of life for observant Jews, what to eat, what to wear, how to cut your hair, how to worship. Every aspect of life. Paul was addressing a critical question in the early church: What is to be done about Gentile converts to Christianity? Are they subject to the laws of Torah, or are they not? To become a Christian, must a Gentile first become a Jew? And let's acknowledge the

real elephant in the room -- must they be circumcised, because if they must be circumcised that's going to be a deal-breaker for many who are nonetheless drawn to the radical teachings of Jesus. Which is more important, then -- adherence to the law or responding to the Holy Spirit? Which is the more important, subjecting yourself to the will of God, or putting on a good appearance? Subjecting yourself to the will of God might very well cost you your life, as we learn over and over from the martyrs. Putting on a good appearance is pretty easy so it should be no surprise that many people choose to put on a good appearance in public while behaving otherwise in private.

The truth is that all of us want to be the star of our own story. We want to look righteous and we crave acknowledgment from others of our righteousness. Jesus commented forcefully on this:

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, "The scribes and the Pharisees ... do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.¹

However much we might wish it, our righteousness is not to be found in the approval of others, but in our faith-full adherence to the will of God. There has been enough of Christians hiding in churches, from which they can glare disapprovingly at the world through the stained glass and not nearly enough of Christians living God-lead lives in the world. There has been too much of a sanctimonious stench attached to Christianity by the world which often sees us as judgmental or hypocritical.

Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this

¹ Matthew 23:1-5 NRSV

cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes.²

When we deviate from our task, or change the subject, or hide in our churches, we not only fail God, but we do damage to the Gospel we are charged with spreading. Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness, and pride of power, and with its plea for the weak.³ THAT is the teaching of Christ. Walking with God in the world must mean something more than a search for human approval or the appearance of righteousness. It must mean action to spread the Gospel, no matter the cost personally, and to do it in a way that it can be heard in the world.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is often seen as the advocate of action-based Christianity. Eric Metaxas, Bonhoeffer's

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

biographer, summarized Bonhoeffer's views in this way:

Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God's will.

That's a powerful statement. Being a Christian is about doing God's will in the world. Bonhoeffer's life is a good example. He was safe, teaching in New York and had a new fiancée, but after Hitler rose to power he actually returned to Nazi Germany where he was accused of joining the plot to assassinate the Führer, and spend two years in prison! He was executed by the Nazi regime at Flossenbürg concentration camp on April 9, 1945, just two weeks before the United States liberated the camp. When he died he famously remarked to another prisoner, "This is the end — but for me, the beginning." THAT is what Paul is writing about.

Paul was confronted every single day with the political reality of living in an occupied territory under Roman rule, subject to laws of a country that worshiped many gods, that considered Semites inferior to the Romans and had to contend with local officials who made substantial compromises in their moral and ethical dealings with their own people to maintain their political status with their conquerors. Excruciating poverty stood in the shadow of vulgar riches, slavery and cruelty was public policy, economic and social injustice was the official order of the day.⁴ Like Jesus and Bonhoeffer, Paul lived in the world in the thick of his foes. Go ye and do likewise, church.

AMEN

⁴ Adapted from a posting by Judy Dugas

BENEDICTION

I think we all believe that if we say “Please” and “Thank you”, don’t cuss in front of the ladies, follow the ten commandments and be generally decent people, that’s enough. That’s enough to get human approval, maybe, but it is not enough for a Christian. Be more than law abiding. The early church had no buildings, no money and no political influence and they turned the world upside down.⁵ Have courage, church.

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.

The Bible texts of the Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel lessons are from the New Revised Standard Ver-

⁵ J.D. Greear

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