



By the waters of Babylon...

A common liturgy during a time of physical separation

June 13, 2020 – Pentecost 2

Call to Worship – Just as Jesus called the Disciples, Jesus is calling you! Spend a moment reflecting on your call to worship and to serve.

Confession

Jesus, we bow in wonder at the expanse of your embrace
the breadth of your inclusion
the surprise of your grace
You seek and seek and seek
Including those we write off as beyond hope
the outcasts
the public sinners
the self-serving
those who collaborate with evil and oppression...
Why are we surprised?
You desire mercy not sacrifice
You are the Great Physician
coming to those most in need of healing
Forgive us
Forgive us for forgetting who you are
Forgive us for forgetting our own sin
and isolation
and collaboration
Forgive us for judging
Forgive our self-righteousness
Forgive us for limiting you
when we are so desperately in need of you
We are “those most in need” as well
Create in us clean hearts and renew your Holy Spirit within us
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy on us all

Assurance of Pardon

Know this: Christ came so that you might know forgiveness. You are forgiven, and freed.

Prayer for Illumination

Open our ears, our eyes, our minds and our hearts, O God as we meditate on your living Word.

Scripture: Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.'

While he was saying this, a synagogue leader came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live." Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed."

Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed at that moment.

When Jesus entered the synagogue leader's house and saw the noisy crowd and people playing pipes, he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. News of this spread through all that region.

Reflection

The Pharisees ask of the disciples of Jesus, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" Assuming there is a statement behind most questions, what is it the Pharisees are telling the disciples and themselves about what Jesus is doing?

Through the eyes of the Pharisees, these people appear to be...

Through the eyes of Jesus, these people appear to be...

Through your eyes?

Jesus says a bit later "Go and learn what this means, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." For I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners."

What is mercy? What is sacrifice? Why is Jesus not calling righteous?

What is it Jesus wants the Pharisees to learn?

What is it Jesus wants us to learn?

Exploring Deeper – from Ed Williams, "A Christmas Story".

He had come to Miami years ago from a nearby town. When he was diagnosed with HIV, his family told him not to come home. Over time his condition had developed into AIDS.

A few days earlier, he said, his family had called. For some reason they had a change of heart. They invited him home for Christmas. He couldn't tell them, he said, that he was broke. He needed money for bus fare. Ten dollars would get him home for Christmas.

I'm in a Wednesday morning Bible study class at Myers Park Baptist Church. Not long before my Miami trip we had discussed the passage in Matthew where Jesus speaks to those who are to inherit the kingdom and reminds them of how they had helped him when he was down and out.

They ask, when did we do this? He responds, in the compelling language of the King James Version, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

There's a problem with knowing these Bible stories: They keep calling you to account. This one is particularly troubling for prosperous people who usually manage to ignore the poverty around us.

People like me.

In my pocket I had a \$20 bill that I intended to spend on a shirt. I didn't know whether to believe him. It didn't matter. He obviously needed the money more than I did.

I handed him the twenty.

"Here," I said. "Merry Christmas."

He was surprised. Apparently he hadn't expected it to be so easy.

He took the money and looked straight into my eyes.

"Thank you," he said, and it was as heartfelt a thanks as I have ever received. Then he put the money in his pocket and walked away.

A shared epiphany

Just before he melded into the crowd, he turned and raised his hand in a farewell salute. And he said, "I think you are Jesus."

I was stunned. Before I could respond, he vanished into the crowd of shoppers.

What I would have said to him was this: "I thought you were Jesus."

Offering

In what ways might you care for "the least of these" this week?

Prayers of the People

This week, as you pray for those whom you know, pray too for those on the frontlines of this current crisis. Pray for communities around the world as we seek to find solutions to the virus, as well as the economic fallout.

Benediction

God desires mercy.

Go, be merciful.

Bear the Light of Christ in the world

knowing that the Christ goes with you. Always.

Source material for this liturgy comes from *The Bible Workbench*, Vol 6, Issue 4. The Confession is by Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia. Ed Williams' "Christmas Story" was first published in the Charlotte Observer.

This resource has been developed for the Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse for use by members and friends of its congregations.