

Sermon for 27 August 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Scriptures: Exodus 1:8-2:10; Psalter: UMH 846, Psalm 124; Romans 12:1-8; Matthew 16:13-20

You all are so faithful in your attendance, and so patient in hoping for a word from the Lord!

I, too, keep showing up, and hoping that a word from the Lord will show up as we do the familiar steps of the liturgy.

Listen to the first lesson: A lot has happened since Joseph reconciled with his brothers last week. You think the sun rises and sets because America is the most powerful nation in the world right now? Here's some folks who suffered 400 years in slavery. Then what happened?

Then hear the Psalm. It has people saying, singing, chanting back and forth about how rough things can be; and think about that when you feel bad... You'll need this, one of these days... and so does everybody.

"Trust me," God says, through these words. "Use them, for yourself, and when you think about others and try to help them."

Then hear Paul tell his little church they simply can't go it alone. That's not what life is for. You all better find some kind of fellowship, and stick with it until it works for you and you work for it ... because you must depend on other people, that's what finally matters; and it doesn't go until you all have patience with one another enough to bring out the special good that's inside each one of you, waiting to come out and make the world a better place. That means us: This group. Work it! You need this, and we need you.

And finally, Matthew gets around to his way of saying what all the Gospels do, point blank: God works through me! Don't tell anybody, Jesus says ... I'm not ready to close down yet ... but you'll see that what I'm saying and doing, and what's happening here and now, is the most important thing you'll ever understand. What I've been telling you, and what I've been quoting from all the stories you just heard, is the truth, and it's going to be told like the stars and the seasons and everything that ever matters ... This is Almighty God working here; through a human being; through me.

God help us! Can we use this? Can we act it out, week by week, by ourselves and shoulder-to-shoulder on Sunday?

What's my title this week? What would do you say from these texts and this holy time we've passed together, and haven't finished yet?

This isn't automatic. Showing up matters a lot; but what do you honestly say happens here, week after week? Are there ways we can improve this hour? Are we being pushed in a new

direction? The same point is being made by you as you read, some of you, and all of us individually and together, as is made in a big cathedral or at a bedside, or a graveside. We are all part of the action. That's what I get about saying Jesus was divine and the Bible is the Word of God. It's no more so than the workings of nature, or anything scientific, or the big guns that look like they're running the show.

Let us pray.

Lord, listen to your people praying. Centralize the Spirit so it works through each of us. Pray through us, Jesus. Give us the inspiration that springs forth from our hearts into the spaces we'll find ourselves in this week. Teach me how to get the word that's working in each one of us here loose, so it heals and inspires in the unknown places we'll be in and the home places we know well... What do I need to say? What do we need to hear? Save us, heal us, protect us, thank you, forgive us, accept us, love us, bring us together in new loving, now. Amen.

So, what's my title this Sunday? I think it's "Liturgy," "The people's work." That's what I thought about, anyway, as I wrote and produced and delivered and, please God, you listened and will deliver as you go forth today.