

WORSHIP NOTES

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost • October 23, 2011

The Season

Throughout our journey through the autumn portion of Ordinary Time we have heard teachings about Christian life and life in the kingdom. Today we are reminded that it all begins with a call to love God and love neighbor . . .

Today the church commemorates James of Jerusalem, an early leader of the church in Jerusalem. James is referred to in the New Testament as Jesus' brother and is identified by the Jewish historian Josephus as the brother of Jesus, "the so-called Christ." Josephus records that he was greatly respected for his piety and strict observance of the Law. His enemies took advantage of an interval between Roman governors in 62 AD to have him put to death.

In Word . . .

Our Old Testament reading comes from the Levitical Holiness Code, so named for the opening verses, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." We are holy because we are 'set apart' for a particular calling, to be signs and instruments of God's grace, presence, and purpose. In our reading from Thessalonians, Paul reminds us that being an apostle of Jesus Christ and the Gospel means challenging the powers that be as well as conventional wisdom. "We speak not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts." Our Gospel reading includes one of Jesus' best known statements, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." The setting is the Pharisees' final attempt to discredit or trick Jesus by asking him to identify the greatest law. Jesus takes the 613 commandments found in the Torah and summarizes them with what has been the core of his life and teaching. He does not invalidate, but reinterprets and reprioritizes the commandments, and in so doing, gives us a means to discern and interpret the will of God in the Word of God. Jesus then poses a question to the Pharisees, "What do you think of the Messiah, whose son is he?" As Christians we are called to ask ourselves what Jesus means to us, to show the world God's love in the character of our relationship together, and to express our love of God through care for all.

And Song . . .

Traditional (9:00)

Our distribution hymn, "Lord, Thee I Love With all My Heart," is a powerful prayer which speaks about justification, Christian vocation, and the joyful hope of the resurrection. The original German text is by Martin Schalling (1532-1608), a student at the University of Wittenberg who studied under Philip Melancton and became a pastor. The English translation is by Catherine Winkworth. The tune, HERZLICH LIEB, composer unknown, is from a 1577 German hymnal. Today's prelude is a chorale prelude based on this tune and attributed to Bach. It is from a collection of 44 pieces compiled by Johann Gottfried Neumeister, and discovered by Christoff Wolf and Hans-Joachim Shultz at the Yale Library in 1985.

Contemporary (10:30)

The song of the day, "Lord, I Want to be a Christian," is a contemporary adaptation of a spiritual from the African American tradition. Spirituals are the religious folk songs created and first sung by African Americans in slavery. Their original composers are unknown, and they have come to be regarded as the first "signature" music of this country. Some research suggests that the spiritual we sing today originated in Virginia in the 1750s. It is a prayer for growth in Christian character, a theme found in our readings today. Our arrangement is by Lori True, Campus Minister and Director of Liturgy and Music at St. Catherine University in St. Paul, Minnesota.