



September 20th, 2020
16th Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. George "Chip" Dischinger
Readings: Exodus 16: 2-15, Philippians 1:21-30
Gospel: Matthew 20:1-16

I love the sound of unique word and phrases...like "topsy turvy."

This portion of scripture today from Matthew follows directly on a pronouncement from Jesus that *"the first shall be last and the last shall be first."*

This, to me, is a very topsy turvy way of looking at justice and salvation direction.

In the reading from Exodus today, the Israelite people are in the wilderness, complaining of being led out of Egypt only to starve and die in the wilderness.

Aaron is instructed by Moses talk to the people and to tell them to draw near to the Lord. The people turn and look into the heavens above the wilderness, and they see the image of the Lord.

Day labor, as we see in Matthew's gospel today, is not a walk in the park.

When I was in seminary at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California, I was allowed to visit parishes to find one that would be a church home for me while I studied. I went to St. Augustine's Parish which is in Oakland, California...took the bus down Telegraph Ave from Berkeley and crossed underneath Interstate I-980 which is a huge viaduct over Telegraph.

Underneath I saw a homeless encampment that was truly a wilderness (It is something I have never seen before nor do I hope to ever to see again). I saw men lining up to work as day laborers. And there was very intense tension and a feeling of despair there, as well, even though they were waiting to go out and hopefully find work.

And I felt like the questions of the time were:
Am I going to find work?
How am I going to feed my family?
Is this going to be a safe place for me to go to work?

Well, I went and worshipped around the corner at St. Augustine's Church, and found it to be a lovely and welcoming, spirit-filled place. The people there, the congregants, were very pleased to show me some of the history of the church which included, in their parish hall, hosting the first school children's breakfast in the country in 1967.

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This was part of an outreach effort by The Reverend Earl Neil, beginning in 1966 when Father Neil reached out and was the pastoral presence for the Black Panther Party which started in Oakland. This outreach made a huge impact on this parish.

And I saw a light in people's eyes as they welcomed me...a real true light of welcome and openness that made a huge impression on me. And I think it was in large part due to the community service that these people and Father Neil had developed.

So, what is the unjust justice in a topsy turvy world? It's the first being last and the last being first. Now I know that to overcome prejudice and bias, one must look at one's own principles and beliefs. And I know that this topsy turvy justice that Jesus proclaims is one that runs contrary to my own personal biases.

I must admit, as an educated Western, middle-income background person, that being first is something that I felt was important and is something to be lauded. But to understand that bias and to get past that, and to work more toward just justice, I must accept this unjust justice in my own thinking and get over my own bias and my own prejudice.

These bright eyes that I saw at St. Augustine's Church that welcomed me and spoke with great pride about where they stood, where they were, and what they did was something that I saw when I first came to Christ Church Detroit, as well.

And I think this history of outreach and of caring for maybe those who would be left behind, in reaching out to unrecognized others, is something that Christ Church has in its history, too.

So how can we go on during this wilderness time that we're in with a pandemic raging and with changes in our way of looking at relations — race relations, class relations, status relations in this country — how can we maintain this unoccluded, bright-eyed, open-hearted way of working and thinking and being as Christians?

It's incumbent to maintain and to grow our worship. And this is a difficult time, but to cling to worship, to work with worship, is extremely critical.

Today we are celebrating our music program and our choir. And St. Augustine is known to have said that when *"one sings, one prays twice."* It's with great thanksgiving for our immense and talented and wide-ranging music program that is used to supplement our worship.

Prayer also is drawing near to God to understand this unjust justice. Our Prayers of the People are wide-ranging. They not only talk about the world, our church, our society, but they also talk about those of us who ask for prayer and look for prayer as individuals. An individual prayer life, beginning and ending and throughout our day, is crucial, as well, to drawing near to the Lord.

We have a neighbor close by, the Pope Francis Center, that does exemplary work, not only in providing sustenance and substance for people who are on the street or just in need, but it also provides a pastoral presence, too. And volunteering to help in any way we can at this time and going into the future with the Pope Francis Center is a crucial portion to drawing near to the Lord.

And we have a collection service with Crossroads, which is a close-in neighbor to us, and we can provide in our bounty for people who are in need there, as well, and reach out even further than we have.

So, brothers and sisters, I feel like I'm talking about also using a very broad and wide-reaching idea of outreach and by working in possibly in ways that we have not considered in the past.

But during these topsy turvy times, draw near to the Lord and the light of grace will shine in your eyes.

AMEN