

Sermon – November 13, 2022

For all readings from the Hebrew scriptures, we must remember that we could be the Jewish people. God is not speaking to some other group or race. He speaks to us. He speaks to us in our ancestry through the Jews. The Hebrew scriptures should be viewed as if we ... who we are at this very moment ... are the people in the desert to whom God is speaking. We are the people who have made idols ... we are the people who walk in the desert ... we are the people singing lamentations and experiencing desolation of God's desertion in His wrath against us for our sins. Not the sins of another people far away in history. All sins that the Hebrew people committed, we commit today. We await the coming of the saviour, we await the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah and the other prophets. Just as the Jews had prophets, we have prophets today if we listen.

We extol God's virtues and his omnipresence. We shout out loud in praise of God and the goodness he brings to us. We raise our faces to the God who made us. We acknowledge his power. In all, we cannot know the breadth of God's love for us.

We were not circumcised as the Jews are. It was not a tradition for the gentiles. We are not automatically marked as people of God. During the

time of Jesus' life, we would have been considered "alien to the polity of Israel." We would not have been aware of how Israelite society was governed or the laws by which the Hebrews were guided and judged. They lived by a set of laws, prophecies, and writings. As uncircumscribed people, we would have been as separate as another tribe and would have been excluded from Israelite life and any promises God made to his people. Hence, we would have been separated or partitioned from God as Paul wrote in today's letter to the Ephesians.

Today's Invitation to Worship was adapted from Exodus. God instructs the Hebrews to build a temple and specifies details for construction. A new tabernacle is to be built – wood type and joinery are specified. Carving and elaborate decorations are to be prepared by the finest craftsmen. Women are to bring their best and finest wools and linens and embroidery. Gifts of money were to be made by the people.

Can you imagine how beautiful the Temple must have been? As we experience beauty of the art of other cultures through the media, the Temple must have been extraordinary. Why does God ask this of the people? Maybe...to occupy the people – they had just been remonstrated for making the golden idol before Moses brought to them the Ten Commandments. Maybe...to signify God's importance in their lives. Let us

recall that God is a jealous God, jealous of any idols we might place before him.

The sanctuary is prepared and after last week's sermon hopefully you are dressed up for the service today! You are welcome here in God's presence. Somehow, through the gifts of caring members of our congregation, the sanctuary and narthex are vacuumed, oil in the candles is refilled, wicks are replaced, the heat is turned on or windows opened. Our greeter has welcomed you, the offering plate is taken up, communion is prepared, readings and sermons are presented. And we enjoy fellowship with coffee and sundries.

Why do you worship God? Why do you come **here** to worship? Is it because this church is your "home," ... where you grew up? It is because of the comradery? ... Or because of the food or music? ... Is it because you have dedicated yourself to certain charities and this church is involved in the charities you care about? ... Do you come here because you like the historic organ, pink walls, and red carpet? ... Do you come here to pray for those who are sick and in need of healing? ... Do you like how the church is decorated for special times?

Why do you visit this place, and bless it with your humanness? Do you find solace in ritual? And what about God? ... Do you seek the

Creator's voice in your life? ... Does the Creator's voice speak to your soul? Are you listening? ... Do you close your eyes; ... and feel; ... and ask for wisdom and understanding? Do you look upon your fellow worshipers with gentleness and love? ... Is it prayer and holiness that is upon you when you enter these doors? ... Do you see God in the light shining through the windows? Do you sing your heart out to give God praise? Do you bring honor to this holy place and to God, our Father?

Honor ... means (1) *high respect; great esteem; a title of respect given to or used in addressing a judge or a mayor;* (2) *adherence to what is right or to a conventional standard of conduct.* To put God in a place of honor, we must sit and be quiet and listen. We must listen to our pastor quietly and not talk during the service or sermons or prayers. To honor God, we must respect other worshippers and allow them the opportunity to pray. We must give every courtesy and consideration to anyone who enters this sanctuary. Just as we welcome family and friends into our home and extend love and comradery to them, we must extend those same values to those who come here – even if we know them very well. This is a small congregation, and we know each other's quirks. Instead of belittling them behind their backs, we need to love them and laugh with them not at them. Identify your quirks and leave them at the door of this holy place. Do not

allow your quirks to interfere with another's need to worship. **DO** allow your gifts to shine and bring forth the love of God through them for the benefit of others. The worship service is a time to be open to God's word ... a time to respect the prayers, songs, and sermons. It is a time to listen to God's word in the sermon not to the person who delivers it. God speaks through all of us. To lead a holy life we must seek His voice in every encounter in every minute of every day. God can even speak through me. Listen to his word not to me.

Listen to God's voice through the lyrics of the songs and the harmonious music through the piano or organ. Bless the gifts of those who choose the hymns because it is through their gifts that we hear God's voice. Let the music course within your bones and move you to tears in rapture. Allow yourselves to feel rapture in honoring God.

As much comfort as you may feel, there are as many who do not feel comfortable in this church. Why?

The Pharisees asked Jesus why the disciples broke the tradition of the elders by not washing their hands before they ate. Jesus responded to the Pharisees, "Why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" Have we become too concerned with who is "not

washing their hands before they eat?” Have we decided to become the judge?

The work of a Pharisee was to apply the traditional and written laws of the Jewish people. As we read the Hebrew scriptures, we know there are inspirational laws and writings. Did Jesus mean that the laws and writings are hypocrisy? Not at all. As Christians, we love to hate the Pharisees and Sadducees! In the New Testament, they are portrayed as opponents to Jesus and his teachings. We see time and again that they are always trying to trip up Jesus. Jesus tells the Pharisees that they are hypocrites because their tradition does not bring someone close to God. The Pharisees told the people that it is ok to ignore the needs of father or mother because they have donated whatever they had to God.

If we look only to the works that we do, or obey rules and traditions, and neglect our neighbor because we have already given to God through those good works, we are hypocrites. ... We are the Pharisees! ... We are all Pharisees at one time or another paying attention to our traditions and rules rather than whole-heartedly worshiping God. We end up paying lip service to God and living without a good heart. Jesus said, “In vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.” Some people, like the Pharisees are more concerned with the rules and teach the rules as God’s

message. Some rules and some traditions are of human origin and mean nothing in the worship of God. It is important to distinguish between following rules and traditions for the sake of following them and following rules and traditions with a devout heart so that God may speak and act through us. If adhering to those rules, morays and traditions become more important than God-inspired worship, we worship God in vain.

The gentiles lived in a time and a place where separation and partition from God occurred necessarily because they were not circumcised – not of the Hebrew race. St. Paul tells us in his letter to the people of Ephesus that we are always separate and can only attain union with God and each other through Jesus the Anointed One. We remember that we once were not circumcised. We did not know God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit. We were not among God's chosen people. There was division between those who by birth, the people of Israel, were known to the Lord and those who were the gentiles, the non-believers, the uncircumcised. We were strangers to the covenant that God had made with his people.

And yet we know we prevent ourselves from **Holy** worship. We know by our actions that we have placed human precepts before the Almighty Father. We have allowed human precepts, human rules and traditions to separate us from God, the Father.

If you want to live a more holy life, think about every action you take, ask God to help you understand where you hurt another person. Ask for eyes to truly transport yourself into the other so that you might understand the other's pain. Maybe it was when you were short with someone and did not realize how hurtful it was. Maybe you spoke in a disrespectful way about someone. Maybe you did not lend a hand when it was really needed. Maybe you did not give credit to someone who needed to know he/she was appreciated.

You might ask, well how can I know if someone is hurt if I am not told? Remember some people are afraid to say that your actions may have hurt them. We cannot know everything; but we can, in our daily conversations with God, ask. It takes some humility to recognize that our actions may willingly or inadvertently harm someone. Ask God for humility. Being comfortable enough with yourself to admit to yourself that you hurt someone only truly happens when we know that God loves us, that Jesus died for us and that the Holy Spirit was sent to comfort us. If you ask God to teach you, show you where you have erred and not lived according to his Word, God will show you. We must ask God to show us when something we did or said caused someone harm. We must pray ... pray for openness

to receive God's answer. We must be self-reflective and take the focus off what someone else did or didn't do and look at what we did or didn't do.

It is through the true knowledge that we can come here happily and worship – we can sing out loud – we can close our eyes – say our prayers. We are not running a business here – we are worshipping God here. We are building a temple – a temple of people, not coins. Together we trust in God to provide for our congregation. The only reason for this House of Worship to exist is because God lives in us, and we share that with each other. **This is the celebration!**

We can socialize elsewhere – we do not **NEED** this church for that. We can make donations and perform charitable works elsewhere – we do not **NEED** this church for that. We can raise monies for other charities elsewhere. But we need you – each and every one of you to come here and worship the Creator together. That is what makes us a Church, a congregation, a Temple to the Lord. That is worth celebrating. You are worth celebrating.

It is because of you that I feel the Holy Spirit. It is because of you that I come here to worship God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is because of you ... you who are the Temple ... that I can share in warming, heartfelt fellowship. It is because of you that I can bring God's spirit to others. It is

because of you that I can risk my personal self to speak God's message. It is because of you that I am reassured of God's love for me. I want to be here with you worshipping the Lord together, celebrating communion together, praying together.

Just as Isaiah says in today's reading:

We will give thanks to you, O LORD,  
Even though you were angry with us, your anger turned away  
And you comforted us.

God is our salvation,

We will trust and not be afraid,

For the Lord God is our strength and our might;

He has become our salvation.

With joy, we will draw water from the wells of salvation and we will  
say

Give thanks to the Lord, we will call on his name and

Make known his deeds among all peoples and

Proclaim that his name is exalted.

We will sing praises to the Lord for he done gloriously

We will let this be known in all the earth

We will shout aloud and sing for joy for the Holy One of Israel is great  
in our midst.