



Reflections for Sunday, September 6, 2020

Good morning church and Facebook friends, I am Lisa Williams pastor of San Pedro United Methodist Church. We are glad to be worshiping with you today on this Labor Day weekend. I hope this finds you safe and hydrated? It is hot outside!

This is the first Sunday of the month and our tradition to celebrate the Lord's Super. This morning we will celebrate virtually. I invite you to bring with you something that represents the bread of life and a cup of God's love. While you gather your items for communion, I will share a few fun facts

about Labor Day:

In the United States, the first Labor Day was celebrated in New York City on Sept. 5, 1882 organized by the Central Labor Union. About 10,000 workers took unpaid leave and marched for speeches, a concert, and a picnic.

But where did the first demonstration for equal rights for workers take place? *Toronto, Canada in 1872*

Which American State was first to make Labor Day a public holiday? *Oregon in 1887.*

Which president signed a law-making Labor Day an official holiday? *President Grover Cleveland*

In the late 19th Century what was the average number of hours worked every day? *12 hours*

What year did the eight-hour workday became official? *1916.*

Traditionally what color has been social unacceptable to wear after Labor Day? *White*

Let us gather our hearts and minds in worship as we pray together:

Creator God, the one who gives us strength to work, minds to envision and hearts to persevere – thank you for creating us with the ability to do tasks, create products and contribute ideas that benefit the world.

We remember in gratitude all those who labor diligently in our factories, restaurants, in transportation, communications, agriculture, construction, in our nursing homes and hospitals, in law enforcement, in childcare and in our retail industry.

We pray the blessing of Ecclesiastes upon each worker, “That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his/her toil – this is the gift of God.” (Ecclesiastes 3:13 NIV)

Keep our workers healthy, safe, and strong. May the work of their hands provide the means they need to care for themselves and their families.

Grant all workers an environment that allows them to do their jobs in safety, where they are respected and valued.

Open our eyes to their labors on the behalf of our world and help us to voice our thanks to them for tirelessly doing their allotted jobs.

May we learn your grace from others example of faithfulness in every task. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing unto to you O Lord, my rock, and my redeemer. *Amen.*

On this Labor Day weekend one way we might be able to honor those who marched before us to lay the foundation for equal rights for workers is to relax and play a board game. I am thinking about Chutes and Ladders. It can be played as early as three years old. You do not need to be able to read or learn any strategic skills to enjoy the game. It is a game of chance that teaches us lessons about behavior and its consequences. Land on good behavior square and you move up the board faster; land on a bad one and you move back down.

Sounds to me like this is the game of life. We are constantly moving up the ladder, usually when our behavior is good and we are in line with God and then we slip and fall down the chute when we fail to make God the center and when we forget to invite God into our space. Our Psalm and gospel from Matthew will hopefully give us some guidelines on how to “play the game.”

Psalm 119:33-40

Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, and I will observe it to the end.
Give me understanding, that I may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.
Lead me in the path of your commandments, for I delight in it.
Turn my heart to your decrees, and not to selfish gain.
Turn my eyes from looking at vanities; give me life in your ways.
Confirm to your servant your promise, which is for those who fear you.
Turn away the disgrace that I dread, for your ordinances are good.
See, I have longed for your precepts; in your righteousness give me life.

There are 176 verses in this Psalm, it is the longest chapter in the Bible. “Teach me, O Lord” sums it up. The Hebrew verb “yarah” is closely related to “torah,” which means God’s teaching and instruction about what he wants for his people as well as the “law” they should follow. God promises abundant good to all those who observe and delight in his teachings.

You may find it fun to go back and read all of Psalm 119 you may be delighted to find verses that you are familiar with like "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (v. 105); "With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you" (vv. 10-11); "The earth, O LORD, is

full of your steadfast love; teach me your statutes" (v. 64); "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long" (v. 97).

These selected verses I read earlier are the psalmist's persistent, wholehearted desire to seek and live out God's instructions throughout life. The psalmist passionately seeks, by inviting God's help, to turn away from lesser things, to focus on God's best. The psalmist trusts God.

In the "*Torah*" which is the first five books of the Bible, we are given a detailed set of laws to follow like the Ten Commandments (be nice to your mother and father, don't use God's name in vain, no stealing, no coveting other people's stuff etc.) But we are also given God's freeing grace "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart ..." (Deuteronomy 6:5). "You shall love your neighbor as yourself ..."

Something for you to ponder over the weekend – which of these various Old Testament Laws are still relevant today? Why or why not? When we follow them do, we continue up the ladder? And what happens when we don't? Do we fall through the chute like in our game?

In the 21st Century how do we view the multi-layer relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament? This is where the fun begins...

Matthew also outlines rules for how we are to "play the game" and the importance of dealing with others when wrongdoing has happened in our church or community. This is what Matthew 18:15-20 says:

¹⁵ "If another member of the church^[a] sins against you,^[b] go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one.^[c] ¹⁶ But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

Few things I found interesting this time around with this text is how it complements the Psalm. Matthew outlines rules for us on "how to play the game" especially when we need to confront someone. And just like the Old Testament reading it provides God's freeing grace – "For I am there among you."

Here are a few things to think about and a few takeaways from this morning's gospel: the word listen shows up four times in 5 verses. The promise is that God is present within and among us. God is observing how we as community engage with one another. One example is how we will engage with each other over the next 58 days before our Presidential election.

This is an important passage for us to consider as we engage with our neighbors, friends and loved ones as we move into the next 58 days and beyond. Jesus is speaking and setting expectations for us. He is showing us the way we are to be in community together – how we are to engage in the goal of reconciliation. “If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.”

As Christians we are being called to act differently. We are being asked to engage, listen, and respect one another in ways perhaps we have never done before.

When we listen to another person’s views, which may be different from ours, and you engage in conversation - do you imagine God being present and listening to that conversation? If you did would you be embarrassed for what God might hear? Try this exercise next time you find yourself in conversation with others. Know that God is already present and does not need to be invited into the conversation. “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there.”

God cares about both sides and yearns for reconciliation, in fact God demands reconciliation.

Going back to our illustration of the board game, Chutes and Ladders, these passages are instructions on how to follow the rules so one can climb the ladder and not fall down into the chute. But what happens when you find yourself traveling down the chute instead of climbing up the ladder? Well, this will happen, why because we are not perfect. But as children of God we are given the tools necessary to continue the journey up the ladder as we strive for reconciliation for all people. Isn’t reconciliation for all people what is in our hearts desire?

God has given us the instructions it is up to us to implement them. Amen.

Communion

As we prepare our hearts and minds for communion remember that Jesus is present more in times of need than in times of plenty, more in times of desperation than in times of certainty. All we need to do to be worthy of this virtual communion is be willing to accept God’s love and forgiveness with our hands opened wide and our hearts willing to receive.

Lift up your hearts and give thanks to the Lord our God.

Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, you made us in your image, to love and to be loved. When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast. By suffering, death, and resurrection of your only Son Jesus Christ you delivered us from slavery to sin and death and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

On the night in which Jesus gave himself up for us he took the bread, gave thanks to you, O Holy One, he broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: “Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

When the supper was over Jesus took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and the blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, Almighty Father, now and forever. **Amen.**

And now, with the confidence of children of God, let us pray:

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass 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

Now take your bread hold it in your hand, this is the body of Christ given for you. Take the cup which represents God's love for you; dip the bread in the cup remembering that you are loved and forgiven. **Amen**

Benediction

Now may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Today, tomorrow and always. Amen.