



Message for the Fifteenth Sunday After Pentecost September 13, 2020

“What time is it?”

Read Pastor Kerns' message

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Psalm 103:8)

Let us pray: Compassionate Father, you forgive all our sins and put them far from us. As an eagle to her young, you nourish and renew us with your tender love. Sustain us each day of our mortal life, that we may seek your healing for all who are in need, and bring us at last with saints and angels to bless and praise you forever; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

As I was preparing for today's message, I was reminded by one article that I read that we stopped worship back in March right in the midst of Lent. I had a first communion class on March 8 after worship that day and was looking forward to our next meeting. By March 15 we were asked to shut down because of the virus but we worshipped that day with a service of the Word and there was no communion, passing of the peace, no greetings with handshakes and no ushers to collect the offering. By March 22, the Fourth Sunday in Lent, the church was in shutdown mode that would last until July 5 when we had our first in person worship service since March 15. All the

Lenten planning for midweek services and the soup meals came to an abrupt halt.

There were no Holy Week services and no Easter Service.

Things have changed so drastically since back in March and it feels like we are stuck in that moment. We are stuck in mid-Lent. That is at least how I feel sometimes when we worship and record our worship and send out emails and snail mail copies of the message for the week. We are on hold as far as communion goes but my hope is that sometime soon we can celebrate communion again but it most likely will be in a very different way. I stated in a newsletter that whenever we come back together as a congregation and are able to worship again that we would have a great Easter celebration even though it was not Easter.

Well that did not happen as the virus hung on and keeps hanging on. I look back at the liturgical calendar and all that we missed including no Confirmation on Pentecost Sunday and that is still on hold. It seems that most of our celebrations have been put on hold but we still worship and have recorded services since the end of March so that there is some form of normalcy in our worship even if it is outside of the Nave. It feels like we are stuck in Lent and the purple paraments that are now tucked back into the closet in the vestry. I dug out the White for Easter and had some help from our altar care team with changing the paraments and making sure the right color candles were available. Then out came the red for Pentecost Sunday followed by the white paraments for Holy Trinity Sunday. Then the long green season of Pentecost

came and the talk of coming back to in person worship with all of the safety provisions put into place on July 5.

I went down to Fellowship Hall this past week and changed the green hanger on the make shift altar that we use through the summer. I changed it to the green hanger that we use in the fall. It helps to break up the paraments to something different. But the reality is that we do that normally so I wasn't doing something unusual but what is the norm for us. There has not been too much that has been the norm for us during this time but it sort of felt good to change that panel that something different was taking place. I still think back about the purple stole that I wore for Lent and how it seems that the whole world came to a standstill because of the virus. The reality is that the church calendar continued onward and it didn't come to a stop. The scripture passages for each Sunday changed as per the lectionary. The prayers changed for each Sunday. We still had music played even though we were and still are not singing because of the risk of spreading the virus.

Part of me feels like we are stuck in some kind of time warp but the reality is that life in the church and our lives at home have continued moving forward. I remember a church sign that said something to the effect, "The virus might have closed our church but it did not close the Word of God." Part of me is still caught in the season of Lent and of deep repentance where the themes of Holy Week, in particular, resonate even now: the denial, the betrayal, the suffering, the death—along

with a deep sense of foreboding at what can possibly happen next. And then it does. And then we sink into grief again as we so want things to be back to normal again. This journey that we have been on now takes me to our stories for today which we are to reflect on this week.

Consider our first reading from Genesis and the story of Joseph and his brothers. I have to wonder at how fragile their peace must have been if as soon as their father Jacob dies they are back on their knees begging Joseph to forgive them once more. Without a doubt they are caught back in their younger years. Caught still by their resentment of their younger brother, their collective selling him into an unknown and worse future of slavery and then their lying to their father about what happened to Joseph. They proclaimed him to have perished just because of their jealous feelings for their baby brother. Their actions caused great grief for their father Jacob who loved Joseph very much.

They later faced a great famine and ended up having to beg to meet their most basic needs. They are stuck in that time before they encountered their brother again, before their move to Egypt, before forgiveness was spoken and lived into. They are stuck in a time of regret and guilt and probably denial. But life moved forward and in today's first reading they are on their knees begging for forgiveness. They even told a made up story to try and make them look better to Joseph, "Your father gave this

instruction before he died, ‘Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.’”

It is very clear that Joseph’s brothers are concerned about how Joseph will respond to their plea. But while they were worrying, Joseph was weeping, because Joseph had chosen to release them from their worry. How does he do it? How is it that Joseph is not resentful? How is it that Joseph does not look to get even? How is it that Joseph does not remind them of their offenses? How is it that Joseph does not seek revenge? The simple answer is that he remembers the story differently.

Christopher Davis in his commentary this week on the Genesis passage stated, “Contrary to how it is most often used, **remember** does not simply mean to stroll back down memory lane. Rather, to remember literally means to put something back together again.” Joseph re-members his story differently. He shares his story, “I know you sold me into slavery. I know you thought you were harming me. But God used me to bring life to you.” Joseph also remembers that God sent him to Pharaoh’s house and that before that God took him from the pit his brothers tossed him into and to the prison he first experienced in Egypt. The bottom line is that God was in control.

So as Joseph re-members, he does not just remember what they did, but he also remembers what God did. Joseph understood there is a difference between a moment and a movement. Being thrown into a pit—a moment. Being sold into slavery—a moment. Being forsaken and forgotten—a moment. Then Joseph says to his brothers,

“Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as God continues to do today—a movement. This story as well as our gospel directs our attention to forgiveness. ‘How many times must I forgive’ are Peter’s words in our gospel and Jesus basically tells him as many times as it takes. How many times do we find ourselves stuck in time? How many times do we tend to shy away from forgiving?

Time has moved forward over these past months. It isn’t Lent anymore but part of me thinks I’m still in Lent. The church year has continued onward even though it has been different. Maybe I am stuck in the past and want things to return to the way they were but that may be just a **moment** but the **movement** of the gospel keeps going on. I so want to continue the first communion classes and welcome some new members into our body of Christ. I want to gather us all together for a great big Easter celebration. I want to confirm the two young women who have waited for this to happen. I want things to be like they were but maybe just maybe God has other plans for us.

It is easy to get stuck in the past and find that the future holds something very different. We all live in moments in time and sometimes we dwell in them but as Christopher Davis says in his commentary “To remember literally means to put something back together again.” Joseph and his brothers found themselves putting their relationships back together again as God had chosen. We will remember this

time in history that has changed us in many ways. It is but a moment in time but the movement continues forward.

I changed the altar panel to the next green for this week because that is what we always do. It is still just a moment and makes me wonder what God's movement will be for us post Covid-19 or has it already started? Amen.

Let us pray: Gracious Lord, you come to us in our times of worry and concern to comfort us. Guide us into our future so that we can be part of your movement and so that we are not stuck in a moment in time. Help us to always be willing to forgive as you have shown us in Joseph's story with his brothers. Help us heed Jesus' words to Peter that we should forgive seventy-seven times or always. In Jesus name we pray, amen.