

7-25-2021 9th Sunday of Pentecost

Welcome, friends, to our worship for July 25th.

We begin in the name of God, Abba, Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our opening prayer is an ancient favorite from Psalm 145. Just this verse.

O God, all life looks to you in hope, for you feed us with the food of each season.
You open your hands wide. You satisfy the desires of every living creature, so open
our hearts to receive your infinite love and generosity this day. We pray in Christ's name.

Our first lesson for today is from **Ephesians, chapter 3**. [Ep. 3: 14-20]
It is just a stunningly beautiful prayer.

This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before God, who is the source of life for every being in heaven and on earth. In the abundance of God's glory may Christ, through his Spirit, enable you to grow firm in power with regard to your inner self, so that Christ may live in you and live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, with all God's holy people you will have the strength to grasp the breadth, and the length, and the height and the depths of wisdom; so that knowing the love of Christ which is beyond knowledge, you may be filled with the utter fullness of God. Glory to the One whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory to the One from generation to generation in the church and beyond, through Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.

[Martha Mantei and Bev Harms lead the congregation in singing *The Lord Is Kind and Merciful*.]

Today's gospel is from **John, chapter 6**. [Jn 6: 1-15]
The Miracle of the Loaves.

Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee and a large crowd followed him, impressed by the signs he had done in curing the sick. Jesus climbed the hillside and sat down there with his disciples. The time of the Jewish Passover was near. Looking up, Jesus saw the crowds approaching and said to Philip, 'Where can we buy some bread so that these people may eat?' Now he said this only to put Philip to the test. He himself knew exactly what he could do. Philip answered, 'Two hundred denarii would not buy enough food to give these people even a little piece of something to eat.' One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said, 'Here is a small boy with five barley loaves and two fish, but what is that among so many people?' Jesus said to them, 'Then make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass there and as many as 5,000 people sat down. Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed them to those who were sitting there; he then did the same with the fish, distributing as much as they wanted. When they had eaten enough, he said to the disciples, 'Pick up the pieces left over, so that nothing is wasted.' So they picked up and filled twelve large baskets, filled with the scraps left over from the meal of five barley

loaves. Seeing the sign that he had done, the people said, 'This is indeed the prophet who has come into the world.' Jesus, as he realized they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus disappeared back into the hills alone.

The word of God.

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In the name of God, Abba Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I'd like to begin with a little story of the experiences of a woman named Etty Hillesum. She was a remarkable Jewish writer who lived from 1914 to 1943. Unfortunately, she was marked for death at Auschwitz. Etty was a professed atheist with a sharp, analytical mind. The existence of God, to say nothing of a deep intimacy with God, was not even remotely of interest to her. And yet completely unbidden, and not especially wanted, Etty began to notice something stirring within her. She hadn't the foggiest idea what to make of it, but only gradually did she begin to realize that there is a vast presence opening within her. In June of 1941, she wrote in her diary "My inner landscape consists of great, wide plains, infinitely wide, with hardly a horizon in sight."

In her next entry, June 21st of 1942, she asked herself, "What was it like this morning just before I woke up? An almost tangible feeling, just as if there were all sorts of spaces and distance locked up inside of me, which now wanted to break out and become free to unfold into even wider spaces and distances. It felt like the stamping and pawing of horses in a crowded stable. That spatial feeling within me is very strong." And it gradually begins to dawn on her that the inner world of each of us is as real as the outer world. The inner world has its landscapes, contours, possibilities and boundless regions. And in another diary entry, she reveals her realization that "...it is as if I were riding through the landscape of my own soul-scape. I feel that often--that the outer landscape is a reflection of the inner soul-scape." This leads her in time to even write, "Thinking gets you nowhere."

A startling statement from a rather fierce, analytical thinker, don't you think? She said, "You shouldn't live on your brains alone, but on a deeper, more abiding source, though you should gratefully accept your brains as a precious tool for delving into the problems that your soul brings forth."

Our Ephesians text is sharing and addressing way that Etty, like so many of us, have experienced that deep inner freedom, a connection beyond all understanding with life, with love, with who we are and what we're about.

I pray to the one who gives each of us life that in the abundance of the spirit, you may grow firm in power with regard to your inner self, firm in understanding who you and we are becoming so that in Christ and through faith, we may be planted in love and built on love with all of God's holy people. Then we may be able to grasp the breadth and height and length and depth of that wisdom of Christ which is unfathomable, so that we may be filled with the utter fullness, the utter

delight of God. Glory to the One who can work within us that which is infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

To do more than we can ask or imagine requires us--to ask. To ask and press the case, for what we and loved ones need in life, 'Ask', Jesus says, 'seek, you'll find, pound on the door and it will be open to you.' We must ask, we must imagine who we are and what we want to become.

The setting of intentions is what shapes our focus and energy. This is the crucial spiritual practice--to be clear about our intentions. What are we longing for? What are we asking for? What are we seeking? It is through committing ourselves to our intentions that we are led to a new awareness, or a new understanding or that we receive gifts which are beyond our imagining. If we just sit there and expect nothing, that will be the result. We have to engage ourselves in the questions, in the concerns, and in making commitments.

Sometimes we are like Etty, where whole vast universes open up within us, unbidden seemingly. Other times it is the exertion of our commitments which opens us to do visions until we get to the boundaries. We can't see beyond that, can we? New horizons and vistas open for us, where we didn't think there were any. Both of these gifts, strengthen our inner self bringing the clarity you need to be planted in love and built on love. Like the child who offered loaves and fishes, God receives what we offer and then multiplies it beyond our imagining, giving us a taste of the very fullness of God.

Thanks be to God.

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O God, this day we pray for the willingness to trust you to open minds and hearts. to that vast expanse of understanding and compassion, joy, insight, wisdom and delight with which you would bless us so that we might be nurtured in the depths of our being with that freedom by which inner self must live so that your spirit may communicate the joy. and the insights we need to continue to grow.

May we offer what we have--loaves and fishes, gifts of compassion and care--to you, that you may multiply all that we have for the joy of your creation. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Glory be to God, Abba Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit, and upon us weak and wounded people, upon us amazing, beautiful creatures may mercy and compassion be shed in both worlds now and forever. Amen.