

ORDINARY TIME – Seventh Sunday after Pentecost

RECOLLECTING OURSELVES FOR WORSHIP

Music (please use this time for quiet and reflection)

Gong [followed by silence]

Call to Worship

Hymn – 463

Opening Prayer

OUR HUMANNES AND GOD'S GRACE

Call to Confession

Unison Prayer of Confession

Gracious God, I have an aversion to feeling weak, bordering on a repulsion or even a revulsion. I instinctively turn away from the experience and turn instead to feeling something other, something with more strength, like brave or determined. I want to focus on what is not weak rather than to concentrate on the weakness and comprehend it. This effort drains me in that it requires me both to subdue the experience of weakness that is actual for me and then to emphasize another experience which I must fabricate or embellish. I am unaware of doing this when I do it. I am not asking you to make me strong, nor to help me tolerate feeling weak, but to make me aware of what I am doing and of the outcome and cost of doing it: I end up being disconnected from the weakness I need to understand and depleted by the effort to feel something different.

Personal Prayer of Confession in Silence

Assurance of Pardon

LISTENING FOR THE WORD OF GOD

Story for the Children

Scripture – Mark 6:1-13

Prompting

Silence and Reflection

RESPONDING TO THE WORD OF GOD

Hymn – 393

Announcements

Minute for Mission

Our Gifts and Offerings

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Christ all creatures here below;

Praise Holy Spirit, Comforter;

One God, Triune, whom we adore. Amen.

The Prayers of the People and Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us in the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and forever. Amen.

GOING OUT – to serve, to journey, to live the word

Hymn – 234

Charge and Benediction

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

TODAY 10:00 Worship and Church School  
11:00 Coffee and Fellowship  
11:30 Conversation

Lectionary Readings from Cycle B for July 15, 2018

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Psalm 24;  
Ephesians 1:3-14; Mark 6:14-29.

F.Y.I.

“Our small change can make a Big Difference.” Please give your pennies, nickels and dimes etc. to the Presbyterian Hunger Fund. A can on the table in the coffee room needs donations.

The church school teachers are taking a break during July and August, so there will not be any church school during that time.

Ushers: Jim Plein and Jenny Goldgur.

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Our web site is <[www.faithpresbyterianrp.org](http://www.faithpresbyterianrp.org)>

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## Ordinary Time Following Pentecost

Each Season in the Church Year highlights certain experiences which come our way as God goes about the work of presenting us with the experiences which constitute the fullness of our life. In the First Cycle of the Church Year (Advent, Christmas, Epiphany Day and the Ordinary Time following Epiphany) we are introduced to an unwanted element of our life which is not included in our experience of ourselves. In the Second Cycle of the Church Year (Lent, Easter, the Day of Pentecost and the Ordinary Time following Pentecost) we watch as we attempt to remove what has intruded into our awareness in the First Cycle, and eventually are brought to the place where we grasp that it is in our awareness to stay. The task then becomes how to assimilate what has intruded and integrate it into our self-understanding.

The Ordinary Time following Epiphany is a time when this assimilation and integration is worked out over time, and our identity is changed in the sense of expanded. One part of this expansion is that we come to terms with the weakness this assimilation and integration brings. On the Christian journey, the effort is made to learn from the feeling of weakness, seeking to understand it and its origin, and then use what we discover to find a more fulfilling way to live. The effort is not to overcome the weakness and be stronger or less vulnerable, but to discover how to approach the vulnerability we feel in such a way that the weakness or vulnerability is honored, and our life is enhanced. Living in this way is not what we consider “normal.” Normal for our culture is not being weak or attending to any weakness we experience. In fact, this whole approach is “offensive” to our sensibilities. Our being offended gets in the way of our participating in the more humane and intelligent way of living into which God is always inviting us, where the goal is not to be strong in the usual sense of that word where we overcome our weakness, but to find the strength that lies on the other side of the weakness we experience and live from it. (Refer to today’s Gospel reading: Mark 6:1-6.)

[Jim Robie, 7-6-18]

### Ordinary Time – 7th Sunday after Pentecost (Mark 6:1-13)

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue and his words “astounded” the people who heard him. The English translation here is too mild; the Greek indicates more that his words “assaulted” the people, literally “pounded” them, “inflicted them with calamity” [calamity meaning “an event causing great and often sudden damage or distress”]. Therefore, the people took “offense” at him. The Greek says: the people were “tripped up” by what he said. We might say: he greatly offended the people’s sensibilities by asking them to think in unfamiliar, or more accurately, unacceptable ways. What he said both surprised and confused the people in that what he said went against their expectations and did so to such a degree that his words gave the people a pounding headache.

What was astounding and offensive about Jesus was his urging people to pay attention to what was weak, without strength, and then waiting upon what was weak in a servile manner by loving it joyfully. If we think about this for a while, I imagine the idea will be as astounding and offensive to us as it was to the people of Jesus’ time, because what is being proposed here is a way of life where attention is given to what is without strength rather than to what is strong, a way of life where we adore what makes us feel weak rather than what makes us feel strong. How would we do this? The most important thing to know is that we are not talking about feeling good about feeling weak. If we remember that “love” in Christianity is primarily about honoring something rather than feeling warm about it, we love what is weak by taking being weak seriously and being in earnest about discovering what the weakness is about and understanding the origin of the weakness. Whatever in us is weak is so for some reason which can be explored and understood, and that information can then be used either to mitigate the weakness or to help us accept it and live with it in the sense of find life through it. The fullness of our own human life is brought to us as we learn to regard with deep and joyful love those things about our own life that make it difficult or maybe impossible to feel strong.

I will give you two illustrations from my own life. After I was released from the hospital I realized that I felt weak in general and

that my legs felt weak in particular. My initial inclination was to think of ways to make myself stronger, especially my legs. When the exercises I undertook did not change anything, I began to consider more seriously that I was weak and did not actually know why that was so. That “I felt weak” was what I presented to one of my doctors, who eventually was able to discover why that was so, and a treatment was begun which resulted in the weakness I felt being relieved. I had to come to the place where I honored feeling weak sufficiently to take the weakness seriously enough to address it directly rather than move away from the weakness and onto efforts to feel strong.

A second illustration is from doing taxes. I have always found the record keeping that goes into preparing taxes difficult and even burdensome. I have always told myself that I needed to toughen up and just do the work. Every time I did so, my mind would freeze up. Eventually I decided to take my disability seriously and find someone who could help with the task. Years later, when I took a Myers/Briggs temperament sorter, I realized that I am out on the extreme of one of the indicators, that of Intuition, and almost not registering on its opposite, that of Sensation. The kind of task that record-keeping is, is a “sensate” task, and a Sensate would love it; whereas an Intuitive would hate it. The difficulty in doing the record-keeping was not something I needed to toughen up about but was something I needed to honor and understand.

Approaching our life in such a way as to focus on what makes us feel weak is not something that will excite us. It will likely have the opposite effect and deflate us. We are in love with feeling strong and with doing things that make us feel strong. We like things that inflate us. If we actually think about what is being said here we will be as astounded and offended as were the people in the first century. If we practice these words, I suggest that our heads will hurt.

The text says: “And (Jesus) could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.” The word “sick” is a Greek word meaning “infirm, from a root “not” plus the verb “to strengthen.” The word “cure” is a Greek word meaning “to wait upon menially,” or figuratively “to adore” [adore:

to regard with deep, joyful love]. The things Jesus said offended people, but to those who were not offended he was able to wait upon the ones who were infirm [without strength], doing so with a deep and joyful love for them and their condition. I think that means Jesus did not judge or criticize those who were weak for being weak, and therefore was able to address their weakness with them and unpack it.

When Jesus sent out the twelve disciples he gave them instructions about what to take, what to wear, how to enter a place they visited and conduct themselves while there. I believe the instructions Jesus gave served the purpose of helping the disciples be congruent with the task they were given. The disciples were not to go and present as someone who had the strength to master their lives and had done so successfully; they were to present as ordinary people, especially people comfortable with a normal human life and the weakness that comes with it.

The disciples were given authority over “unclean spirits.” The phrase “unclean spirit” refers to an aspect of our life, something like a mental disposition or a “self,” that has not been integrated into our primary personality and operates independently of who we mostly are. It is a part of us to which we do not relate. Using a metaphor Jesus often uses, this an element of our life that has not been “cleansed” in the sense of not been cultivated or pruned and therefore is “unclean.” The disciples are given “authority” over unclean spirits, “authority” referring to the “privilege” of having the “power” or “capacity” to influence unclean spirits. The way that worked is, the disciples proclaimed that all should “repent,” a word meaning “to think differently or afterwards, i.e. reconsider.” The root of “repent” is “accompaniment” plus “to exercise the mind.” Jesus and the disciples asked people to “exercise their mind” and think differently about what they adored. The idea would be to shift focus from what made them feel strong, to what made them feel weak. Doing so would create an internal environment that would be “friendly” toward the “unclean” parts of us that are without strength because we do not relate to them. In such an environment the weak parts of us would be influenced to come out

from the place they reside and communicate with us. They can then be attended to, waited upon, adored and understood.

The heart of this is the idea that we are asked to attend to the aspects of our life that are without strength, and which connect us to feeling weak. My guess is that even the thought of doing this makes us feel weak. We all have an aversion to feeling weak, and an attraction to feeling strong. We need to begin to notice both, and to “exercise our mind” and think about our aversion and also our attraction, especially to focus on our need to feel strong and to not feel weak.

[Jim Robie, 7-6-18, 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Cycle B, Mark 6:1-13]