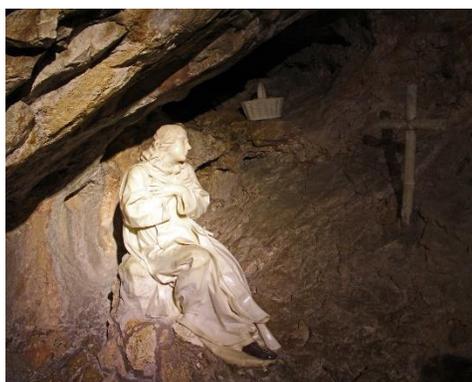




ST. ELIZABETH EPISCOPAL CHURCH

The Rule of St. Benedict that so heavily influences Anglican liturgy and practices is filled with spiritual gems. One that could summarize Benedictine spirituality is this: “The love of Christ must come before all else.” The Benedictine spiritual life is pervaded with the idea of sacramental encounters with Christ in worship and prayer, in nature and material objects, in the circumstances of daily life, and above all, in ourselves and in others.



“Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ,” St. Benedict wrote, borrowing from a quote from St. Cyprian, an early church father, who continued: “...for He has preferred nothing to us.” This Christ-love is the center of the Rule and Benedict expects it to be the center of the monastic’s life, and the focal point toward which all our actions and thoughts should lead. That makes it also an excellent passage for non-monastics. Benedict’s sense of the presence of the Risen Christ, makes the paschal mystery a cornerstone in Benedictine spirituality. Benedict repeatedly presents the risen, transcendent Lord and calls us to participate in the

Pascal mystery. It is God in Whom we are loved and in Whom we love others.

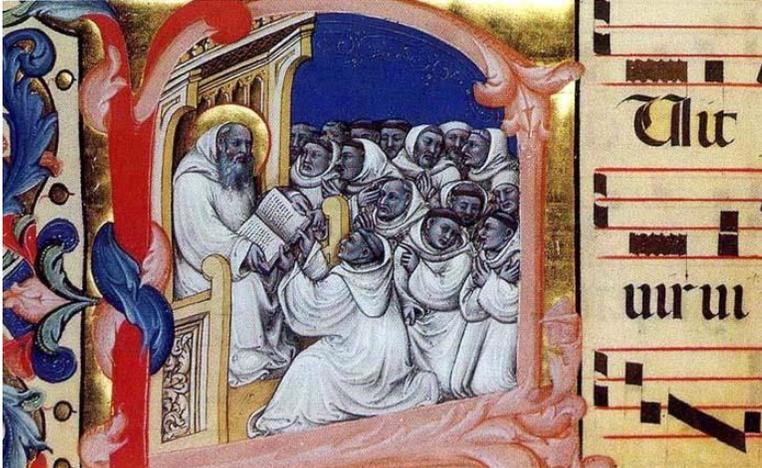
For professed religious and lay-people, that means all other realities in our lives must be subordinated to the passionate, personal and communal pursuit of immersion in Christ. Australian Abbot Michael Casey wrote: “Separation from the world is not primarily an act of distancing or detachment, but an act of joining oneself to Christ and to the holy community: an act of attachment. ...No Christian can scorn the world for which Christ died; he can however refuse to accept its unevangelical standards of behavior. ...What is of fundamental importance is rather the desire to attach oneself to Christ and the conviction that this union is achieved through membership in a particular community in the Church.”

It is this dynamic Christ-centeredness that prepares our hearts and souls for a liberating journey into the fullness of life. After seeking and discovering Christ in ourselves and ourselves in Christ, we are enabled and compelled to reach out to others in love and in service. This Christ-love allows us to value and cherish the interests of others without sacrificing our own distinctiveness and precious solitude. The resulting emphasis on patience, kindness, humility, tolerance, forgiveness and trust create community within the body of Christ, animated by the love of Christ. To paraphrase Trappist Benedictine Thomas Merton: “The poet enters into himself in order to create. The contemplative enters into Christ in order to be created.”

Preparation

Now that we are in the late Spring/Summer season after Pentecost called “Ordinary time,” we use green as the liturgical color for altar and priestly vestments. The color symbolizes growth, creation, life, health and hope for many people from many faiths. At home, worship can take place anywhere but it is most appropriate at a table: a kitchen table, a dining table, a table in a garden or under a tree.

During this temporary physical separation, you might dress your worship space with photos or real flowers and greens. Anglican spirituality holds that all the senses can disclose God’s presence – not just texts for speaking or singing. You may want to burn some incense



as a way to enhance your prayers and let them rise with the fragrant smoke. If you have a favorite icon, cross, rosary or image of Jesus, putting holy artifacts in your worship space can help focus your prayer. A candle is always appropriate, as is inviting friends, family or loved ones to join you by phone or through social media. You may want to invite loved ones that we no longer see or saints that you admire.

Given our current life circumstances, you may find a moving

musical expression in this acapella recording: youtube.com/watch?v=Ir3htl3UIBk of Arvo Pärt’s “The Deer’s Song” by VOCES8. The lyrics were composed by St. Patrick in the year 433 C.E. It is a beautiful prayer celebrating a God who guides, shelters and strengthens God’s children, set to a tune that carries a feeling of lament. Or you may prefer the somewhat more majestic “Deck thyself my soul with gladness.” You can hear a rendition done at the Washington National Cathedral at: youtube.com/watch?v=CjZ3JwrXwz8. You can also follow the lyrics and sing along.

You might also enjoy this gorgeous motet recorded by St-Barnabas Anglican Church in Ottawa: youtube.com/watch?v=RCrkSU6_PXc And finally, if you are looking for something a bit larger, try: youtube.com/watch?v=7s1suWhb5KA This is one of my favorite Welsh tunes (Cwm Rhondda) set to “Guide Me O Thou Great Redeemer,” which is Hymn 690 in our hymnal. Ours uses earlier wording – “Jehovah,” in place of “Redeemer” to begin with – but the sentiment is the same.

For something different, I would also point you to this recording of the Our Father (or “Abun d’beschmoyo” in Aramaic): youtube.com/watch?v=AdPiRWIam0 This is a captivating rendition in the language that Jesus spoke most.

We are preparing meticulously for the day when we can gather together in person at St. Elizabeth. Our buildings may be closed, but the church is open and continuing to seek God’s inspiration creatively. And so we pray together in the plural – “we,” “us” and “our” – even when we are worshipping by ourselves or temporarily apart from each other physically, because no matter what separates us – politically, geographically or economically – we are also always bound together in Christ.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost 26 July 2020

Centering

Make the sign of the cross as the leader says: Blessed be God; (+) Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and blessed be God's kingdom, now and for ever.

The leader prays:

Seed-planting, fish-netting, bread-baking, pearl-hunting God,
you shape us into living parables.

Pray with your Spirit in us
so that we may understand our experiences
as healing metaphors,
and become creative and abundant stewards
of the environment you have entrusted to our love. *Amen.*

The Word of God for the Eighth Sunday after Pentecost



A reading from Genesis: Laban said to Jacob, “Just because you are a kinsman, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?” Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes; Rachel was shapely and beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel; so he answered, “I will serve you for seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” Laban said, “Better that I give her to you than I should give her to an outsider. Stay with me.” So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife, for my time is fulfilled, that I may cohabit with her.” And Laban gathered all the people of the place and made a feast. When evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to him; and he cohabited with her. – Laban had given his maidservant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her maid. – When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? I was in your service for Rachel! Why did you deceive me?” Laban said, “It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the older. Wait until the bridal week if this one is over and we will give you that one too, provided you serve me another seven years.” Jacob did so; he waited out the bridal week of the one, and then he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife.

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God

(The response: Prayed together or by alternating verses) Psalm 105: 1-11, 45b

¹ Give thanks, and acclaim God's name,
make known God's deeds among the peoples.

² O sing to the Lord, sing praise;
tell all his wonderful works.

³ Be proud of God's holy name,
let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice.

⁴ Consider the Lord, who is strong;
constantly seek his face.

⁵ Remember the wonders of the Lord,
the miracles and judgments pronounced.

⁶ O children of Abraham, God's servant,
O children of Jacob the chosen,

⁷ This is the Lord, our God;
whose judgments prevail in all the earth.

⁸ God remembers the covenant for ever,
the promise for a thousand generations,

⁹ the covenant made with Abraham,
the oath that was sworn to Isaac.

¹⁰ God confirmed it for Jacob as a law,
for Israel as a covenant for ever;

¹¹ and said: I am giving you a land,
Canaan, your appointed heritage."

^{45b} Alleluia!

A reading from Romans: The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God



The Gospel is the primary reading of the day and should always be read. Read the passage aloud without rushing. Allow the images to enter your awareness and find a home within.

A reading from Matthew: [Jesus] set another parable before [the crowd] saying, “The Kingdom of the heavens is like mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field, which is the smallest of all seeds, but when it grows it is larger than garden-herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.” He told them another parable: “The Kingdom of the heavens is like yeast, which a woman took and mixed into three measures of flour, until all of it was leavened.”

“The Kingdom of the heavens is like a treasure that had been hidden in a field, which a man found and hid, and from his joy he goes and sells the things he owns and purchases that field. Again, the Kingdom of the heavens is like a merchant looking for lovely pearls; and finding one extremely valuable pearl, he went away and sold all the things he owned and purchased it. Again, the Kingdom of the heavens is like a large dragnet cast into the sea and gathering in things of every kind: And when it was filled they drew it up onto the strand and, sitting down, collected the good things in vessels, but threw the rancid things away. Thus it will be at the consummation of the age: the angels will go forth and separate the wicked out from the midst of the just, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; there will be weeping and grinding of teeth there. Did you understand all of these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” Then he said to them, “Hence every scribe who has been made a disciple to the Kingdom of the heavens is like a master of a house, who brings forth things new and old from his treasury.”

Reader: The Word of the Lord

Response: Thanks be to God



Sermon: Matthew gathers five brief parables and weaves them together with two longer parables; one about a sower and another about dandelion growing together with wheat. In all seven parables, Jesus describes the mystery of the Kingdom of heaven. And then Jesus asks if his followers have understood. He doesn't ask if they know what the parables mean

Because parables don't *have* meaning so much as they *awaken* meaning. They don't explain, they expose. And these particular parables appear to walk us heavenward and yet they leave us standing flat-footed where we really have been all along. Even for parables, these are odd stories, although taken out of their time and cultural context, it may be hard to see just how baffling they are.

Our 21st c. Pacific Northwest minds tend to be content with interpretations that have Jesus saying that "heaven is a place where we will gather after we die, if we have even a tiny bit of faith because our faith is more important than anything we own, although if we haven't been good people, we'll be tossed out like bad fish." *That* we seem to understand. It just isn't what Jesus said.

To be fair, Jesus will say a little later in Matthew's Gospel that if we had faith as small as a mustard seed, we could tell mountains to move, so that may be a little confusing. Here, Jesus gives us a strange, one-sentence story about a farmer planting an invasive weed that turns into a tree. And says that heaven – not our faith mind you – heaven is like *that*.

Immediately following that, Jesus tells another one-sentence story about a woman mixing a stinking, living goo into about 60 pounds of flour, enough to make more than 100 loaves. Heaven – again, not our *faith* – but *heaven* is like that.

Both of these parables work with everyday images from the lives of the first century Mediterranean men and women following Jesus. And both parables have unexpected twists that make interpretation mystifying. Every farmer listening would have known that mustard plants were weeds that could grow, at most, maybe five or six feet tall. And yet, even the tallest of these would never turn into trees.

As for the image of a woman baking bread, the expectation is that she is baking a daily loaf for a family. And yet, even the largest extended family would not eat more than a hundred loaves even if it were possible for her to bake them all in her clay oven.

Jesus starts these short parables with small and immediately familiar references – a common weed and a bread starter. He ends each of these with perplexing images of growth and abundance well beyond our lived experiences. Jesus uses commonplace materials and

recognizable characters to *evoke* God's in-breaking realm in our daily lives. In this way, his tandem tales expose us to heaven "already" and "not yet."

And while we are still a bit off-balance trying to resolve *that* enigma, Jesus engages our imaginations again with a triplet of short parables about discovery. The reign of heaven is like a person finding a hidden treasure. The reign of heaven is like a merchant. The reign of heaven is like a fishing net. These are all earthly situations and characters that we can picture because that's where we are.

Now, *please* notice: we are not the ones who find treasures and pearls or who sort fish: God does all that. God acts that way here in this world – this real world riddled with hostility and chaos. Right here, God finds hospitality and compassion in and among you and me and the rest of humankind.

God's heaven doesn't come find us in some fantasy afterworld – or at least not *only* in an afterworld. Heaven stumbles across us right here in this world. Right here where we are reeling from a pandemic, drowning in both information and misinformation, and pummeled with prejudice and polarization.

That's the real world we are living in. This is the field where a treasure is found. The place where a pearl is found. The sea where "things of all kinds" are hauled up in a gathering net. All these things are present, but hidden.

It's easy to get distracted by surface details. We could talk about the man who found the treasure not being the owner of the field, making some of his behavior suspect. The way to get back on track is to remember that Jesus said *the realm of heaven* is like someone finding a treasure who then gives everything to obtain it. Similarly, the kingdom is not like the *pearl* in this parable...it's like a *merchant*. And so, Jesus implies that once *heaven* finds what it values, God's *heaven* will unexpectedly give up anything and everything to possess it.

And finally, Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a net thrown into the sea that gathered every species. Jesus didn't say that heaven was like a basket of good fish. What he said is that the realm of God's heaven is like a *net* that gathered "every kind." That is to say, not just all of us but all that each of us is—each and every one of us in all our hurtfulness and our grace; in all our sinfulness and our loving, our pettiness and our gratitude; in all our destructiveness and all our creativity.

In God's own time, God's angels – not you or me or the Archbishop of Canterbury or Pat Robertson or any other human – *God's angels* will gather us all in and cast out all the causes of separation from God. And the fire of God's Holy Spirit will burn way all selfishness, evil and hatred.

So I invite you to revisit these ancient teachings, these old treasures, as we participate in what God is making new. The more of God's heaven that we give away, the more we say "Yes" to Christ in this world, the more of God's heaven comes into its fullness; God's heaven that is breaking in – even now, even here.

Silence and stillness

The Nicene Creed

Leader: Let us reaffirm our faith in the words of the Nicene Creed:

We believe in one God,

the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,

the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.

Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:

by the power of the Holy Spirit

he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.

With the Father and the Son he (or “she” or no pronoun) is worshiped and glorified.

He (she/who) has spoken through the Prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.

We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers for the church, the world, and all who are in need

These intercessions may be used, adding others in each household:

Leader: Through baptism we have been made alive in Christ Jesus. With the breath of the Holy Spirit speaking through our renewed lives, we pray for the whole state of Christ’s church and the world, saying: “LORD, have mercy.”

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer, we pray for the team responsible for preparing the Lambeth Conference, which was due to be taking place now – please pray for them as they consider

the implications of its postponement in light of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer, we pray for the Earth Ministry; Underhill House, Seattle; Center for Spiritual Development.

For the church, that we might be faithful, willing to serve, constant in grace, and receptive to newness, let us pray to the LORD.

All: LORD, have mercy.

Leader: We pray for our neighbors at Navos, for Neighborhood House, for Hospitality House, for Operation Nightwatch, and for the safety of those in military service, for the safety and stamina of healthcare workers, for first responders, and for their families. We pray for those on our long-term list. Let us pray for our own needs and those of others, offered silently or aloud.

All: LORD, have mercy.

Leader: For this congregation, that we might be eager to welcome, diligent in prayer, and generous in deed, let us pray to the LORD.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For our nation, town and neighborhood, that we might be advocates for the excluded, diligent in prayer, defenders of liberty and models of justice.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For those who lament the iniquity of racism, those who protest the brutality of hateful speech and deadly action; for those working for racial justice and harmony, and for the courage to examine our own prejudices, inviting the Holy Spirit to free us from them.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For those experiencing homelessness, unemployment or under-employment, and those without healthcare or food stability.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For those who grieve, for those isolated in care facilities, those in prison, those suffering from addiction and those who are despondent.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For those in dangerous occupations, for those who care for the sick, those who work the land, those who work in transportation, warehouse or delivery services and those who teach.

All: LORD have mercy.

Leader: For our families and all those placed in our care, for those with whom we disagree, and for those who are examples of grace in our lives.

All: LORD have mercy.

A period of silence follows and then, leader: Holy One, in our weakness, be our strength. Work in us and through us to do your yearning as the people you want for us to be. With your Holy Spirit, inspire all who seek to grow in the faith that your heavenly realm may shine within us into the lives of all those we encounter through Christ Jesus, our brother, who bears our burdens and inspires our joys. *Amen.*

Leader: Let us confess our sins to God.

Silence may be kept and then all together:

Almighty God, our heavenly Father:

We have sinned against you,

through our own fault,

in thought, and word, and deed,

and in what we have left undone.

For the sake of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,

forgive us all our offenses; and grant that we may serve you

in newness of life,

to the glory of your Name. *Amen.*

Leader: May the Almighty God grant us forgiveness of all our sins, and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Pater Noster/Our Father/The Lord's Prayer

Please feel free to use the translation and language that most feeds your heart.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

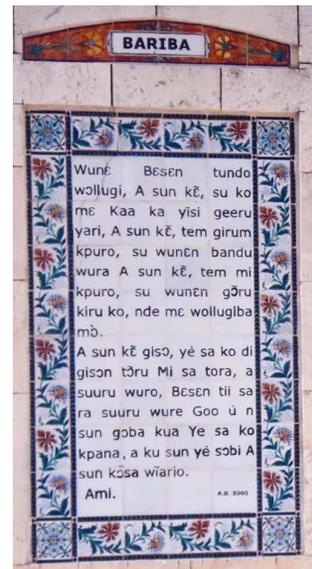
And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. *Amen.*



Prayer of spiritual communion

Most Holy Christ, we trust that you are truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

We love you above all things, and we long for you in our souls. Since we cannot at this moment receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into our hearts. We embrace you as though you were already there and we unite ourselves entirely to you. Never permit us to be separated from you. *Amen.*

Concluding Prayer

Lord, our God, in the confusion and loneliness of this world, you do not cease to gather with your word a holy people from every land, city and nation, so that in charity they may offer worship pleasing to you. Keep the flock you have gathered, preserve it in your love, now and forever. *Amen.*

Blessing

Make the sign of the cross as you say: The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that God has given us. May the blessing of God (+), Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us and those for whom we pray, this day and for ever.
Amen.

Giving Thanks at Table

Leader: Every eye looks to You, O Lord.

All: You are the One who gives them their food in due time.

You are the One who opens Your hand
and fills every living thing with Your favor.

Bless us, + O Lord, and these Your gifts which we are about to receive
from Your goodness, through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.



“If it is God you want, look for the light and not the diamond.
There are so many facets, and yet the light is not in any of them.
Their beauty lies in their ability to reflect what is beyond them.”

~ **Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor**

Offerings

Just a reminder: There are many ways to continue to invest in our shared ministry at St. Elizabeth during this time apart. You can still send your pledge or gift to P.O. Box 66579, Burien, Wash., 98166 or you can find us on Givlify.com. You can also find us at <https://resources.ecww.org/> Your gift will help to provide upkeep and maintenance of the building and grounds; allow church staff to maintain our ministry; ensure that normal operations can resume when the time comes. If you want to make a gift to the Rector's Discretionary Fund, which we use for those who have emergency needs, please indicate that on your check.

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