

October 1, 2017 17th Sunday after Pentecost
Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-32, Psalm 25:1-9
Philippians 2:1-13, Matthew 21:23-32

Quotes from Ghandi and Adrienne Rich come from Feasting on the Word for this date.
Ideas from Troy Troftgruben in Working Preacher for this date, and DavidLose.net for this date.

Beloved of God, imitators of Christ, grace and peace to you. Amen.

It's important to notice the mile markers.

As we worship this morning, folks from our congregation are running both the TC 10 Mile and the Twin Cities Marathon.

Plenty more are lined up, a bit damp, at one mile marker or another, to cheer like crazy,
signs and cow bells and the like, in hand,
cheering as those they know and those they don't know pass by.

Some will stick around mile 14 or wherever they've planted themselves, but others will go farther along the course, to another mile marker, to add more encouragement, and lots of love and gusto.

If you've been to the course already this morning or if you've had a chance to look at the map, these mile-markers offer a sense of progress:

Okay, I'm ½ way done, or this is the beginning of the incline away from the river, or just 2 miles to go.
It's just that kind of day, and it's important to notice the mile markers.

There is plenty that could be said about today's gospel, but I turn instead to our 2nd lesson.

Paul's letter to the community at Philippi could make some good signs along the race way:

"If there is any encouragement in Christ,
any consolation from love,
any sharing in the Spirit,
any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: (colon)
be in unity, live in humility, watch out for the needs of others.

Let the same mind be in you that is in Christ Jesus."

That doesn't mean impersonate Jesus, but rather imitate him.

Impersonators want you to think that they are someone they aren't.

Imitators, on the other hand, seek to live into the qualities they value, to imitate these qualities..

As his people struggled for justice, Gandhi is reported to have said,

"I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ."

Hard words, and often true words: Imitate Christ, dear people, imitate Christ.

This part of the Paul's letter that we heard today includes a beautiful Christ hymn and then finishes,

“Beloved, work out your salvation with fear and trembling...for it is God who is at work in you.”

As in, this isn't about “little me”, terrified, trying to do the right thing at every turn so that I'll be saved.

But rather this is Paul's desire for this community, more than anything, to take seriously the call to live out their salvation (their salvos, their healing) right here, right now, in the world.

Live with this sense of **obedience** to Christ's call.

Live with **humility**, recognizing God at work both in you and in the person at your side.

Live publicly, **witnessing** to the hope that is within you.

And do all that not out of your own sheer strength, but do it because God is at work within you, through you, for the sake of a beautiful and broken world.

Some days you we will succeed, other days we will fail miserably, and still God is at work in you, in us..

Obedience, and humility and witness—let me simply offer these mile markers for each:

Obedience: I took a short retreat this week with my peer group, a motley group of pastor-types,

close friends and colleagues, 5 of us total, to a retreat house in north Minneapolis...and it was lovely.

Lovely to rest and pray. Lovely to catch up with these beloved ones.

Lovely to retreat, to take time apart, with God, with God's people, in obedience.

We were at a place called St. Jane's House, named for St. Jane from the 15th century who along with another St. Francis, this is St. Francis of Sales, began the order of the Visitation Sisters.

All around the house where we retreated at Emerson near Plymouth, the words of this *other* St. Francis were etched: “Be who you are, and be that well.”

I found these words freeing and guiding: Be who you are, and be that well. **Obedience.**

Humility: In 1974, **Adrienne Rich** received the National Book Award in poetry, beating out the other nominees Audre Lorde and Alice Walker.

When Adrienne Rich stood to accept the award, she began like this:

“We, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, and Alice Walker, together accept this award in the name of all women whose voices have gone and still go unheard in a patriarchal world.”

These three had together written this statement ahead of time with the agreement that whoever won would speak these words, realizing that by humbly, powerfully supporting one another they could do more than by competing against one another. **Humility.**

And finally, witness. This week has seen the death of two pillars of our congregation.

is not often that the Sunday obituaries have two of our beloved sharing the same page.

On Monday morning Bertha Hanson died and on Friday morning Marian Jacobs died.

Both of these women have been long time members of Hope and servant leaders in their own right.

Up until just a few weeks ago we'd see Bertha sitting right here in the front pew, next to her son Terry.

Bertha's close friend Verle describes Bertha as trustworthy, generous, and giving, with a "marvelous sense of humor."

Nearly 50 years ago, Bertha was one of the creators of our Friendly Visitors program.

To this day, Friendly Visitors offer care, visiting those in the congregation who aren't able to get to church.

Until this past June, Marian Jacobs has quietly, faithfully, with a sparkle in her eye and a gentle smile, collated the bulletin every Friday morning.... since 1998.

She told me once how all that time working with our bulletins enriched her sense of worship, her experience of the service..

I've been thinking about Bertha and Marian much these last days watching the arc of their lives, the mile markers, come to a close. **Witness.**

[FONT]

Dear friends in Christ, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you."

The promises of baptism marked Bertha's life and Marian's life.

And the promises of baptism mark their dying days and their eternal rest.

It is important to notice these mile-markers.

One of you recently suggested that we as a congregation might find a way of marking the passing of those within our community, a way of seeing the arc created by the waters of baptism and the unshakeable love of Christ Jesus that holds us in our living and in our dying and in our living eternally.

**When we live, we live to the Lord, when we die we die to the Lord,
so then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.**

It's in that spirit that I invite you into prayer:

**Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our sisters Marian and Bertha.
We thank you for giving them to us to know and to love as companions in our pilgrimage on earth.
At these waters of baptism you welcomed them into your love.
At these waters you comforted them in times of trouble and encouraged them in delight.
At these waters you now enfold them into Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting.**

**Console us who mourn and bring us together to feast with all the saints of God.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**