

St James Episcopal Church
HEALING SERVICE OF TAIZE

February 23, 2021

Gathering and Call to Worship

Leader Come to us this evening, O God,

All Come to us with Light.

Leader Speak to us this evening, O God,

All Speak to us your truth.

Leader Dwell with us this night, O God,

All Dwell with us in Love.

Song *Your Word, O Lord*

Your word, O Lord is a light.

My God, enlighten my darkness.

O Lord, my God, enlighten my darkness.

O Lord, my God, enlighten my darkness.

Leader Let us pray.

Creator and Healer of the world, help us see our part in your work of healing our world and its wounded people.

Show us what needs to be torn down and what needs to be built up, that all people may live in peace and safety, enjoying fullness of life; we ask this in your most Holy Name. *Amen.*

A reading from the Book of Deuteronomy (9: 4-12) (From the Message)

Speaking to the Israelites:

But when God pushes them out ahead of you, don't start thinking to yourselves, "It's because of all the good I've done that God has brought me in here to dispossess these nations." Actually it's because of all the evil these nations have done. No, it's nothing good that you've done, no record for decency that you've built up that got you here; it's because of the vile wickedness of these nations that God, your God, is dispossessing them before you so that he can keep his promised word to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Know this and don't ever forget it: It's not because of any good that you've done that God is giving you this good land to own. Anything but! You're stubborn as mules. Keep in mind and don't ever forget how angry you made God, your God, in the wilderness. You've kicked and screamed against God from the day you left Egypt until you got to this place, rebels all the way. You made God angry at Horeb, made him so angry that he wanted to destroy you. When I climbed the mountain to receive

the slabs of stone, the tablets of the covenant that God made with you, I stayed there on the mountain forty days and nights: I ate no food; I drank no water. Then God gave me the two slabs of stone, engraved with the finger of God. They contained word for word everything that God spoke to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day of the assembly.

It was at the end of the forty days and nights that God gave me the two slabs of stone, the tablets of the covenant. God said to me, “Get going, and quickly. Get down there, because your people whom you led out of Egypt have ruined everything. In almost no time at all they have left the road that I laid out for them and gone off and made for themselves a cast god.”

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Let us read responsively— Psalm 48 (from Everyday Psalms by James Taylor)

When things go right, give God the praise;
give God the glory.
Raise your eyes and see;
the shadow of the Lord looms over us like a thundercloud.
Before that awesome might, no one risks defiance,
not even the principalities and powers that rule this world.
They gather in force, confident of their powers;
they disintegrate in chaos, aware of their weakness.
The rain slices them into fragments.
The hail drives them into the ground. They cry out in agony.
Like leaves before an autumn wind, they scatter.

We do not lie;
we witness in truth to what we have seen and heard.
The authority of God is above challenge;
it surpasses all other gods that humans worship.

The reality of God is more than human minds can grasp;
we can only struggle to understand.
The truth of God overwhelms our imaginations,
despite our attempts to confine it to our comprehension.
We know no more than to worship the Lord of creation,
the one who created us, and all creatures,
and all communities of creatures.

Let them all praise God.

Spend your life learning about this Lord,
so that you may pass on to your successors the truth—
that this is God.

There is but one God, now and forever.
This god will lead us forward into the future.

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews (3: 1-11) (From the Message)

So, my dear Christian friends, companions in following this call to the heights, take a good hard look at Jesus. He's the centerpiece of everything we believe, faithful in everything God gave him to do. Moses was also faithful, but Jesus gets far more honor. A builder is more valuable than a building any day. Every house has a builder, but the Builder behind them all is God. Moses did a good job in God's house, but it was all servant work, getting things ready for what was to come. Christ as Son is in charge of the house.

Now, if we can only keep a firm grip on this bold confidence, we're the house! That's why the Holy Spirit says,

Today, please listen;

don't turn a deaf ear as in "the bitter uprising,"
that time of wilderness testing!

Even though they watched me at work for forty years,
your ancestors refused to let me do it my way;
over and over they tried my patience.

And I was provoked, oh, so provoked!

I said, "They'll never keep their minds on God;
they refuse to walk down my road."

Exasperated, I vowed,

"They'll never get where they're going,
never be able to sit down and rest."

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Meditation Reflection *First Tuesday of Lent* (excerpt by Richard John Neuhaus from *God for Us: Rediscovering the Meaning of Lent and Easter*)

In today's first reading from Deuteronomy, we have the verse that apparently inspired Jesus himself to do his fast in the desert, which then in turn became our forty days of

Lent. Moses says to the rebellious Israelites, “I stayed forty days and forty nights on the mountain, with nothing to eat or drink.”

A sacred pattern of time is being revealed, and forty is the consistent symbolic number. (Some think it was the average age of a person’s life and so symbolized life and death itself.) This is also the time that Moses spent in the cloud on the mountaintop, and it was the duration of the great flood of Noah. It is eventually extended to the full forty years of wandering in the desert.

What’s the significance of this number? Probably the way we would say it is: Trust the process; it’s not over until it’s over. “Forty days and forty nights: has become a mantra for all sacred time: time of temptation, time of ecstasy, and time of trial.

The first part of this same reading beautifully enunciates the growing theme of grace, again repeating “It is not for any goodness of yours that I am doing this.” This new land of gratuitous divine love is the real Promised Land—a land we are all entering in fits and starts, just as the first Jews did.

This is a process different from any meritocracy, but it is hard for us to shake that mindset—we are all hesitant to leave the familiar world of earning and achieving to enter a world of freedom and gift.

Then our author in Hebrews continues to develop his understanding of Jesus as the new and “real” Moses, saying to his Christian Jews that Moses was faithful as a servant in his house, but Jesus is faithful as a son and the master of the house. To live in this house is to be confident with “a confidence that we can glory in” because we are sisters and brothers in the very same house.

This is much his message to an exiled people who are neither confident nor at rest in their exile from home base in Judea. Surely they are a stand-in for all of us. These Christian Hebrews are quite normal people who hanker for the consolations of their early childhood religion, and so this Christian apologist is making his best case for it all being fulfilled in Christ and in the eternal house of God, as opposed to a mere temple in Jerusalem.

[Jesus] replaces the temple with “the temple of his body,” as not just more important than this sacred building, but its rightful and actual successor. The human, the personal, the physical has become the new sacred. Anything which denies the true sacred is to be “driven out.” The human mind of Jesus somehow knew that he was the archetype and avatar of this mystery of divine incarnation, which is still the trump card of Christian belief. The temple is forever personal and living and now.

Jesus knew that religion itself would constantly be tempted to substitute the means for the end, the medium for the message, the container for the actual contents. Religion always risks making God into a commodity that it could personally buy and sell, “turning my Father’s house into a marketplace,” as it were. It is without doubt his strongest act of public anger and an act of social resistance at the very center of Jewish economic and religious power. Many would say this was the action that

clinched his fate. All we can conclude is that the message here is quite central and important for the very nature of religion and the search for God. [Today,] we have moved from sacred time (the symbolic number forty), to sacred relationship (brothers and sisters in God's household), to sacred space (the universal Body of Christ). Our world is surely being rebuilt and refashioned.

A Litany for Healing (adapted from Prayers & Ideas for Healing Services by Ian Cowie)

Leader

O God, our Father [and our Mother], we bless you that your grace has dawned upon the world with healing for all [humankind], and that you have richly poured out your Spirit upon us, so that we can pray as your Family, knowing that our prayers will be heard and answered through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We remember before you those who have recently had or are having operations, and for those recovering. (short pause)

We remember those with chronic diseases and those with wasting diseases. (short pause)

We remember those with depression and those with phobias. (short pause)

We remember those with mental illnesses. (short pause)

We remember those with cancer. (short pause)

We remember those suffering with the multiple problems of old age. (short pause)

We remember those suffering with dementia. (short pause)

We remember those who have or are dying from COVID. (short pause)

Hear us, O Lord, for your mercy is great.

We remember surgeons, doctors, nurses, hospital staff and all who work for the good of those whom we have named.

We remember those in our congregation who work with the sick and suffering.

May your wisdom guide them, blessing their human skills.

May your love sustain them when they are under pressure.

May your healing flow through them.

Hear us, O Lord, for your mercy is great.

We remember those organizations which support research and which try to help people with specific diseases and problems: research for all types of Cancer, research for Strokes and Heart Conditions, research for immune diseases, research for diabetes, research for development of vaccines and for other organizations for whom we pray. May your light guide them and bless their work.

We remember those who tend loved ones who are ill.
Sustain them with your patience and presence, and when human love has grown weary with costly caring, may your Spirit renew and refresh them.

Hear us, O Lord, for your mercy is great.

Song *O Lord, hear my prayer*

O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer.
When I call, answer me.
O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer,
Come and listen to me.

Leader

May the kindness and generosity of God our savior dawn on us all, more and more, until all the shadows are dispersed, all sins left behind, all diseases healed, all suffering conquered, and all relationships filled with the glory of his Love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer (and now let us pray together)

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, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Benediction (by Bob Holmes)

May the quiet fire of God's love arise within you.
May its flames of joy and peace enlighten your steps in this world
And may you be like the burning bush,
the presence of God for each other,
that holy healing light of love,
the breath of God made manifest in you. Amen.

Song *By Night, We Hasten*

By night, we hasten, in darkness,
to search for living water,
only our thirst leads us onwards,
only our thirst leads us onwards.