16th Sunday After Pentecost: Mouthwash and Road Rage Sunday, Sept. 11th, 2021

*O God, through suffering and rejection you bring forth our salvation, and by the glory of the cross you transform our lives. Grant that for the sake of the gospel we may turn from the lure of evil, take up our cross, and follow your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

Prayer: Lord, may the words of my mouth be acceptable and pleasing in your sight. Amen.

\*There is a joke about a driver followed for some time by a police officer. The driver wove in and out of traffic, cutting in front of another driver, changing lanes without indicating the intention to do so, pulling away quickly from a recently changed traffic light. The officer watched as the driver made inappropriate hand motions while passing a driver. Almost watching an accident take place in front of the police vehicle, the officer turned on the lights and proceeded to pull the driver over.

\*While walking to the car, the officer noticed a variety of religious bumper stickers. “God is my Co-Pilot” read one. Another read, “Honk if you love Jesus” while a third read “Follow me to Jesus.”

\*As the officer came closer to the car, the driver leaned out the window, furious at being pulled over. The driver demanded to know what reason the officer had to pull them over.

\*Undeterred, the officer replied, “Well, between the way you were driving and the bumper stickers on the back of your car, I wanted to make sure the car hadn’t been stolen.”

\*Road rage. We’ve all probably been there a time or two – that feeling of frustration when traffic goes slower than us, or when another driver doesn’t seem to understand the rules of the road, or a detour takes us unexpectedly out of our intended way.

\*Whatever the cause of road rage, it’s not fun. Experience it long enough, and it can lead to physical side effects such as high blood pressure, headaches, ulcers, even depression.

\*Whether or not we want to admit, there have been those times in life we’ve experienced road rage on and off the road.

\*In those moments, it’s not pretty. Words may fly out of our mouths we would normally never think of using in front of family and friends. Our words may cause others to question our integrity; our words may even give pause for us to step back from ourselves in embarrassment.

\*Words matter.

\*What is said, how it is said, how it is heard, matter.

\*Many in society today seem to have forgotten this reality; we’ve heard it, read it, possibly may have even spoken it a time or two:

\*Snarky words of anger, cynicism, or frustration, calling those who disagree with our opinions, thoughts, values, and beliefs jerks, or other worse names.

\*Dear friends in Christ, as People of God, this is not who we are to be.

\*And yet, because of our sinful human nature, it is the reality of our collective, lived human experience.

\*We say the things we don’t intend to say.

\*We say words that hurt rather than heal; words that curse rather than bless; words that invite death rather than encourage life.

\*We wonder why our words generate a response different than anticipated, different than what we had hoped for.

\*We are not alone in our use and misuse of words.

\*Peter – the very stepping stone on which Jesus declared the Church built becomes a stumbling block in Mark today.

\*Not wanting to face reality, not wanting to hear what is to come, Peter verbally tries to prevent Jesus from talking about his death.

\*Peter has just confessed Jesus as the Messiah.

\*Now Jesus tells Peter and the others what is to come: the reason why they are travelling to Jerusalem, and what is to happen there.

\*It must be said, but Peter wants none of it.

\*Peter’s understanding of Jesus as Messiah is being questioned, as is his plans for Jesus.

\*Jesus’ plans are different from Peter’s, commanding Peter to be silent.

\*By today’s understanding, Jesus’ rebuke of Peter is the equivalent of telling Peter to “shut up.”

\*There is no politeness, but a strong rebuke – and a warning.

\*A warning that if any are ashamed of Jesus or his words, so also will the Son of Man be ashamed.

\*A warning that follows the invitation to deny ourselves, pick up our crosses, and follow Jesus.

\*Here is where it matters: how we bear this cross – big, small, whatever it may be in our lives, how we proclaim this cross makes all the difference in the world.

\*If we say we believe in Jesus, or that we love Jesus, or that we have faith, but do nothing to show this love to and for others, or neglect to take time for personal growth or conversation with God, we give a weak witness to the world.

\*But, if our words and our actions match, pointing to Jesus, declaring the love of God to the world, taking time for prayer and conversation, we give a stronger witness to the world.

\*Over this past week, there have been countless stories around the twentieth anniversary of Sept. 11th.

\*There have been stories of heroism, and bravery – of firefighters and first responders sacrificing their lives to save others.

\*And, there have been stories from survivors that selflessly worked to help others to safety.

\*In last Sunday’s Lancaster Newspaper, there was an interview with Mark Hershey – the son in law of a member of St. James.

\*At one point in the interview, Mark states ‘I would have done what anyone else would have done – I couldn’t just stand by and not do anything.’

\*Mark’s cross in that moment was helping others to safety.

\*For Mark, doing what needed to be done was a small thing; for someone on the receiving end, this action of ferrying others to safety made all the difference in the world.

\*Watch your words, dear friends, pick up your cross, and follow Jesus.

\*As you do, may these words, may this cross, may your discipleship give witness to the world of One who is greater than us in everything – today, tomorrow, and always. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers of the People:

Made children and heirs of God’s promise, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

Revealing God, you have made yourself known through bread and wine, water and word. Continue to nurture your church, that it continues to be a place where your presence is experienced and shared. LIYM,

Creating God, you bring life into being and call it good. Bring new creation to lands devastated by tornadoes, hurricanes, floods, fires, and other disasters, especially in Washington State, Nevada, California, Louisiana, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, and all places impacted by recent severe weather. Restore forests and curb overflowing waters. LIYM,

Protecting God, you desire all people to live in peace and safety. Provide for all who are in danger. Strengthen first responders to help meet the complex needs of others. Provide care and compassion as they face trauma themselves. LIYM,

Still the captives long for freedom, still in grief we mourn our dead. As we remember Sept. 11th, continue to give us courage, grace, and resilience to overcome evil with good. LIYM,

Transforming God, you announce release to the captives and freedom to the oppressed. Break chains of discrimination and injustice. Amplify voices that go unheard and inspire us to advocate or those who are overlooked. LIYM,

Forming God, you gather this community together. Shape our communal life, that in our prayer, praise, and worship, we honor you and encourage one another. Keep our disagreements civil and increase our joy in working together. LIYM,

We give you thanks for the gift of grandparents this day, those among us, and those who have entered their eternal rest. For their wisdom, their laughter, the lessons they taught us – we give you thanks. LIYM,

We pray for all in need of healing of body, mind, and spirit: George, Maggie, Paige, Scott, Barry, Mary, Linda, Bob, Peggy, Nancy, Mary Lou, and all we name before you aloud or in the silence of our hearts: LIYM,

Redeeming God, you accompany your people through every stage of life. We give you thanks for the saints who now rest in your embrace, especially Jeremy. Wrap your arms of love around the Spickler families in their time of grief. LIYM,

Into your hands. . . .

Thoughts:

Grace in World:

\*College football continues

\*20th Anniversary of Sept. 11th observed throughout the nation

\*President Biden mandates vaccines for everyone

\*School boards meet to re-consider mask requirements for students

Grace in Text:

\*Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher and opened my ear

\*He who vindicates me is near

\*I love the Lord because he has heard the voice of my supplications

\*Gracious is the Lord and righteous, our God is merciful

\*I walk before the Lord in the land of the living

\*With the tongue we bless the Lord and we curse

\*Jesus and disciples on way to Casearea Philippi

\*Jesus asks disciples ‘who do you say that I am?’ Disciples answer “Jesus, the Messiah”

\*Jesus begins to tell disciples what will happen and what is to come, also offers definition of what it means to be a disciple ‘take up cross, follow me, and deny one’s self’

Trouble in World:

\*Tropical storm Larry turns into a hurricane; Hurricanes Mindy and Olaf – Olaf pounds Baja, California

\*Many in Louisiana without electricity; may not be restored until end of September

\*Clean up from remains of Tropical Storm Ida continues in NorthEast

\*Senior citizens in Louisiana found ‘warehoused’ during Ida

\*Nation pauses to remember 20th Anniversary of Sept. 11th

\*President George Bush speaks at Shanksville, warns of greater terrorist threat facing America

\*Sept. 11th is an emotional day for many

\*State Republican leaders join lawsuit against mask mandate

\*Many oppose Pres. Biden’s vaccination mandate

Trouble in text

\*My back is turned to those who struck me and pulled out my beard one whisker at a time

\*All will wear out like a garment

\*Snares of death encompassed me, I suffered distress and anguish

\*Not many of you should be teachers for you will be judged with greater strictness

\*All of us make many mistakes

\*No one can tame the tongue; with the tongue we bless and curse at the same time

\*Jesus orders disciples not to tell others they have figured out his identity

\*Peter rebukes Jesus’ foretelling of what is to come

\*Jesus rebukes Peter for getting in the way

\*At least three times, either Jesus or Peter tells the other, or the other disciples to ‘shut up’

\*Those who are ashamed of my and my words will the Son of Man also be ashamed

What is God doing?

God is:

Calling the servant to a life of suffering, pain, loss

Encouraging people to guard their words

Defining discipleship in a way many have a hard time accepting, embracing, understanding

Protecting those who respond to this calling in life

Promoting a way of life counter to the rest of the world

Reminding this way of life comes with a price

Reminding too, words – our words, have the potential to heal, and the potential to hurt, the potential to bless, and the potential to curse, the potential to bring life, the potential to bring death

What needs to be proclaimed?

\*Our words carry weight – more than we realize

\*Words impact the witness we give

\*Jesus doesn’t want to hear Peter’s words; Peter is both stepping stone and a stumbling block – we stand/sit in good company

What is our response?

What does Zion need to hear?

The cost of discipleship does have a price

The words we say – to one another, privately, publicly – matter

The words we don’t say – to one another, privately, publicly – matter