

Let us pray.

Gracious God, you have given us your word to enlighten us and to purify us, yet your ways are often uncomfortable for us. Now as the Scriptures are read, may we embrace the fullness of your message. Help us to be open to all the ways you reach out to us, and ready to respond. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Our **Old Testament** reading comes from the book of **Exodus**, chapter **17**: verses **1–7**, found in the Pew Bible on page **114** if you would like to follow along.

- 1 The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim (Rěf ĩ dēēm), but there was no water for the people to drink.
- 2 So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"
- 3 But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"
- 4 Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."
- 5 The LORD answered Moses, "Walk on ahead of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go.
- 6 I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel.
- 7 And he called the place Massah (Mass - ah), which means testing, and Meribah (Merry bah), which means quarreling, because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Our **second reading** comes from Paul's letter to the **Philippians**, chapter 2: verses 1–13, found on pages 1827-28 in your Pew Bible.

- 1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,
- 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.
- 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.
- 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.
- 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:
- 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
- 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
- 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!
- 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
- 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
- 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.
- 12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,
- 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

- 23 Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"
- 24 Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.
- 25 John's baptism-- where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?" They discussed it among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'
- 26 But if we say, 'From men'-- we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."
- 27 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.
- 28 "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'
- 29 "'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.
- 30 "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.
- 31 "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.
- 32 For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

God Leaves the Light ON for Us

- I. Parenting - Everyone has a theory on how it's done
 - A. Amy Chua (Chua, Amy. *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*. Penguin Press, 2011).
 1. Parents show schedule EVERY aspect of child's life
 2. Parents should push their children - never let up
 3. Parents should express their disdain
 4. Parents should tolerate nothing that doesn't conform to parent's wishes
 - * She did say on a talk show that she ended up modifying the rules in her book because she learned they were too rough.
 - B. Diana Baumrind, a clinical and developmental psychologist, says that there are four parenting styles:
 1. authoritarian parenting ("too hard" -- think Joan Crawford of *Mommy Dearest*),
 2. permissive parenting ("too soft" -- think Sharon and Ozzy Osbourne),
 3. neglectful parenting ("too little" -- think of the mother in the movie *Precious*), and
 4. authoritative parenting ("just right -- think of the *Cosby* show, or the 1950s' *Cleavers* in *Beaver*).
 5. Garrison Keilor says it doesn't matter how you parent. Writing in *The Old Scout* newspaper column, "Why a man should turn 64" he says:

"Any parent knows about humbling. Children grow up, and your influence over them declines precipitously. You begat them because you pictured yourself as a wise and beloved patriarch, but instead you become the warden of San Quentin. Your offspring yell at you and bang their tin cups as you walk through the cell block. You try to enforce a few rules, and they ignore you. They become painted women in tiny shorts and tank tops and lascivious boys dancing in dim basements to bands with names like *Stark Raving Idiots* and *Degenerate Thrombosis*.

He goes on to say that whether they end up in prison or medical school really doesn't have much to do with the parents.
(I think as the queen of hyperbole I can honestly say that is a little hyperbolic- even for me)

- C. Not surprisingly, Jesus, the single man with no children, gets it right. In today's text, Jesus tells a story which reveals the traits of the heavenly parent who has hopes and dreams for the earthly children, and yet at the same time also displays compassion and understanding.
1. Jesus describes the father whose expectations are clear.
 - a. "Go work in the field," he says with authority.
 2. The first son refuses outright
 - a. after reflection, thinks better of his rebellion and goes out to the vineyard
 - b. Despite his initial resistance, he obeys his father.
 3. The second son is more devious.
 - a. He puts on a good face and immediately agrees with his father's request; however, his actions do not measure up to his words.
 - b. He ignores his father's wishes and never appears in the vineyard.
 4. Jesus asks the critical question, "Which of the two did the will of his father?"
 5. The tiger mom might have issued a punishment to both sons -- the first would be reprimanded for threatening to disobey and the other for actually ignoring the father.
- II. Jesus, however, clearly has a forgiving heart and is able to see the bigger picture.
- A. It's not the first son's words that are important to Jesus, but his actions.
1. Jesus allows room for complaining and verbal resistance.
 2. The first son, despite his original reluctance and outward show of rebellion, soon chooses obedience.
 3. He follows the will of his father and does the work to which he is called.
 4. Please raise your hand if you have NEVER complained when asked to do something.
 5. We should be glad God understands that complaining doesn't always equal disobedience.
- B. The second son, however, only talks a good game. He promises much and produces nothing of value.
- C. Jesus points out the difference in their actions to his listeners.
1. The first son, like the tax collectors and the prostitutes (Jesus informs his listeners), is headed toward the kingdom.
 2. Despite the mistakes of the past, this son has now chosen the right route.

3. The scheming, double-talking chief priests and elders, like the second son, are not kingdom bound.
4. One cannot simply talk the talk of faith and obedience.
5. One must walk the walk,

even when it means backtracking from a poorly chosen path, and starting over down the narrow path toward eternal life. (Repeat)

6. A little boy had been misbehaving and was sent to his room. After a while he emerged and informed his mother that he had thought it over and then said a prayer.

"Fine," said the pleased mother. "If you ask God to help you not misbehave, he will help you."

"Oh, I didn't ask him to help me not misbehave," said Johnny. "I asked him to help you put up with me." (His mom is probably going to recommend he goes back down the path and try one MORE time.)

III. So, if God is such a compassionate and caring parent, why would we ever say NO to God?

- A. What leads us to say "No" to God? What fuels our refusal of God?
 1. We might say no to God because we're stubborn, afraid, doubtful, or we want to do something else.
 2. Given the choice -- labor in the field (volunteer at the food bank, visit a sick neighbor, work on that fundraiser, forgive someone who did you wrong, reconcile with someone estranged from you) or spend another hour in front of TV or reading a good book -- what would one choose?
 3. Maybe the "No" grows out of a sense of being overworked.
 4. Could it be that the first son refuses his father because he believes he has already done enough for the father; perhaps he considers his contribution to the family to be extensive.
 5. Clearly the father thinks otherwise and is not prepared to offer his son an early retirement package.
 6. The father sees what the son is capable of and demands more.
 7. The son has a "Who me?" moment -- haven't I already done enough for this family? -- and yet evolves into an obedient servant.

B. Is God too demanding?

1. It might seem like it sometimes.
2. The temptation might be to say -- "no, let someone else do it. I've already given." Or, "that's too much to ask of me". Or, "I don't think I'm up to that challenge".
3. Here's hope for anyone who has ever pushed the snooze alarm one too many times and missed an important appointment.
4. Here's good news for anyone who doubts his ability to make a difference and decides not to even try.
5. The first son clears the path for naysayers and hesitant, unsure wanna-be disciples alike. **AND**
6. Here also is a challenge for any self-satisfied congregation or individual who assumes that his contribution and effort is enough.

C. Jesus does not expect perfection.

1. Rather, he invites his followers to learn from their mistakes, put their failings behind them, and then choose to do the right thing.
2. This story of compassion and forgiveness is good news for anyone who can remember moments of disobedience, times of ignoring the rules, or periods of poor choices.
3. The arms of Jesus are open wide.
4. For those who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, there is a message of welcome and an invitation to try again.
5. Past blunders will not be counted against them when they are followed by both a change of heart and a change of course.
6. Followers will not be judged on their initial, often impulsive mistakes but rather on the final choices that lead them either closer or farther away from God.
7. Jesus seems willing to look past the many weaknesses and failures in his followers and invites them to put their earlier bad choices behind them so that they can follow him.

IV. There's a message of God about the compassionate and welcoming parent depicted in the father in the story.

A. The father issues a clear directive and has confidence in the sons' ability to follow it.

1. The father then allows the sons to make their own decisions on their

adherence to his command.

2. Like the father, Jesus is looking for followers who are not in mindless, lockstep precision but who, after reflection, are ready to give their all, and follow.

B. God's merciful invitation is clear.

1. The door to heaven is unlocked and the porch light has been left on to guide even wayward children home.
2. God calls out to the children, "Come home."

All that is necessary is to say "Yes" to God, and offer hands, hearts and spirit to God's service.

Praise be to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit! Amen.

Please stand if able and sing together our Hymn of Response
263 Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

***HYMN OF APPROACH: #224 vs 1, 2, 3**

I Come With Joy

Invitation to the Table

One: Let the women bring the flour and the salt, and the men bring the yeast. Many guests will come, those who live on the margins, those who live with infirmities, those of differing abilities, rich and poor alike.

All: Come quickly; let us follow the recipe of the Lord. Let all of us knead the dough together with our hands. Let us watch with joy as the bread rises and expands.

Prayer of Great Thanksgiving and the Lord's Prayer

One: *We give you thanks O God, for you have made us in your image female and male, black, brown, olive, and pale. You created us and continue to shape us and teach us to love you, to love our neighbors, and to love ourselves.*

All: ***Bread of life, cup of peace, we give you thanks, O God.***

One: *You set us in this world to love and to serve you, and to live in peace with your whole creation. Although we have failed to do so, you have not rejected us but continue to call us back to your way.*

All: ***Bread of life, cup of peace, we give you thanks, O God.***

One: *In Jesus Christ you showed us your love for all, especially those among us often rejected by others. Those of us who are poor, immigrants, prostitutes, suffering from illness, those whom society has deemed unclear or impure. You showed us the way to a new community, one in which the last would be first, justice would be realized, resources would be shared in common.*

All: ***Bread of life, cup of peace, we give you thanks, O God.***

One: *Jesus proclaimed the good news of the reign of God, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, calling for economic justice from tax collectors and religious leaders, preaching about faith guided by the heart, not law.*

All: *Bread of life, cup of peace, we give you thanks, O God.*

One: *Yet we rebelled against his message of compassion and justice, and he was crucified because we feared such love. But death cannot ultimately defeat life; many waters cannot quench love. Jesus rose from the grave, and in the resurrection we place our hope and assurance. We joyfully celebrate Christ's life and resurrection as we wait for the day that Christ is fully present with us and in us and the world is at peace.*

All: *Bread of life, cup of peace, we give you thanks, O God.*

One: *Gracious God, we give you thanks for pouring out your Holy Spirit upon us. Fill us with compassion that we might be moved to action that your reign might be on earth as it is in heaven. Hear us now as we pray the prayer your Son taught us to pray together saying:*

All: *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

Partaking of the Meal

The Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way he took the cup, saying:

This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

Loving God, thank you for the nourishment we have at your table. May we be strengthened and challenged by all who have shared in this meal, both here and around the world. May we be sustained in our struggle by these elements, drawing strength from this divine feast. May we carry in our hearts the life and peace embodied in this bread and wine, that we might be a message of hope and reconciliation to a desperate and hurting world. Send your Spirit to strengthen our love for one another and all creation that your table of hope, reconciliation, and fellowship might be at the center of all our thoughts and actions. Amen.

HYMN OF SENDING: #515 vv 4, 5 I Come with Joy

The Spirit of the risen Christ,
unseen, but ever near,
is in such friendship better known,
alive among us here. alive among us here.

Together met, together bound
by all that God has done,
we'll go with joy, to give the world
the love that makes us one. the love that makes us one.

BLESSING AND CHARGE

Go forth into the world with the knowledge of who you are:

A Child of God;

A Guest at the Communion Table;

A peacemaker.

May the knowledge of who you are in God's sight sustain you and challenge you as you journey from this place. Amen

BENEDICTION RESPONSE

POSTLUDE