

PENTECOST 5, A – July 5, 2020  
SCRIPTURES – Zechariah 9:9-12; Romans 7:14-25a; Matthew 11:25-30

*Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will... Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, that I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Matt. 11:28-29*

**"Come to me, and I will give you rest. I am gentle and lowly in heart."** This is how Jesus is most often thought of: as a gentle and peaceful man, a bringer of peace and comfort. He was not always so gentle, however.

Before He spoke the gentle words of today's Gospel, Jesus cried out against several towns in Israel, including Capernaum, a town populated by simple, hard-working Jewish people. **"Woe to you! You will be brought down to Hell. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day."** (Matt. 11:23) Sodom was a town of idol-worshiping sexual perverts, infamous for attacking Abraham's nephew Lot when he would not bring out to them two men who were visiting him so that they could have their way with them. How wicked they were, far worse than the simple people of Capernaum! And yet, Jesus said to Capernaum's people, **"It will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Sodom than for you."** Talk about offensive. He considered the people of Capernaum guilty of sin that was worse than the sin of the people of Sodom!

What was so bad about the people of Capernaum, that they deserved such severe judgment from God? We need to know, lest we fall into their sin. Were they more sexually perverse than the people of Sodom? No, there's no indication of that. In fact, not only were sexual sins probably much less of a problem among them than they were among the people of Sodom; they were probably troubled by them much less than are we. Sexual sins and temptations are constantly before our eyes on our TV's and our computers; and, divorces and multiple marriages, as well as having sex apart from marriage, were not accepted by them, as they are in our day, but were considered sins against God. No, sexual sin wasn't why Jesus rebuked the people of Capernaum so harshly. So: what was so bad about them? Jesus tells us: **"If the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day."** If the people of Sodom had seen the great things Jesus did, they would have repented, would have turned from their sins and to God for His mercy *in Jesus*. The people of Capernaum did see Jesus. They did not turn to Him, however, but ignored and rejected Him.

How could they do so? Well, they had their lives to be concerned about... their daily needs, and the work they had to do to provide for them. So do we. And, besides, Jesus was just another Jewish man, just like them. Sure, He did great things now and then... at least, that was the report. Most people didn't see them. He did gather a following... of mostly poor and needy people. His closest disciples were a rag-tag group of simple men, and included some offensive sinners like Matthew, the former tax collector. This was where God was to be found? Among them? **"Give us a sign and we'll believe you."**

Ah, signs... there's the problem. Will you change your life... will you do as Jesus expects and follow Him as your Savior, if you see signs? If He proves Himself to you?

Jesus gave me a sign of His saving presence on Friday. I was visiting Bob Moffett, one of our homebound members. We were sitting at his dining room table and were just about to have Communion – I was speaking the Words of Institution, in fact – when, bang! A loud noise that we not only heard, but also felt – our chairs shook – stopped me. Just a few feet from us a large tree branch had fallen onto his back deck. It landed right in front of a chair on which he often sat in the afternoon to feed the squirrels and chipmunks. Bob told me that if I wasn't there, he undoubtedly would have been outside doing so right then... and the branch, which fell from about 20' above, would have fallen right across his knees. He would certainly have been hurt, perhaps seriously injured. But, he wasn't... and all because I just happened to visit that afternoon. A coincidence? Many would see it that way. Bob and I saw it as a blessing from God. He was with us! Well, of course, He was. ***"This is My body... this is My blood."*** There's no doubt that, Jesus, our Savior, was present! Did we need another sign? No!

***"I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children."*** So says Jesus (Matt. 11:25). God gives us plenty of signs of His presence. But, He hides them under the ordinary and commonplace. Only faith sees Him as ***"our refuge and our fortress,"*** (Introit) and so credits all good to Him as ***"our strength and support amidst the wearisome changes of this world."*** (Collect of the Day) Jesus, His one and only Son with whom He is one, is the greatest sign of God's presence. He declares Himself to be God among us! But, He came in weakness, as a normal, simple human being. He was ***"gentle and lowly of heart,"*** and so didn't attract those who were considered the best. He didn't call to Himself the greatest and most influential in Israel. If He were among us today – oh, and He is, isn't He? – He wouldn't fill His church with the wisest and kindest, the most successful and influential among us. In fact, His church probably wouldn't be full. Why not? Because God's will is to hide His Son. This is Jesus' yoke, the burden He lays upon us: that He is gentle and lowly, not powerful and great. Boy, if He would only show in great ways His presence! If He regularly kept tree branches from falling on people when I showed up, or rescued them from auto accidents when I was in the car, do you think our church – His church – would grow? You know it would! Why doesn't He do that, then?

Because Christ's Church not about me... or you. It's not about our wisdom and insight in seeing His presence. It's about Jesus. God offers Him to us as His gift. ***"All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."*** Boy, what a bold statement! Who does He think He is? God? Yes, He does. The only God, and the only way to God, in fact: ***"no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him,"*** Jesus says. But, He won't work to convince you, or anyone else, of this. He won't answer every question, or give signs to prove His greatness and so draw you to Him. He'll be weak and lowly, and let us, His believers, be weak and lowly. He does this to draw to Himself the weak and lowly... and especially those who are weak and lowly in their sin.

It's a blessing to have such a weak and lowly Savior, one who in many ways seems weak like us and refuses to give signs of His greatness. He is One who will receive lowly sinners and not demand that we find Him by our wisdom or earn His blessing by our goodness. ***"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."*** That is His invitation. If you are weak and lowly; if, like the apostle Paul, you struggle with your sinful desires again and again and lament, ***"I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Wretched person that I am!"*** – well, you have a Savior. You are wanted and welcomed by Jesus. Come to Him! Receive Him as He offers Himself to you in the lowliness of His written and spoken Word, and in the Sacrament of His body and blood! You will find rest for your soul.

Again, we pray: Gracious God, our heavenly Father, Your mercy attends us all our days. Be our strength and support amid the wearisome changes of this world, and at life's end grant us Your promised rest and the full joys of Your salvation; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.