

Pentecost 19, 10.11.2020

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14

“Responding to God’s Call”

*Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.* Good morning. Thank you for joining us in person and online for worship at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church!

St. Mark’s is a church blessed with many faithful members and friends who respond to God’s call by sharing their gifts in God’s mission to the world. Thank you to today’s musicians, Les, Riley and Byron, for sharing your musical gifts. Thank you Kay, for reading the lessons. Thank you Tom, Jacob and Ron for operating our internet live-stream. Thank you John for ushering, and thank you, Jay, for your temple talk about how our hands do God’s work over a lifetime. With our hands working together, we are the body of Christ in mission for the world!

Our thanks continue to overflow with gratitude for the Thursday Soup Kitchen volunteers who help feed the hungry and homeless, and for so many involved in Social Ministry who continue to fill our Loaves and Fishes food pantry shelves with groceries. Thank you to our youth and families for your vibrant witness to Christ. Thank you to our dedicated Property Committee who keeps our sanctuary, building, and grounds in good order as a sign of God’s presence in this place. Thank you to all our members and friends. Your response to God’s call is vital to our life as a church!

Yet the current pandemic has made our life together more challenging. We have been unable to freely gather together since March 8th. Though we are gathering with a limited number of people on Sunday mornings, today marks the 7th month since our last regular in-person services.

We are in the midst of our annual Stewardship Appeal, which reminds us that our hands and our response to God’s call are crucial for our life together as a church, as we serve God with our time, talents, and treasures. In these challenging times, as we walk with, comfort, and share God’s love with so many, your response to Christ is crucial for St. Mark’s. Though we are still not able to fully gather in person, St. Mark’s ministries and expenses continue as they did before the pandemic. Now more than ever, we need one another to support our mutual ministry as a church. Thank you for your faithful support of St. Mark’s, because together we are the body of Christ!

In today’s gospel Jesus encourages us to think about our response to God’s call. Our response to this call is a lifetime commitment and journey. From the time we are young we are blessed when we are able to respond to Jesus’ call, and we continue to be blessed when we respond to Jesus’ call throughout our entire lifetimes. The Christian journey of faith is not finished until we share in the death of resurrection of Christ Jesus. As Psalm 23 reminds us today: “*Surely goodness and mercy*

*shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”*

Our response to Jesus’s call “Follow me,” is seen by what we treasure in our hearts. Are our hearts clothed in the grace and love of Christ? Do our hearts respond with a thankfulness that flows outward from God’s love and forgiveness toward others in need?

At the end of today’s gospel, in the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, Jesus’ words, “*For many are called, but few are chosen,*” are meant to encourage us to think about our response to God’s call. God’s call to all people is gracious and merciful, and how we respond makes all the difference in our lives. Like the people in today’s gospel, do we ignore the call, treat it lightly, or do we respond with grateful hearts for God’s grace and love poured out for each of us?

You’ve probably heard the phrase, “Half of life is just showing up.” If half of life is “just showing up,” then it also begs the question, “what is the *other half* of life?” Obviously, life is more than “just showing up.” A student can show up for a test, but unless they have prepared for the test, they will likely fail the test. If an athlete shows up for a race without having trained, rather than winning, the athlete may not even be able to finish the race. Life is also about how we live it. Life is about how we respond to needs around us and how we respond to God’s call each day. By saying, “*For many are called, but few are chosen,*” Jesus is saying that our response to God’s invitation is crucial for the race of our entire lifetimes.

In the parable that Jesus tells, the king gave a banquet for his son, but the king’s invitation was ignored and treated with disrespect; all of the king’s messengers were abused and even killed. Rather than responding to the king’s invitation with joy, people showed contempt for the king. So Jesus said that the king would destroy them and their city.

These words about the destruction of the city in the parable have long been interpreted as a retelling of the historical destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman Empire in the year, 70 AD. This means the Apostle Matthew was explaining the shape of God’s salvation narrative in history: Israel’s rejection of Jesus, the destruction of Jerusalem, and God’s renewed invitation to the world.

Yet as we think about this parable and history, we also remember that Jesus was a Jew, that his disciples and many in the early church were also Jewish. God did not abandon Israel; rather, God extended the invitation to the kingdom beyond Israel to include all people. So we also remember that we are grafted by faith onto the promises made to Abraham, and made heirs of God’s kingdom. Jesus’ point is that when we do not respond with faithful hearts to God’s call, we find ourselves outside of the light of God’s grace in a place of darkness and weeping.

Remembering the events that led to Jesus’ death and resurrection are helpful here. Though the

crowds initially welcomed Jesus as king, the same crowds also quickly changed as Jesus stood before Pilate. The crowds that had once shouted "*Hosanna*," later rejected Jesus when it mattered the most to support him, shouting, "*Crucify him!*" Jesus' words, "*For many are called, but few are chosen*," remind us of the importance of following through on our promise to follow Jesus throughout our lifetimes.

As I read this parable, I am left with a question that Jesus is asking his listeners: "How will you respond to God's call?" Will you respond from your heart again today, and tomorrow, and for a lifetime? By saying, "*For many are called, but few are chosen*," Jesus is asking us for our response, our hearts, and our lifetimes, because Jesus' call to follow is completed when, at the end of our lifetimes, we will share in his death and resurrection.

At the end of the parable, the king said to the person without a wedding robe, "*Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?*" The person made no reply; they were speechless. The wedding robe is a symbol for the state of our inner lives: Are our hearts ready to celebrate the feast of the kingdom? Are our hearts willing to follow Christ the king throughout our lives? The person who was not wearing a wedding robe represents someone who "showed up," but whose heart was not in it. Like the idiom, "Half of life is just showing up," this person showed up, but had not really responded with joy to celebrate the messianic event of Christ Jesus. This person was present, but had not responded with joy and thankfulness to the king's invitation to enter the kingdom. They were speechless because they had not embraced God's grace that opens our mouths with praise and thanksgiving.

Life is more than simply showing up. Life is about giving of ourselves in so many ways that make the world a better place. Life is about sharing our talents and gifts so others will know the kingdom of God is near. Life is about sharing the mercy and love of God that abides in our hearts. God's love can never be extinguished, not by pandemic or war, not by illness or any of life's challenges. Nothing, not even death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

In Holy Baptism, we are clothed in the garment of Christ's righteousness. This means in baptism our hearts are transformed by the living garment that is Christ Jesus. This is the wedding robe in Jesus' parable, because in baptism we become one with Christ. When we show up for life, Christ Jesus is also present with and in us, sharing in our mutual ministry for others.

The good news of this parable is that God continued to send his servants into the world to call all people - the good and bad. This tells us a lot about God's grace. God calls each of us, warts and all, sins and all - with all of our imperfections - because in our weakness God makes us strong. Jesus

words, “*For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners*” (Mt. 9:13), remind us that God’s love transforms our greatest imperfections into our greatest strengths. Jesus called Paul, who had zealously persecuted the church, because Jesus knew that with grace, Paul would zealously build up and protect the church that he had once persecuted. Paul’s greatest imperfection became his greatest strength for Christ.

Entering the kingdom of God isn’t about simply showing up, it is about responding in faithful service over a lifetime. It isn’t about being perfect; rather, it is about allowing God’s grace to transform our sin and imperfection into the righteousness and strength of Christ. Christ has no hands in the world but yours and mine. Each day Christ needs you to be his hands in the world.

Yesterday is gone and tomorrow is not yet, how will you respond to Christ today so that yesterday’s sin and weakness might become tomorrow’s righteousness and strength? St. Mark’s Lutheran Church, the body of Christ, needs your hands, your gifts and your strengths as we share God’s love for the world. Jesus asks us again today, “How will you respond to God’s call?” Amen.