

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 11 August 2024

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-3

Opening Psalm: 22C Amid the Thronging Worshipers

Confession of Sin

Almighty God, Who are rich in mercy to all those who call upon You; Hear us as we humbly come to You confessing our sins; And imploring Your mercy and forgiveness. We have broken Your holy laws by our deeds and by our words; And by the sinful affections of our hearts. We confess before You our disobedience and ingratitude, our pride and willfulness; And all our failures and shortcomings toward You and toward fellow men. Have mercy upon us, Most merciful Father; And of Your great goodness grant that we may hereafter serve and please You in newness of life; Through the merit and mediation of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Romans 8:1-4

Psalm of Preparation: 107B Praise the LORD, for He Is Good

Old Covenant Reading: Exodus 16:4-12

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 20:1-16

Sermon: *Abundant Generosity*

Hymn of Response: 181 Now Thank We All Our God

Confession of Faith: Apostles Creed (p. 851)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Diaconal Offering

Closing Psalm: 103E O Come, My Soul, Bless Thou the Lord

PM Worship

159 Abide with Me

500 Father, I Know That All My Life

436 My Faith Has Found a Resting Place

Old Covenant Reading: Isaiah 41:1-14

New Covenant Reading: Philippians 4:10-14

Sermon Title: *Learning Contentment*

No Sunday School: Extended Time of Fellowship

Suggested Preparations

Monday (8/5) Read and discuss Matthew 20:1–16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no

one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ So the last will be first, and the first last.” (ESV)

Tom Wright comments:

God’s grace, in short, is not the sort of thing you can bargain with or try to store up. It isn’t the sort of thing that one person can have a lot of and someone else only a little. The point of the story is that what people get from having served God and His kingdom is not actually a ‘wage’ at all. It’s not, strictly, a reward for work done. God doesn’t make contracts with us, as if we could bargain or negotiate for a better deal. He makes covenants, in which He promises us everything and asks of us everything in return. When He keeps His promises, He is not rewarding us for effort, but doing what comes naturally to His overflowingly generous nature.

There is always a danger that we get cross with God over this. People who work in church circles can easily assume that they are the special ones, God’s inner circle. In reality, God is out in the marketplace, looking for the people everybody else tried to ignore, welcoming them on the same terms, surprising them (and everybody else) with His generous grace. The earliest church clearly needed to learn that lesson. Is there anywhere in today’s church that doesn’t need to be reminded of it as well?

Read or sing Psalm 22C Amid the Thronging Worshipers

Tuesday (8/6) Read and discuss Read and discuss Matthew 19:27-30

Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name’s sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first. (ESV)

Jesus is making abundantly clear that when we give up anything for His sake ... that He has a far bigger shovel.

As Leon Morris points out:

Jesus is not calling people away from everything that makes life enjoyable. He is calling them to make sacrifices indeed, but to make sacrifices in a worthwhile cause, ... and one that in the end will bring a rich reward.

In fact, when we weigh the totality of the Christian life in the balance we will not end up imagining that even taking up our cross to follow Jesus is particularly costly. As David Livingston the renowned pathbreaking missionary to Africa once put it:

For my own part, I have never ceased to rejoice that God has appointed me to such an office. People talk of the sacrifice I have made in spending so much of my life in Africa. Is that a sacrifice which brings its own blest reward in healthful activity, the consciousness of doing good, peace of mind, and a bright hope of a glorious destiny hereafter? Away with the word in such a view, and with such a thought! It is emphatically **no sacrifice**. Say rather it is a privilege. Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink; but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall be revealed in and for us. I **never** ... made a sacrifice.

To be clear, the primary pattern in the Bible for the Christian is that we follow the path of Jesus Christ. Suffering must come before exaltation. Like Jesus, we must bear the cross before we wear the crown.

And yet, Jesus does not hold back all of the blessings that we receive until the age that is to come. We not only enjoy a life filled with meaning and significance. Right now, in this present age, we receive freedom of conscience and the full forgiveness of our sins. We are filled with God the Holy Spirit, adopted into the Father's family, and made brothers and sisters with every other Christian on the face of the earth.

In a parallel passage, Mark makes this point abundantly clear. Jesus declares:

Truly, I say to you, **there is no one** who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold **now ... in this time**, ... houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.

Beloved, when you turn your back on the empty promises of this world you receive the unshakeable promises that come from the Living God. Your life will be filled with meaning and eternal significance, and you will receive astonishing blessings both in this age and in the age to come.

Read or sing Psalm 107B Praise the LORD, for He Is Good

Wednesday (8/7) Read and discuss Exodus 16:4-12

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, “At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?” And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD.”

Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’” And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. And the LORD said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’” (ESV)

Sometimes Christians feel the pinch that comes from following God’s ways in a world disordered by sin. When this pain gives way to grumbling, such complaining is almost always (1) Misdirected; (2) Irrational; and (3) Based upon a misunderstanding of the LORD’s character. The setting of today’s passage is straightforward: “It is now six weeks after the Exodus. With the oasis at Elim now behind them and the provisions brought from Egypt exhausted, the people face a severe shortage of food. The wilderness conditions offer little possibility of securing fresh supplies. Popular discontent flares, and harsh accusations are hurled against Moses and Aaron (Nahum Sarna).” This response is ...

1. **MISDIRECTED.** As Moses points out, there complaint is really against God. To make his point more emphatic, Moses actually asks “What are we” in verse 8 using a term that applies to things rather than people (Paul does the exact same thing in 1 Corinthians 3:5: “What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each”). Moses is making it clear that he and Aaron are merely instruments in the LORD’s hand that should neither be blessed nor cursed for leading Israel out of Egypt. People haven’t changed very much. Religious people rarely acknowledge that they are grumbling with God. Instead they complain about their boss, their church leadership, or their spouse. Yet, if we find ourselves becoming critical in these ways we need to recognize that we are not being content with God’s plan for our lives and then we need to turn and place our trust more fully in Him.

2. **IRRATIONAL.** Only six weeks earlier this Israelites had walked across the Red Sea on dry ground, yet now they seemed to think that they were all going to die in the wilderness. Once they found themselves longing for “the good old days” when they were slaves in Egypt, they should have realized that something had gone fundamentally wrong in their thinking. Nevertheless, don’t Christians sometimes lament the loss of their former lives when they were slaves to sin? One of the ways to work toward our own contentment is to regularly recall the great things that God has already done for us and then to look to the fulfillment of His promises with confidence.
3. **MISUNDERSTANDING GOD.** On the one hand, the Israelites seemed to be doubting God’s ability to provide for them. On the other hand (and perhaps more fundamentally), they seemed to be doubting the LORD’s good intentions for them. We also need to remember the astonishing grace and mercy of our Lord and that He is *for us* in Christ.

Interestingly, God responds to Israel’s grumbling by literally raining food down from heaven for them to eat. Yet this is not merely a form of provision it is also a test. Will Israel learn to trust God to provide for their needs? How can we know? If they actually trust God they will keep the Sabbath day. Regretfully, as the rest of the chapter makes clear, even raining food down from heaven did not cause the people of Israel to put their trust in God.
Sing or Read Hymn 181 Now Thank We All Our God

Thursday (8/8) Read and discuss Isaiah 41:1–14

Listen to me in silence, O coastlands;
let the peoples renew their strength;
let them approach, then let them speak;
let us together draw near for judgment.

Who stirred up one from the east
whom victory meets at every step?
He gives up nations before him,
so that he tramples kings underfoot;
he makes them like dust with his sword,
like driven stubble with his bow.
He pursues them and passes on safely,
by paths his feet have not trod.
Who has performed and done this,
calling the generations from the beginning?
I, the LORD, the first,
and with the last; I am he.

The coastlands have seen and are afraid;
the ends of the earth tremble;
they have drawn near and come.

Everyone helps his neighbor
and says to his brother, "Be strong!"
The craftsman strengthens the goldsmith,
and he who smooths with the hammer him who strikes the anvil,
saying of the soldering, "It is good";
and they strengthen it with nails so that it cannot be moved.

But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob, whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham, my friend;
you whom I took from the ends of the earth,
and called from its farthest corners,
saying to you, "You are my servant,
I have chosen you and not cast you off";
fear not, for I am with you;
be not dismayed, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Behold, all who are incensed against you
shall be put to shame and confounded;
those who strive against you
shall be as nothing and shall perish.
You shall seek those who contend with you,
but you shall not find them;
those who war against you
shall be as nothing at all.
For I, the LORD your God,
hold your right hand;
it is I who say to you, "Fear not,
I am the one who helps you."

Fear not, you worm Jacob,
you men of Israel!
I am the one who helps you, declares the LORD;
your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. (ESV)

R. Reed Lessing writes:

Yahweh elected Israel with the intent that the covenant people would be in mission to the world as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." At Sinai, the nation is commissioned to be His "go between," mediating between Yahweh and the nations. Israel was designed to be a model of what Yahweh desires for all people (cf. Deut 4:6-8). In contrast to idolatrous nations like Egypt and Babylon, God's people were to be theologically and ethically different. The Torah presented the world with a religious revolution, which was propelled by the exodus Gospel and founded upon monotheism. The

goal was to establish a [distinctive] people whose special concern was for the widow, the fatherless, and the alien.

Israel was not chosen to be Yahweh's light to the world because its people were more important, elite, or upright than those of other nations. Neither were the Israelites elected because they were more numerous, mighty, or powerful. Israel was chosen solely because of Yahweh's gracious love. Election means "to be taken as God's bride, to be drafted as Yahweh's army, to be adopted as Yahweh's son, to be purchased as Yahweh's servant, to be planted as Yahweh's vineyard, to be acquired as Yahweh's sheep, to be formed as Yahweh's vessel, to be separated as Yahweh's special possession.

Friday (8/9) Read and discuss Philippians 4:10–14

I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Tom Wright comments:

For Paul, Epaphroditus's arrival was like spring flowers suddenly bursting into bloom, telling him the Easter message once more. He is, of course, eager not to imply any criticism of the Philippians for not sending the message, and the money, sooner; this was the first chance they had. But in a world without electronic communications, there was simply no other means of knowing how the church was getting on, whether they were still kindly disposed towards him (or whether, having faced serious persecution, they were angry with him for getting them into such a mess).

Paul is quick to say, as well, that his deep gratitude for the money didn't mean he was the sort of person who would grumble or moan at God if he wasn't kept well supplied with creature comforts all the time. On the contrary: God has put him through a tough school in which he has learned one of the most important lessons of life: contentment.

Many other philosophers of the time spoke of contentment. They usually, though, developed the idea in terms of self-sufficiency. You should find resources within yourself, they said, so that you could smile at the fluctuating fortunes which life through at you. Paul has a different view: I am strong enough for anything, he says – because of the One who gives me strength (verse 13). He leaves it open as to whether 'the One' in question

means God, or Jesus the Messiah, but it seems more likely to me that he means God Himself – the God, of course, whom we know in Jesus.

Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. (ESV)

Read or sing Psalm 103E O Come, My Soul, Bless Thou the Lord

Saturday (8/10) Read and discuss Matthew 20:1–16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ So the last will be first, and the first last.” (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

The master’s actions are stunningly unexpected. However, they are only insulting or hard to swallow, if one takes one’s eyes off of the owner. One can imagine the scene as the parable sets it up. Wages are paid out, beginning with the last group and ending with the first. As the first group stands in line and waits their turn, their gaze falters, leaving the master who has hired them, giving them meaningful work, and promised them a fair wage. They stop looking at the master, and they start looking at their fellow workers. That’s when they get into trouble. Their eye actually becomes evil because the master is good to others.

On the Last Day, the reign of God in Jesus will come in all its fulness. All who have been called as workers in the vineyard – all disciples of Jesus, without distinction – will receive from the Master what He deems just, in accordance with His pledge when they were first called. Remarkably, all those who have left anything behind for the sake of Jesus’ name will receive

a hundred-fold and will inherit eternal life (19:29). In light of this promise, all comparing now must be put aside. For this is how it is in the reign of God. The last will be first, and the first will be last.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow's morning and evening worship services.