

Sunday, November 1st, 2020

All Saints Day

Call to Worship

Leader: Worship the Lord with jubilant hearts.

People: Not to please one another, but to praise our God!

Leader: Worship the Lord with jubilant minds.

People: Not to gratify our neighbor, but to glorify God!

All: Worship the Lord with your heart, soul, and mind! Come, let us worship the Lord!

Prayer of Adoration

Holy and loving God, in Christ you offer your redeeming love to all people. We come before you now in the faith that we will be united by your Spirit in the community of your people, stretching throughout the generations, all around the world you love. We join in adoration and praise to the voices of all your saints, both in heaven and on earth, who worship and adore you. We pray in the name of Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn 711 O holy city, seen of John

Prayer of Confession

God of life, we are dependent on you for life and sustenance. Forgive our moments of pride when we act as if we did not need you. Forgive, O God, any move we make to displace you, by exalting ourselves in places of authority or in giving to others the honor due only to you. Be patient with us, as a parent dealing with a child, for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

L: Friends, hear the Good News! Those who humble themselves will be exalted.

P: We who are humble before God will be exalted.

L: Friends, believe the Good News!

P: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Mission Capsule – Coaching During COVID -19

Ministry leaders had to adapt quickly to the changes brought about by COVID -19. In this new context, leaders need thoughtful, wise and prayerful approaches to ministry. In order to help PCC leaders think through and develop next steps, the PCC with the support of funds raised through Presbyterian Sharing, offered free, one-time coaching sessions to ministry leaders. Many ministries from across the country benefitted from this support and were able to engage in innovative ministry during a difficult time.

Children's time

Hymn 609 O saints, in splendor sing

Readings

Micah 3: 5-12

Psalms 43

1 Thessalonians 2: 9-13

Matthew 23: 1-12

Hymn 611 For all the saints

Sermon: "The Church Under Construction."

Since spring, exit 7, the exit I take to go home to Enfield, has been under reconstruction, although it seems much longer than that. It seems that getting the job done is taking a lot more time than one might expect.

Nothing seems to happen quickly. One might also say that of the church. In 1984, German film maker Philip Groning, contacted the prior of the Grande Chartreuse Monastery, a remote Christian community high in the French Alps. He said he would like to bring a camera and shoot a documentary about the monastery.

He was told that they would get back to him regarding his request. Sixteen years later, the prior wrote a letter saying, "**O.K. we are ready for you.**" They certainly weren't in a hurry. It's safe to tell jokes on ourselves, like, "How many Presbyterians does it take to change a lightbulb?" Answer. **CHANGE!?**

The fact is that most people, Presbyterians included, are not fond of change. Change even when desired is not that easily accepted when it happens.

As we hear the words of Jesus in our gospel story today, we might recall what Jesus said at an earlier time. In Matthew chapter five, Jesus said:

“Do not think I have come to abolish the law or the prophets, I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.” (Matt. 5: 17)

Yet today we hear Jesus criticizing the religious leaders of his own day. It is important to note that one of the many aspects of Jesus’ ministry was reforming. He watched the Pharisees and Scribes, who interpreted the law of Moses, and he said to his disciples and followers:

“Be careful about following the Scribes and Pharisees. They talk a good line but they don’t live it.”

He went on to say that they tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others, but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them. Jesus goes further:

“Their lives are perpetual fashion shows, embroidered prayer shawls. They love to sit at the head table at church dinners, preening the radiance of public flattery..”

Our lesson today ended at verse 12, but from verse 13 to the end of the chapter Jesus lays an even greater scathing attack upon those leaders. This is a clear put down of the religion of Jesus’ time. It is no wonder, then, that the religious leaders planned to get rid of him one way or another.

That is how reformers are often regarded. After Pope Leo threw Martin Luther out of the Roman Church, Luther was riding through the woods one day when some soldiers on horseback surrounded him. It turned out they had been sent by Frederick, the Prince of Saxony, to whisk Luther away and hide him in a castle where the Pope’s people wouldn’t find him. Luther’s life was in danger for standing up to the abuses and excesses of the church in his day.

Change is difficult! Reform comes at a cost! Try to make a constructive difference in the world and there will always be pushback. It’s no different in the church, in the Christian community.

The gospel invites us to become more and more like Christ. Perhaps more often than we care to admit we regard that idea with admiration. We can become more loving like Jesus, more compassionate, more outspoken about injustice and abuse, more gracious and merciful – in short, more like Christ!

What we don’t want, much less expect, is that becoming like Christ may mean we end up suffering like him as well. There’s a story told about a grandfather who took his granddaughter to an art museum. The man had time on his hands since he was quite recently fired from his job for blowing the whistle on some financial monkey

business in the company. The management thanked him for speaking up, and after things had died down, they gave him the pink slip for speaking up.

So he takes the granddaughter to the museum. They come around the corner of the corridor, only to see a large and fairly accurate depiction of Jesus on the cross. It was quite graphic for both of them. The young girl turned to her grandfather and said,

“Grandpa what does this mean?”

Without having to think very long about it, the grandfather said,

“No good deed goes unpunished.”

So when making changes, we need to be reminded that no change happens without a struggle, especially in the church, those called together in Christ's name. When Luther posted his 95 thesis on the door of the Wittenberg church, the very first item on the list was:

“Our Lord and master Jesus Christ willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.”

That is, our entire Christian journey is one of returning to God again and again. We are never done with it and never finish returning, until we fall into God's arms. Surely, that is liberating Good News! It frees us from the tyranny of perfectionism.

We must start over every day seeking God' forgiveness, depending on God's mercy, and humbly following the path of Christ . Amen.

Prayers

God of all people, we come before you now seeking your strength in our weakness, your peace in our turmoil, and your direction in our confusion. You call us to serve humbly towards reconciliation between those that are at odds with one another.

We pray this day for all who are finding themselves on the margins of the economy, hurting because of anxiousness and low income. Challenge us as a people to lift one another up. May there be enough for all, and may all be blessed.

We pray for communities in this world caught in the vise of hunger and drought. We pray for those struggling against violence, persecution and chaos in their homes, in their workplaces, and in their communities.

We pray for those who are dying in the world, in our country, in our community. We name now in silence those in our hearts this day, including those saints who have blessed us in days and years gone by.

Keep us united in love with all who rest from life in this world but live in your nearer presence, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who teaches us to pray saying... the Lord's Prayer.....

Hymn 620 Go now in peace

Commissioning/Benediction

We have been equipped for sainthood. We are ready to respond. We have been called to minister to a broken world and called to fellowship. We go now in the Spirit of Christ. May the love of our creator, the grace of our redeemer, and the guidance of the Spirit go with us now, and remain with us always. Amen.