

ORDER OF SERVICE for Sunday, February 7, 2021, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Epiphany  
St. Martin's Episcopal Church, Lebanon, OR 97355  
Bishop +John S. Thornton, Presiding

**A Greeting**

**SH'MA YSRA'EL:** Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD is One." (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Leviticus 19:18)

**Collect of the day:** Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins, and give us the liberty of that abundant life which you have made known to us in your Son our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

**A Reading from Ephesians 3:14-21**

For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

- ❖ Hear what the spirit is saying to God's People
- ❖ Thanks be to God

**Psalm 26**

(BCP, P. 616)

- 1 Give judgment for me, O LORD, for I have lived with integrity; \*  
I have trusted in the Lord and have not faltered.
- 2 Test me, O LORD, and try me; \*  
examine my heart and my mind.
- 3 For your love is before my eyes; \*  
I have walked faithfully with you.
- 4 I have not sat with the worthless, \*  
nor do I consort with the deceitful.
- 5 I have hated the company of evildoers; \*  
I will not sit down with the wicked.

- 6 I will wash my hands in innocence, O LORD, \*  
that I may go in procession round your altar,
- 7 Singing aloud a song of thanksgiving \*  
and recounting all your wonderful deeds.
- 8 LORD, I love the house in which you dwell \*  
and the place where your glory abides.
- 9 Do not sweep me away with sinners, \*  
nor my life with those who thirst for blood,
- 10 Whose hands are full of evil plots, \*  
and their right hand full of bribes.
- 11 As for me, I will live with integrity; \*  
redeem me, O LORD, and have pity on me.
- 12 My foot stands on level ground; \*  
in the full assembly I will bless the LORD.

### **A Reading from the Gospel of Matthew 5:8**

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Or in other words:

- "How blest are those whose hearts are pure; they shall see God." (*The New English Bible*)
- "How happy are the utterly sincere, for they will see God." (*The Gospels in Modern English*, J.B. Phillips)
- "Congratulations to those with undefiled hearts! They will see God." (*The Five Gospels*, Jesus Seminar)

- ❖ Hear what the spirit is saying to God's People
- ❖ Thanks be to God

### **Sermon**

"To Hell with It"

Bishop +John S. Thornton

After my last sermon, on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, a parishioner, by email, asked if I had ever preached on "Hell." There was something about that sermon that made the parishioner think about Hell. I told the parishioner that, to be best of my recollection, I had never preached on the topic. However, I thought that it was – if I may say so – a hell of a good idea. So I decided to take up the challenge.

Back in the early 1950s, when I was a student at Indiana University, an English major, I was required to read Dante's *Divine Comedy*. There are three parts to the *Divine Comedy*, the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradisio*. As I recall, I read only the *Inferno*.

In the poem, Dante is taken on a tour through Hell by Virgil, the great Roman poet. Hell is an inverted cone, with the least guilty at the bottom and the most at the top, with torments ranging all the way from lounging in mud (the gourmands) to being chomped on by Lucifer every hour, hour after hour into eternity (Judas Iscariot). And there's a lot of fire along the way. It is more fun.

In the first circle of the *Inferno* are the righteous who died unbaptized. (My concept of God doesn't allow that.) In the second circle are the lustful. In the third circle are the gourmands. In the fourth circle are the misers and the spendthrifts. In the fifth circle are the ill-tempered, the crabby, the sourpusses. In the sixth circle are the heretics. In the seventh circle are the tyrants and murderers. In the eighth circle are the liars and deceivers and flatterers and hypocrites. In the ninth circle are the traitors, to family, to friends, to country. In the tenth circle, this giant Lucifer chomps on Brutus and Cassius and Judas Iscariot, chomp, chomp, chomp all day long, all night long and never, not ever for one second, satisfied, chomp, chomp, chomp.

Dante's *Inferno* is an elaborate metaphor. It's to be taken thoughtfully, but not literally. With that long poem, Dante is just reminding us that the things we say and do have consequences – and that the consequences can be, existentially speaking, Hell for a long a time.

It's not as if we ourselves are innocent, but it's dogma – and the Law – that people should suffer the consequences of their violations against others. We're outraged when some get away with it.

On January 6<sup>th</sup>, the United States – we – were humiliated before the world. Summoned by the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, rioters – no, not just rioters – seditionists and insurrectionists stampeded into the Capitol building, bearing American flags and Confederate flags and Gadsden flags (“Don't Tread On Me”) and Punisher flags and “Trump 2020/No More B...s...” flags, armed with lead pipes and baseball bats and cudgels and Tasers and tear gas canisters and a hangman's noose for Mike Pence – oh, and a Bible, as if, somewhere in it, there's a warrant for making war. Costumed as they were, they must have thought that they can scare us into believing that their perversion is omnipotence. In the collision of bodies and the killing crush (a Capitol Police officer died in that crush), each gave the others permission to be unthinking, mindless, stupid, to be utterly heartless, to be hardly human at all. In all their categories (Proud Boys, Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, QAnon and other conspiracy theorists, white supremacists and who knows who else), they're the people who hate to be governed, so hate government, from city councils to Congress. They're the people who hate to have to submit to rules and laws that inhibit their perfect liberty and license. They're the people who hate the “elitism” of decency and courtesy and kindness. They're the people who will not subscribe to the one thing without which a democracy will not survive, which is that THERE IS NO JUSTIFICATION FOR VIOLENCE (Gandhi, Mandela, King, the Christ, and millions more). But they're the people who love being the victims of society; it's their self-image, the motivation for every stance they take. And their idol, the self-proclaimed Victim, was watching from the White House and pleased by their obeisance. We can cry for this country. These are our neighbors, our fellow-citizens, but we don't share a grievance turned to rage turned to violence,

destruction and death.

Now there are investigations and arrests and prosecutions and, soon, trials. The guilty will go from one Hell to another. The consequences of our actions are so fateful for us and for all whose lives we fail to consider. We're accountable for Hell.

Eugenio Scalfari, a ninety-four-year-old Italian journalist – an atheist, by the way – had one of his periodic interviews with Pope Francis recently. Scalfari, it's reported, never takes notes; but he went away from that interview with the clear memory that the Pope said that “a Hell doesn't exist.” When the Vatican saw it in print, they felt that it needed a little clarification. What the Pope meant, they said, is that Hell isn't a place; it's a condition, of being, of choosing to be alienated from the love of God and neighbor. There are times in our lives when we do just that, choose to be alienated – and we know it's Hell. We can feel it; and other people can feel it too.

The Hebrew word for Hell is “Sheol.” The Greek word is “Hades.” Maybe, for Jesus, the word was “Gehenna.” Gehenna (the “Valley of Hinnom”) was, really, a ravine south of Jerusalem, beyond the walls meant to contain peace. It was the garbage dump, on fire, forever smoking, forever stinking. It was the perfect metaphor for what we call “Hell”. Just the way we do, Jesus had to use metaphors to make a point. He was no literalist.

Jesus concern was for purity of heart. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,” he said. He knew that there are things about us that are beautiful gifts – and there are things about us that are garbage. To Gehenna with the garbage. (I am not promoting the doctrine that we are, by nature, sinful. I'm speaking only about some of the things we say and do.)

In Paul's first letter to the Christians in Corinth, without ever mentioning “Heaven” or “Hell,” he gave them a list of those things that fulfill our humanity and, by inference, those things that waste it. In other words, garbage.

You know the text. It's right up there with the Great Commandments and the Beatitudes and “Jesus loves me, this I know.” “Love never ends,” he wrote. Love is always the beginning, is always the begetting. But some things do end. And should. They're garbage.

Here's Paul's list.

- ✦ Love is “patient” – so my impatience with others is, well, garbage. To Gehenna with it!
- ✦ Love is “kind” – so my unkindness toward others, if only a snub, is garbage. To Gehenna with it!
- ✦ Love is “not envious” – so my envy and my jealousy and my competitiveness is garbage. To Gehenna with it!
- ✦ Love is “not boastful” – so my boasting and bragging and false pride and puffery and egotism and need to be center-stage and deferred to is garbage. To Gehenna with it!
- ✦ Love is “not resentful” – so my resentment and indignation and sense of offense is garbage. To Gehenna with it!

✦ Love “does not rejoice in wrong-doing” – so my secret delight in other people's sins is garbage. To Gehenna with!

“Love rejoices in the truth” – so my easy affirmation of untruth, of half-truths and falsehoods and lies and evasions and fibs is garbage. To Gehenna, to Hell with it!

Saving this society, this democracy, this “sweet land of liberty,” this “brotherhood from sea to shining sea” has to start with me. You too. One by one by one, until, at last, we are one.

My loves, everything we say and do, everything we are at the end, matters. **Amen**

**The Creed:** "Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God"

**Prayers of the People** for Epiphany V (year B)

The people's response is *Lord, graciously hear us*

Let us pray to the God of compassion who heals the broken and binds up their wounds. For the church throughout the world and for all who proclaim the message of God's healing love.

Lord, hear us.

*Lord, graciously hear us*

For our parish family of St. Martin's Lebanon that we have the grace to grow into our calling in worship, service, stewardship, and mission.

Lord, hear us.

*Lord, graciously hear us*

For the leaders of the world, and for all who promote human dignity.

Lord, hear us.

*Lord, graciously hear us*

For the sick in body, mind, or spirit, and for all who assist them with hands of healing, especially those on our prayer list and those we name at this time silently or aloud.

Lord, hear us.

*Lord, graciously hear us*

For those burdened by anxious days and sleepless nights.

Lord, hear us.

*Lord, graciously hear us*

For those whose labor is hard and whose wages are inadequate.

Lord, hear us.

*Lord, graciously hear us*

For those who have passed through suffering and death and for the dawn of eternal life in God's presence, especially those on our prayer list and those whose names are known to God alone.

Lord, hear us.

*Lord, graciously hear us*

God our Father, you cure the sick and raise the dead to life: Hear our fervent prayers and enable us to proclaim your gospel; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Prayers

(BCP p. 824)

*For the Poor and the Neglected* ~~ Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*For the Oppressed* ~~ Look with pity, O heavenly Father, upon the people in this land who live with injustice, terror, disease, and death as their constant companions. Have mercy upon us. Help us to eliminate our cruelty to these our neighbors. Strengthen those who spend their lives establishing equal protection of the law and equal opportunities for all. And grant that every one of us may enjoy a fair portion of the riches of this land; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against  
us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

## Prayer for St. Martin's

God of Love,  
open our eyes and ears to perceive you at work  
in creation, the church, and our parish.  
Fill our hearts with your love  
that we may reach out in love to others.  
Stir up our imagination with your Holy Spirit  
that we may find new ways to live into life with  
you.  
Give us a vision of your mission  
that we may share your love and your spirit  
in all the places where we work and play and  
worship you.  
In Jesus' holy name, **Amen.**

## Blessings

## The Peace

## The Dismissal