Sunday, Sept. 10, 2023

**Lectionary 23, Year A**

Ezekiel 33:7-11 — *The prophet’s responsibility to warn the people*

Psalm 119:33-40 — *I desire the path of your commandments.*

Romans 13:8-14 — *Live honorably as in the day*

Matthew 18:15-20 — *Reconciliation in the community of faith*

**CONSIDERATIONS FOR PREACHING**

Conflict is part of our humanity, causing ripples of separation and division. We live in a world of fractured communities and broken bonds. We find fault and fail to forgive. In the book of Ezekiel we hear firsthand the repercussions when we withhold forgiveness and let anger fester. Today’s reading from Ezekiel begins in the middle of a passage in which God has condemned those who stray from God. It is easy to let arguments consume and divide us but harder to rise above them, to acknowledge when we fall short. That’s when God uses a firm hand to correct us.

Tough love is what we see in this prophetic text. It is challenging to some and jarring to others because it shows God using a heavy hand to rebuke and discipline us. To understand the fullness of what God is saying, we must understand that God is speaking to Ezekiel, who was appointed prophet to the exiles yet is failing his people. He is not upholding his duties and proclaiming the word, nor is he teaching his people the totality of God’s will, so God reprimands him.

How many of us need guidance and reassurance that we are doing the right thing? How many of us have failed or chosen to intentionally disregard what we know is right?

When we stray and choose to go against God, God offers repentance and love. In the lectionary we find the juxtaposition of failed leadership in Ezekiel alongside the love and hope announced by Paul in the letter to the Romans. Paul could have easily used guilt, shame and fear to get his point across, but he chooses to address the community with hope. Paul highlights love and law as the main principles of being in a Christian community. Also, though we acknowledge that God’s commandments are hard to follow and we will fail at times, we know that this is not the end, because Christ gives us chance after chance. When we lead by love, we fulfill the law and act in accordance with Scripture. When you learn how to love, your anger subsides, the walls of division dissipate and you see as Christ does in the Gospel reading from Matthew.
In the gospel reading Jesus offers to mend our broken relationships. He understands that splintered relationships are inevitable, part of our broken humanity. He looks at his own disciples and how they too share this struggle. Jesus normalizes it and then offers ways to resolve conflict. Anger, malice and disagreement should not be stewed upon but instead confronted privately with the one who has angered you. Jesus urges us to go to one another, seek resolution and, if that is not feasible, ask someone else to assist in this, because sometimes we can’t do it by ourselves.

We live in a world that is broken, fractured and divided, yet in living in such a space, we are called to embrace the harsh world and to care for one another. Love prevails, and Christ lives in us, offering unyielding love, no matter what we are, what we do or who we are. There are no hoops to jump through or concessions we have to give. Christ looks at every one of us, calls us by name and loves us when we can’t love ourselves or one another. Christ lays out a blueprint for the church, a church that is accessible to all, built on unyielding and immovable love. *Ralen Robinson*

**WORSHIP TEXTS**

*The service may begin with confession and forgiveness or with thanksgiving for baptism.*

**Confession and Forgiveness**

In the name of the + triune God,
who loves us into being,
calls us to community,
and inspires us to love.

Amen.

Confronted by the law and called to life in the gospel,
let us confess our sin before God and one another.

*Silence is kept for reflection.*

God of love and community,
we confess that we have not loved as God has loved us.
We look to ourselves to fulfill your law.
We seek to satisfy our own desires.
We turn away from our neighbors
and live for ourselves alone.
Teach us again your statutes
and help us to love your will,
that in and through us
your beloved community is made known.
Beloved of God,
love is the fulfillment of the law,
and in + Jesus, God’s love for you is made known.
Through Jesus your sins are forgiven,
and you are drawn into God’s love and life.
Live fully, knowing that God loves you.
Amen.

OR

**Thanksgiving for Baptism**

Trusting that Jesus dwells in our midst and loves us into life,
let us give thanks for the gifts of baptism.

*Water may be poured into the font as the presiding minister give thanks.*

We give you thanks, Holy One,
for washing us and drawing us into your community.

We give you thanks for the waters
that have shaped and formed your people in every time and place:
    - For water that washed the earth and brought about your promises;
    - For water that parted so that your people could dance in freedom;
    - For water that quenched the thirst of your promised people;
    - For water that shaped a holy land;
    - For water that washed a foreigner clean;
    - For water that satisfied a woman who did not even know she was thirsty;
    - For water that welcomed an outsider on the road;
    - For water that cleanses and makes whole;
    - For water that drenches us and makes us your own.

Holy One, we give you thanks that your love
flows over and into and through us.
May your Spirit live in us,
that we might live for others.
**Thanks be to God. Amen.**

*The service continues with gathering song. As a reminder of the gift of baptism, the assembly may be sprinkled with water during the singing.*

**Prayer of the Day**

O Lord God, enliven and preserve your church with your perpetual mercy. Without your help, we mortals will fail; remove far from us everything that is harmful, and lead us toward all that gives life and salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen. (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 46)
OR

Holy One, you stretch wide your tent that all may be welcomed in, and in Jesus you stretched out your hands in expansive love for a weary and wounded world. Help us to reach out with your own wounded hands of love, that through us your life may be known in the world, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*The prayers are prepared locally. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.*

Gathered into God’s embrace, let us lift our voices on behalf of a weary and wounded world.

God of love, send us out filled with your love and life. Be known in our daily living, that your love may be known through our proclamation. God, we pray, open our hands in love.

God of creation, remind us to be good stewards of your diverse and beautiful world. God, we pray, open our hands in love.

God of peace, fill the hearts of those who rule, govern and lead. Give them and us compassion to guide the peoples of this world in the ways of truth, justice, equity and peace. God, we pray, open our hands in love.

God of healing, visit those who yearn for your wholeness, especially those whose names and needs we lift up now [names and needs added as desired]. Encourage all those who bear another’s burdens. Give wisdom and perseverance to all who work in health care professions. God, we pray, open our hands in love.

God of service, give us strength and humility. In our service to those near and far, whose needs are visible or invisible, may we find you in the faces of our neighbors. God, we pray, open our hands in love.

For what else do we pray?

*Here other intercessions composed for the local community or related to a local service project may be added.*

God, we pray, open our hands in love.

Everlasting God, support us in this life. As we remember those who have gone before as examples of faithful living and honor those whose faith was known only to you, inspire us to follow their example of baptismal life until we join with them in worship. God, we pray, open our hands in love.
Into your wounded hands of love, O God, we place all our prayers, trusting in your mercy through the Crucified and-Risen One Jesus.

Amen.

**Offering Prayer**
Holy God, giver of all good things,
receive the gifts we bring,
fruit of the earth and the work of human hands,
that they may be used to your purposes
for life and love in the world.

Amen.

**Thanksgiving at the Table**
Honor, praise, glory and thanksgiving
to you, God, our loving Creator.

In the beginning you reached your hands into the earth
and formed humanity in your own image.
You breathed into us your own breath of love
and gave us hearts and hands and voices
to live your loving purpose in the world.

Seeing the lonely creature of earth,
you created a partner that we would know the joy of community.
Throughout the history of your people, you never abandoned us,
but brought us into community with one another and with you,
and guided us through your prophets.
With endless patience and love,
you called to us time and again to return to life with you.

In the fulfillment of all things, you came to us in Jesus,
born into a human family,
raised in a hometown,
who gathered around himself a community formed by your love,
and yearned to gather all people under the loving wings of a mother hen.

Sitting at dinner with friends
and knowing one among them would break the bonds of love,
our Lord Jesus took bread and gave thanks;
broke it; and gave it to his disciples saying:
Take and eat; this is my body given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.
In the same way after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sins. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Trusting in his promise to be among us whenever we gather in his name, we proclaim the mystery of faith: **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

Gathered as your people, meeting in Jesus’ name, and preparing ourselves to feast upon Jesus’ very body and blood, we plead with all creation: **Come, Lord Jesus.**

Send your Spirit upon this meal, the body and blood of Jesus, that we overflow with your selfless love. Turn us to face our neighbors, that by us and through us your love may be known in the world. Again, we beg: **Come, Holy Spirit.**

All honor and praise and glory to you, God of creative, dirty hands, God of holy, wounded hands, God who strengthens and guides our hands, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Prayer After Communion**
Holy Jesus, in this meal you have fed and nourished us to work in your beloved world. Send us now, filled with yourself and strengthened by your Spirit to live your love for others. **Amen.**

**Blessing**
God who sets forth the law of love, Jesus who fulfills the law for you, and the Spirit through whom you are called to love, + bless you this day, that you may be God’s hands and heart and voice at work in the world. **Amen.**
CELEBRATION OF VOCATION AND BLESSING OF HANDS FOR MINISTRY

Following the hymn of the day, or before the blessing at the sending, the assembly may share a brief rite of celebrating our vocations and blessing hands for ministry. Oil may or may not be used for the blessing of hands.

We are called to proclaim the good news:

God is at work!

This good news is not left in some history long ago or a place far away:

God is at work in the world still today!

In us and through us, God is glorified in our work.
When we offer a helping hand, God is praised.
When we share of our abundance, God is known in the world.

God is at work in us!

In our service today, and in our daily lives, let us live out what God has called us to in baptism.

God is at work through our hands!

Here, the assembly may be seated while an appropriate hymn or song is sung. Individuals may come forward and receive a blessing on the backs and palms of their hands.

Signing a cross on the backs of the hands:
God bless your hands and your work,
Signing a cross on the palms of the hands:
that through you God’s love may be known.

Amen.

HYMNS AND SONGS

The following suggestions may be especially suitable for this day. For additional suggestions, explore the topical indexes in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, All Creation Sings and This Far by Faith. Singing on this day may take place in settings outside the worship space, such as a service project work site. Any song can be sung unaccompanied, but hymns marked with an (*) lend themselves more readily to singing without the aid of instruments or printed materials.

ELW 513 * Listen, God Is Calling
ELW 538 Enviado soy de Dios / The Lord Now Sends Us Forth
ELW 546 To Be Your Presence
ELW 548 Rise, O Church, like Christ Arisen
ELW 549 * Thuma mina, Nkosi yam / Send Me, Jesus
ELW 583 / 685 Take My Life, That I May Be
ELW 722 O Christ, Your Heart, Compassionate
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<tr>
<th>Hymn Ref</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELW 741</td>
<td>* Your Will Be Done</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELW 748</td>
<td>O God in Heaven</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELW 798</td>
<td>Will You Come and Follow Me</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELW 808</td>
<td>Lord Jesus, You Shall Be My Song</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 939</td>
<td>Touch That Soothes and Heals</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 984</td>
<td>May the God of Hope Go with Us</td>
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<td>ACS 985</td>
<td>Let Us Enter In</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 987</td>
<td>* Guide My Feet</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 991</td>
<td>Go to the World</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 1000</td>
<td>God’s Work, Our Hands</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 1003</td>
<td>* For Such a Time as This</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 1022</td>
<td>God, Bless the Hands</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 1036</td>
<td>Commonwealth Is God’s Commandment</td>
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<td>ACS 1043</td>
<td>Spirit, Open My Heart</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 1045</td>
<td>Come, Share the Spirit</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 1047</td>
<td>What Is the World Like</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 1048</td>
<td>Founded on Faith</td>
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<td>ACS 1056</td>
<td>God Bless to Us Our Bread</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 1059</td>
<td>Come Now, You Blessed</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACS 1061</td>
<td>Caminemos con Jesús</td>
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<tr>
<td>TFF 130</td>
<td>* Listen, God Is Calling</td>
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<tr>
<td>TFF 134</td>
<td>O Lord, Open My Eyes</td>
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<tr>
<td>TFF 243</td>
<td>* Your Will Be Done</td>
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<tr>
<td>TFF 244 / 245</td>
<td>Send Me, Jesus / Thuma mina</td>
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Two versions of the “God’s Work. Our Hands.” Sunday hymn are available at ELCA.org/dayofservice, one set to a familiar tune (as presented at ACS 1000) and another set to a new tune, with permissions to reproduce them for local, nonsale use in synods, congregations and other ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

A setting of the newly composed tune for SATB choir and optional assembly is available for purchase from Augsburg Fortress.

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