

**The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost, July 5, 2020, the Rev. David Ota**  
**Zechariah 9:9-12; Psalm 145:8-15; Romans 7:15-25a; Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

Good morning Saints! And Happy Independence Day weekend! As we all are experiencing, we are living through life-changing times, and I would submit that we are living through societal paradigm changing times. We will be wearing masks for the very near future, and what it means to love our neighbor will be to keep a safe social and physical distance from them so they and we will not spread the novel Coronavirus.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the inequality of our national life primarily of historical economic racism, as more black and brown people contract COVID-19 than folks from other groups. The way a police officer killed George Floyd revealed to the entire nation that there continues to be a separate and unequal justice system which is not acceptable to most Americans.

And both of these paradigm shifts: living through a pandemic and societal recognition of not only our racist history, but how that history continues today is occurring during the era of climate change. Climate change means that the fossil based energy used to power our lives must be converted to more sustainable power. We can no longer ignore the effect of our life-style has on the planet. We must make proactive changes to save the environment or we will have to make reactive changes in response to a changing climate.

And given that this is the Fourth of July weekend in which our nation celebrates its independence from England's King George and taxation without representation, we must look at this celebration with the eyes of the new paradigm. So often the Fourth of July has been celebrated for the entire nation, when in reality it was the beginning of independence for the few, and over time the freedoms and rights evolved to include more and more people.

What then do our lessons for today say to our new paradigm and our national celebration of independence?

In our gospel lesson for today (Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30) Jesus points out to the crowd that they dismissed John the Baptist because he was too strict, and they accused Jesus of being so inclusive and welcoming that he was too lax. The people didn't want religious leaders who asked too much of them. John the Baptist called the people to an ascetic life-style. Jesus asked them to reach out to those on the margins. They both asked them to do work.

Is this not so with us at times? Would we rather have leaders both religious and secular who take care of things for us? Instead of having to undergo strict self-examination, repentance and amendment of life, wouldn't we rather have leaders that bless us and not ask us to do the difficult and necessary work?

For example, we have leaders who ignore the problems of the pandemic. We have leaders who don't recognize that the paradigm has shifted who wants to whitewash our history, to pretend as if our history both glorious at times has also been very sad and dehumanizing at times. We would like to forget the genocide done to the Native Americans. We would like to imagine that slavery has happened, but now is over. They cannot see the connection between our sad history and the times today.

In our lesson from Zechariah the people who have been oppressed, most likely those captives in Babylon are called to rejoice because their king comes, the LORD's Messiah. This promised one rides a donkey, a work animal, and not a warhorse. The idea between this contrast of animals carrying the leader is important. The kingdom of God comes not from war. Not from some powerful leader imposing his or her will on the people and on other nations. The kingdom of God comes from those who labor peaceably using a donkey. The kingdom of God is a lot of work, a lot of change and repentance on our part. We must do that work, and we follow a leader, Jesus, who does that.

Returning to today's gospel lesson, Jesus offers comfort to the weary who are carrying heavy burdens. These are those who labor and must follow the leaders, both religious and secular. They must follow the strict religious rules of the Pharisees, or pay the taxes to the Romans. Jesus, on the other hand, does not place these demands on the people before they can enter relationship with him. Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of heaven (in Matthew) has come near and welcomes all who seek relationship with him.

Yes, there will be a call to a different ethic of life, to seek the reign of God and not our personal interest, and there will be a call to serve and welcome even the least even as we have been called and welcomed.

The apostle Paul addresses the challenge of living the Christian life in today's portion of his letter to the Romans. However, a crucial portion is left out of today's lesson, Romans 7:12-14,

“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good. Did what is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. For we know that the way is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin.”

What these verses make clear is that the law or Torah is holy and good, but sin has the ability in our lives to take what is good and make it an instrument of evil. Paul is here referring to his attempt to arrest and present for execution Christians because he believed they were committing blasphemy saying that Jesus is Lord.

Given this background, Paul is arguing that although the law or Torah is holy and good, and a means by which we can have a covenantal relationship with God, sin which infects each person, that is the temptation to place one's own self-interest above anything else deforms the living out of that covenantal relationship with God which is spiritual.

We all have a tendency to do what is in our best interest. This tendency is sin which cares more about the self than about the loving relationship with others. If God's ways are placed at the center of our lives and not self-interest (sin), then loving others, loving God's creation and loving God comes first.

Paul highlights the problem, but like the rest of us is unable to address a solution to self-seeking. We cannot will ourselves away from self-seeking, it is so much a part of us. We all need help, and this help comes from Jesus. Paul asks, “Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24b-25) It is Jesus who helps us, who rescues us

from our own self-seeking. So, we must die to our self-seeking so that the love of Jesus may live in us.

So, returning to the paradigm changes that I began today's sermon, we are all called to acknowledge our own self-seeking, to repent and ask, "How does the gospel call me to love my neighbor?"

In regards to the pandemic, we must act in the best interest of others. Our primary concern should not be what is best for me and my circle of friends, but what is best for others, even the stranger. What are the loving actions I can take to show my care for others? Of course, we can wear masks, maintain a safe social physical distance; wash our hands regularly so we will not spread the virus inadvertently. We can choose to not take offense at someone who is not taking precautions. Remember, God's way is not the way of the warhorse, but the way of the donkey. We are to do our work to take loving actions, and not command others.

What does it mean to come to terms with our national history of economic racism in this Black Lives Matter time? Does it mean taking down statues of Confederate leaders, and other leaders who in their time practiced keeping slaves? Does it mean looking at our laws and ordinances with regards to race or ethnicity? Does it mean looking at our own networks, and how we include or exclude people?

I believe it means to listen to the voices wanting to express their pain at living with this economic racism of our nation. I believe it means seeing with new eyes our collective history. Our history in one sense is glorious, just as the Torah or Law is holy, good and just. We have a history which has done great good, but sin in our society has also resulted in great harm to our own shame. Because we are ashamed of it, we ignore it, we do not teach it in our schools and then we will be tempted to repeat it. So the genocide done to the Native peoples of this continent was not emphasized very much. The slavery and the harm of the Jim Crow era was not emphasized very much. These are stories which we need to learn about not so much from the perspective of the victors but of the vanquished.

So, Andrew Jackson came up recently and he is responsible for the Trail of Tears, and the suffering of Native Peoples. It is part of our history that we must remember.

When we do this, when we learn a fuller version of our history as a nation, we will begin to see the inconsistency between what we proclaim and what we have lived. Meaning that we know that we have more work to do. For example, in the Pledge of Allegiance, we state we are a nation "with liberty and justice for all." This is a reign of God aspiration, to have liberty and justice for all. But a look at our history reveals that this is a long and continual struggle to live into that vision.

And finally, we all know the challenges of climate change, and the challenges we all face in meeting our responsibilities to care for one another, especially our families. I believe most of the changes that we can make in addressing climate change has to do with needing to grow in our awareness of our privilege. The Shelter-in-Place policy had an ironic effect on carbon dioxide emissions. When it was going on much less carbon dioxide was released into the atmosphere during that time, but it was not sustained. However, it showed what could happen if we can make a life-style change away from fossil fuels.

But the ability to change all begins in our hearts. Can we see our neighbors who are suffering? Are we willing to acknowledge their suffering and our part in it? Are we willing to repent and make changes to the way we live? And once we do, are we willing to ask for forgiveness and live a new way and live reconciled lives?

Amen.

## **The Collect**

O God, you have taught us to keep all your commandments by loving you and our neighbor: Grant us the grace of your Holy Spirit, that we may be devoted to you with our whole heart, and united to one another with pure affection; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## **Old Testament**

### **Zechariah 9:9-12**

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!

Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
and the war horse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
and he shall command peace to the nations;  
his dominion shall be from sea to sea,  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.

As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you,  
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope;  
today I declare that I will restore to you double.

## **The Response**

### **Psalm 145:8-15**

*Exaltabo te, Deus*

8 The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, \*  
slow to anger and of great kindness.

- 9 The LORD is loving to everyone \*  
and his compassion is over all his works.
- 10 All your works praise you, O LORD, \*  
and your faithful servants bless you.
- 11 They make known the glory of your kingdom \*  
and speak of your power;
- 12 That the peoples may know of your power \*  
and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.
- 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom; \*  
your dominion endures throughout all ages.
- 14 The LORD is faithful in all his words \*  
and merciful in all his deeds.
- 15 The LORD upholds all those who fall; \*  
he lifts up those who are bowed down.

## **The Epistle**

### **Romans 7:15-25a**

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

## **The Gospel**

### **Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30**

Jesus said to the crowd, "To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,

‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance;  
we wailed, and you did not mourn.’

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

**I propose to show that as we live in a paradigm changing time for our world, we are called to re-evaluate how our nation and we ourselves can live into a future that is aligned with God's vision for us all.**

**In preparation for this coming Sunday's worship, please pray this coming Sunday's Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below**

**Isaiah 55:10-13; Psalm 65:1-14; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23**

## **The Collect**

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## **Old Testament**

### **Isaiah 55:10-13**

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,  
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

For you shall go out in joy,  
and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you  
shall burst into song,  
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.  
Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;  
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;  
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,  
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

## **The Response**

### **Psalm 65: (1-8), 9-14**

#### *Te decet hymnus*

- [1 You are to be praised, O God, in Zion; \*  
to you shall vows be performed in Jerusalem.
- 2 To you that hear prayer shall all flesh come, \*  
because of their transgressions.
- 3 Our sins are stronger than we are, \*  
but you will blot them out.
- 4 Happy are they whom you choose  
and draw to your courts to dwell there! \*  
they will be satisfied by the beauty of your house,  
by the holiness of your temple.
- 5 Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness,  
O God of our salvation, \*  
O Hope of all the ends of the earth  
and of the seas that are far away.
- 6 You make fast the mountains by your power; \*  
they are girded about with might.
- 7 You still the roaring of the seas, \*  
the roaring of their waves,  
and the clamor of the peoples.
- 8 Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs; \*  
you make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy.]
- 9 You visit the earth and water it abundantly;  
you make it very plenteous; \*  
the river of God is full of water.
- 10 You prepare the grain, \*  
for so you provide for the earth.

- 11 You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; \*  
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.
- 12 You crown the year with your goodness, \*  
and your paths overflow with plenty.
- 13 May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing, \*  
and the hills be clothed with joy.
- 14 May the meadows cover themselves with flocks,  
and the valleys cloak themselves with grain; \*  
let them shout for joy and sing.

## **The Epistle**

### **Romans 8:1-11**

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law-- indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

## **The Gospel**

### **Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

“Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”