

Order of Worship for September 6, 2020 - 9 AM

A video of the service will “go live” at 8:30 AM Sunday morning on Memorial’s YouTube page here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqritUPMNz38pvRJo4-17Kw> and on Memorial’s Facebook page here: <https://www.facebook.com/mlcomes/>

P: The Lord be with you.

C: And also with you.

Opening Hymn: “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise” - Hymn 802

Calling on God’s Name, Confessing our Sins, and Receiving God’s Forgiveness:

P: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

P: “As I live,” says the LORD God, “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live.”

C: If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

P: Our God’s warnings are serious. So is God’s desire to forgive.

C: We confess to You our sinfulness and our helplessness to escape from it. We sin against one another and break apart what You have put together. We function selfishly. We are wicked; we are doomed to die. We beg Your mercy for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son. Forgive us from our sins, and turn us from our ways.

P: Our God earnestly desires our salvation...and that we hear—and share—the word of reconciliation. Jesus Christ was given to die for us. For His sake, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Service of the Word

Introit: Psalm 32:1-7

P: Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,

C: whose sin is covered.

P: Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,

C: and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

P: For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away

C: through my groaning all day long.

P: For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;

C: my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

P: I acknowledged my sin to You,

C: and I did not cover my iniquity;

P: I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”

C: and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.

P: Therefore let everyone who is godly

C: offer prayer to You at a time when You may be found;

P: surely in the rush of great waters,

C: they shall not reach him.

P: You are a hiding place for me;

C: You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with shouts of deliverance.

Prayer:

P: O merciful Lord, You bid us to be a community bound together by Christ's love. Guide us to be responsible for each other, as You have taken responsibility for us. Make forgiveness the hallmark of our community and build us up in true faith through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C: Amen.

Old Testament Lesson: Ezekiel 33:7-9

R: So you, son of man, I have made a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from My mouth, you shall give them warning from Me. If I say to the wicked, O wicked one, you shall surely die, and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from his way, that wicked person shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from his way, and he does not turn from his way, that person shall die in his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle Lesson: Romans 13:1-10

R: Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Holy Gospel: Matthew 18:1-20

P: The Holy Gospel according to St, Matthew the 18th chapter.

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And calling to Him a child, He put him in the midst of them and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of My Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I among them."

P: This is the Gospel of our Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Sermon Hymn: *"Jesus Sinners Doth Receive"* – **Hymn 609**

Sermon: *"The 'Them' is Us"* – **Matthew 18:15-20**

I remember playing a lot of sandlot baseball as a boy. To decide who got to bat first, I would take a bat and throw it in the air to my opponent who would catch it. Then I would put my hand over his hand which he had used to catch the bat. Then he put his other hand over mine. Then I would put my other hand over his until someone got to the knob of the bat, which was on top. That person would decide who batted first.

It is nice to be on the top—to be in control of our daily schedule, our grades at school, our families for our future, or our relationships with others. The pandemic has threatened that control, just as we felt that way for the time we were blacked out after the storm on August 10th. But we've learned to adjust to using face masks, the internet, and social distancing to stay on top of things.

In Jesus' time the way to be on top was to knock down those who were different. The people Jesus dealt with often did that with their laws and traditions. They came up with 613 laws which "brought low" all kinds of people so that only a few were left standing, the few who would consider themselves the chosen people of God. You could "eliminate" people who didn't have the right family tree, who had jobs working with the Roman government, and those who had to deal with "unclean" things like garbage or dead bodies. What you ended up with was "them and us." The "them" were all the wicked people who God condemned in the law, and the "us" were the few who would receive all the wonderful promises of God.

Haven't we grown up from that kind of separation and thumbing our noses at other people? Haven't we in our society freed slaves, championed civil rights, emphasized a world in which all are equal, and promoted tolerance for all? The unrest this year over incidents with the police has shown how bad things can still be. It is still a world of "them" and "us."

In the world in which Jesus lived people were ready to point out others' faults. You could use those 613 laws to bring down others and make yourself look good. But don't we emphasize in our culture acceptance rather than blaming others? Isn't most quoted words of Jesus today not John 3:16, but Matthew 7:1, "Judge not so that you will not be judged"?

Why do we emphasize tolerance and being non-confrontational? The old saying goes, "If you point the finger of blame at someone else, then three fingers are pointing at you." If I confront other people with their wrong, I might pull them down, but I also risk that others will point out my faults. Most Americans say that they think abortion is wrong, but they don't want any laws against it. Why? Because they might have to fall back on it in the future. If I tolerate others, then they will tolerate me. If I don't knock them down, they won't knock me down. If I don't make a fuss about them, they won't make a fuss about me.

We might say, "Then there is no "them and us." Everyone's the same. But while we may not confront others and judge what they do wrong, instead we distance ourselves from them. We look the other way and keep quiet about their wrong, so we can keep separated from them. The result is that it is still "them and us." No, we may not point out the evil of others as they did in Jesus' culture, but we do separate ourselves in other ways. Race doesn't separate people in our society the way income does. More and more in our culture there is a dividing line between "haves" and "have-nots." Our grandparents and great grandparents probably had a lot more in common with the poor than we do today. Do we see the poor in our church?

Jesus' directive is that we are to confront evil. "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault just between the two of you." We don't do that to knock other people down. Jesus said, "Just between the two of you." We pray to God that the problem stops with just me

and the person I confront. We do it to help the other person. That can only happen when we aren't competing, when it isn't about "them and us." And we won't get to that point unless we first see that we are forgiven. Jesus speaks about confronting someone else in Matthew 18 between two stories—the parable of the lost sheep and the unforgiving servant. The parable of the lost sheep emphasizes how much God wants to forgive. The story of the unforgiving servant tells how a servant who is forgiven a huge debt by his master is unmerciful to a fellow servant who owes him much less. When the master hears of this, he throws the unforgiving servant in jail. Jesus says God will thus punish us if we fail to forgive others as God has forgiven us. It is with the attitude of forgiveness that we confront others in their sin. It isn't "them and us" because we realize that we are "them." There is no competition because it is no contest. We don't stand a chance. We are sinners who fall short of God. But as people who are forgiven by Jesus, we care enough about others to not overlook their evil. We don't worry if that makes our own shortcomings more visible. We don't have to hide that we are "them."

Mortimer bought a new area rug for his living space. The bright color cheered up his little cottage. The day after he got it, he was eating dinner while watching his favorite TV program. He spilled some of his macaroni and cheese on the floor. So he lifted up the edge of the rug and pushed it under the rug. The next day his friend Sydney came to visit. Sydney left a clod of mud by the door as he entered. "No problem," said Mortimer and he pushed the clod under his rug. Two nights later Fred and Marty joined Sydney in coming to Mortimer's house to play cards. Marty accidentally knocked over a glass and broke it. Mortimer just brushed it under his rug. This went on for months and then years until one could see the lumps under the rug. But Mortimer didn't seem to notice much because the top of the rug still looked good to him. Then a young man came by and noticed the mess. While Mortimer was gone on a walk, the man entered the cottage, picked up the rug, took it outside, shook it, and then started cleaning up all that had been under the rug. He got filthy cleaning up the mess and cut his fingers on all the broken glass. He was exhausted by the effort. When Mortimer came back, he looked at the man and said, "What happened to you?" The man explained how he had cleaned up the cottage. Mortimer thought, "It didn't look so bad."

When we try to ignore others' sin, we do it with our own. We pretend like Mortimer that if everything is "under the rug," no one will notice. We try to make other peoples' sin small so that our sins will look small. But then like Mortimer we don't see how great it is that someone came to clean up our mess. When we make our sins small, then our Savior is small. If we aren't that bad, then it is no big deal that Jesus died for us on the cross. But when we stop hiding our sins and ignoring the sins of others, we see how great it is that God forgives us. When we see that love, we don't want sin to ruin other peoples' lives. We confront them, because we know the "them" is us. As we deal with our sins, we so deal with others—we direct it to the cross where Jesus wants to nail it there forever.

In the past weeks many of us have had to face driving down a street in town and suddenly having to stop and turn around because an orange DOT truck is blocking our way. It might at first seem frustrating, but then we realize that they are clearing the branches away after the

storm. It may be an inconvenience for us, but good because it means the damage is getting cleaned up.

Being confronted about sin may be like having a big orange truck placed in front of us. But it is what we need to realize that sin and turn to God for forgiveness. It is what helps to turn from “them and us,” to “us” all as sinners and even more “us” all as forgiven.

When Abraham Lincoln ran for president, one of his worst detractors was Edwin Stanton. Stanton derided Lincoln and said he looked like a gorilla. When Lincoln got elected, some of his advisors recommended that he try to silence Stanton. Others told him to ignore Stanton. But Lincoln arranged to meet with Stanton and ended up appointing him Secretary of War. Stanton at first continued to say critical things about Lincoln, but grew to respect him more and more. When Lincoln was assassinated, Stanton was at his bedside until he died. Stanton wept and said, “There was the greatest man I ever knew. Now he belongs to the ages.”

Jesus has freed us from having to compete and make it “them and us.” The “them” is us. We can take our sin to Him. As we do, we want others to have that forgiveness. That moves us away from avoiding or ignoring them to caring for them as Jesus has done for us. Then it is no longer “them and us,” but all of us in Christ Jesus.

Apostle’s Creed

Hymn of Reflection: “God of Grace and God of Glory”- Hymn 850

Prayers of the Church:

P: Lord, in Your mercy . . .

C: Hear our prayer.

Lord’s Prayer:

Closing Prayer: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” – Hymn 686

