

**Arise...Come Away!**

Pentecost 15 2024 St Andrew's

Song of Solomon 2:8-13 Psalm 45: 1-2, 7-10 James 1: 17-27, Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

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I speak to you in the name of God, the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier Amen

Good Morning and Welcome! .... this fifteenth day of Pentecost, the beginning of the Season of Creation where Christians around the world are invited to give particular attention to praying and caring for God's creation, as part of the global Season of Creation observed from September 1<sup>st</sup> to October 4<sup>th</sup> every year. This is quite simply a time for intentional prayer and reflection for all of creation which of course includes all of humanity!

For the past weeks we have heard from the gospel of John with reassuring words from Jesus as the bread of life, the living bread, and the true bread from heaven telling us that whoever eats of this bread will live forever and today we shift to hearing that message the way Mark tells it. The fantastic readings this morning continue in the theme of confidence and reassurance of Jesus' presence, the indwelling spirit. The Song of Solomon, sometimes thought to be a romantic love song of two lovers equal in relationship, when viewed as a song with deeper meaning, seems to be a holy conversation of Divine connection. A Divine conversation Jesus hears from God his Father and that we hear from Jesus in our heart too. An invitation to arise my love my fair one and come away! A Divine call to be immersed in the love of God unstained by the world.

James in his letter refers to the Father of lights, who is without the shadow of change, who gave us birth by the word of truth, such that we would become a kind of first fruits to welcome the implanted word that has the power to save our souls. James speaks reassuringly to his listeners and us, teaching that pure religion is about persevering, about being doers to spread the word through our actions of caring for one another in distress, and, that as doers who act, we will be blessed.

Then as we just heard, Mark in characteristic fashion, gets right to the point in his story of the Pharisees and scribes trying to trip Jesus up for not following the rules of washing before eating. Mark's Jesus takes the authorities to task and challenges them for placing so much importance on ritual rules which they hide behind feeding their own self-importance as the enforcers. Quoting Isaiah, Jesus accuses the Pharisees and scribes of being caught up in the details of ritual, honoring Jesus only with their lips, not their hearts that Jesus sees are far away. Perhaps this is a message for our awareness for making our faith and our worship accessible somehow to those who might be curious. Jesus then says there is nothing that happens on the outside of a person that by going in can defile them, that it is only what comes out that defiles. I wonder if what we are meant to hear is that God is with us, that our souls are shielded by Christ's love and the power of the Holy Spirit such that in being dishonored on the outside we are given the power to resist the temptation to dishonor another by our words or actions. Mark teaches that all things come from the heart and the power to save our souls is in abiding in Jesus, the bread of life, the light of the world, the implanted word. This is a call to the Pharisees and scribes and to us to arise and come away with Jesus, who will always guide us into doing the right thing.

As a community of believers our hearts hear the echo of the Divine call, God's invitation drawing us to the heart of Jesus. We receive the gift of the Holy Spirit in the call and sacrament of baptism. A sacrament being an outward sign of inward grace. In baptism we are anointed with the Holy Spirit, the grace and mercy of God who creates us as James Koester writes, to be pilgrims open to the power and presence of God in relationship bringing about the Kingdom as guides and co-laborers of the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of each worship service, in the power of the Holy Spirit within us, we stand before God and pray saying together, Almighty God, to you all hearts are open and all desires known and from you no secrets are hidden. We then ask that our thoughts and hearts be cleansed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit placing us to perfectly love God and magnify God's holy name through

Jesus Christ. In this prayer all of us, God's perfect creation, stand fully open, just as we are, to be surprised by God who reassures us that all prayer in community has the power to overcome the worldly powers that defile or taint. By the power and grace given and received in our baptism we come to worship charged with the power of the Holy Spirit to stand unstained by the world.

We need one another. We care for one another. We are a community who loves God and one another; that's how God creates communities of faith with the powers to redeem. Worshiping together each week, caring for the land, growing veggies at the farm ministering with those in need, and staying in touch to care for one another's needs as James tells us, is religion that is pure and undefiled before God. It is certain reassurance of God's presence at work in us keeping us unstained by the world.

I recall one Easter vigil as the Christ candle was lit someone bursting with excited voice exclaimed "There it is!" and there it was, the light of Christ right there in plain sight. As co-creators of the Kingdom of God and our growth as a community in the days and weeks ahead may we all experience that same excited, fulfilling and reassuring energy of the light of Christ, the bread of eternal life in our heart, in our working, in our playing and in our praying. Thanks be to God! Amen

Rev'd Pam Wilson  
September 1, 2024

Pilgrim reference from James Koester SSJE