

3rd Sunday after Trinity 06-28-2020

Verse of the week

“The Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost.” (St. Luke 19:10)

Prayer of the day

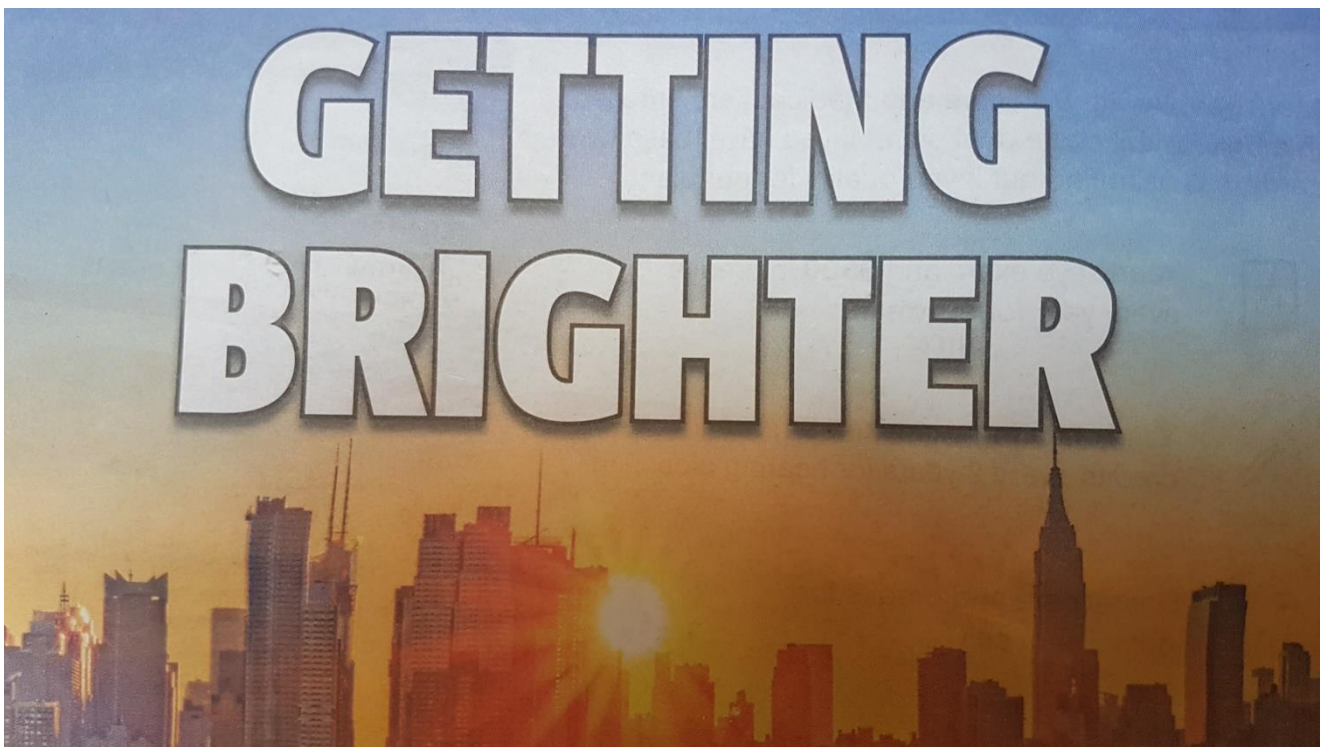
O God, you direct our lives by your grace, and your words of justice and mercy reshape the world. Mold us into people who welcome your word and serve one another, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen

1. To remind all of us, we're in the **church season of growth**. Every Sunday after Trinity therefore provides an opportunity to grow in our spiritual lives. **Today's 3rd Sunday gives a lesson about “Lost and found – amazing grace.”**

There are **stories in St. Luke 15 about losses**, the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. The stories are about God. He reacts to the lost very much as we do: He wants to find them. The first story in Luke 15:1-7, the Gospel reading of today, is about a shepherd who has one hundred sheep and loses one. He then leaves ninety-nine sheep and searches for the lost one until he finds it. When he arrives home with the lost sheep on his shoulders, everyone rejoices. Sheep may have a knack of just wandering away. But instead of let it go and count it for lost, the shepherd takes every effort to get it back. It's about how much every single life counts in God's eyes. No cost too high to save it. It cost God the life of his Son Jesus to get our lives found and rescued. **The story of the lost sheep gives the picture of God's grace** instead of judgement. This Gospel story reveals God's heart full of love to us.

I can imagine how the shepherd was feeling counting one sheep less than the herd's number was before. It hurt him. And to carry it home on his shoulder made his day brighter than it was before. **God's intention towards man is to getting life brighter amid the darkness of sin.** “Every soul – man, woman, child - belongs to me, parent and child alike...Do you think I take any pleasure in the death of wicked men and women? Isn't it my pleasure that they turn around, no longer living wrong but living right – really living? I

take no pleasure in anyone's death...make a clean break! Live!” words of God in our Old Testament reading in Ezekiel 18. Wouldn't we think that kind of preaching was hailed as good news? Ezekiel had a difficult time convincing anyone of this. Everyone was more comfortable with a predictable, cause-and-effect morality that punished people than with a God who took each person seriously as a new creation to be loved and saved. If people could blame others for the bad things that were happening to them, they didn't have to take any responsibility themselves.



2. **By last Tuesday New York City lost 17,591 people to covid-19** related deaths. Every single person would be missed by a husband or wife, a brother or sister, a father or mother, a friend or neighbor. Now, as the City entered phase 2 in reopening, it looks like life is getting brighter again. Governor Cuomo in his last of the daily briefings applauded New Yorkers for stemming the spread of covid-19. “Today, we have done a full 180, from worst to first”, he said, “we are controlling the virus.” But, there is still the fear of another wave of the virus, there are still jobs lost. Even we might be able to regain a

lot of things we've lost because of the pandemic, **a dose of humility would do us good** in the present moment. It might help reconcile us to the **radical uncertainty** in which we are always living, but didn't want to accept it. It seems, that **being lost, suffering losses is a basic issue of our life.**

3. **However we are lost, we become the objects of God's search.** The story of God's search for us starts in Genesis, when **God asked Adam: "Where are you?"** (Genesis 3:9) This is the first question God ever asked Man. Jesus is the culmination of the search – he comes “to find and restore the lost” (Luke 19:10)

We love to cut God in an image we can handle such as cause-and effect-laws. The spiritual understanding of God gave way to a rational and material one adjusting God to the human way of life. People want to hear an authoritative voice they can draw assurance from, they want to be told what will occur, and that they would be well. This kind of faith was not designed to deal with uncertainty. Every case God didn't show up as the fix-it-man, made human impatience grow. But **God obviously meant humans to take responsibility for what they do.** God's question **"Where are you, Adam?"** resonates through the historical **spirals of pain and tragedy when people separate from God and find themselves lost in despair.** God wants to break this circle by finding us and bringing us home into a community with him that's capable of enjoying the serendipity of his love and the sudden invasions of his grace in our lives. We might like to count the coins of what we earn from God thus making him a vending machine. This is incorporating God in the system of control. We might look for this thing but find another when we let God perform his amazing grace in finding us where we are lost. That's godly serendipity.

4. It is interesting that Pharaoh, the Egyptian counterpart of Moses in the story of ending slavery for the Israelites, contains the syllable *phar* for cattle in Latin *pecus*. And *pecus* is a part of the Latin word *pecunia* which means *money*. **This reveals that it's all about making money in the human world and system of power in opposition to the world God created human beings godlike and reflecting God's nature (Genesis 1:27).**

By making himself the center and gathering all life around himself for his own purpose Pharaoh stole human dignity.

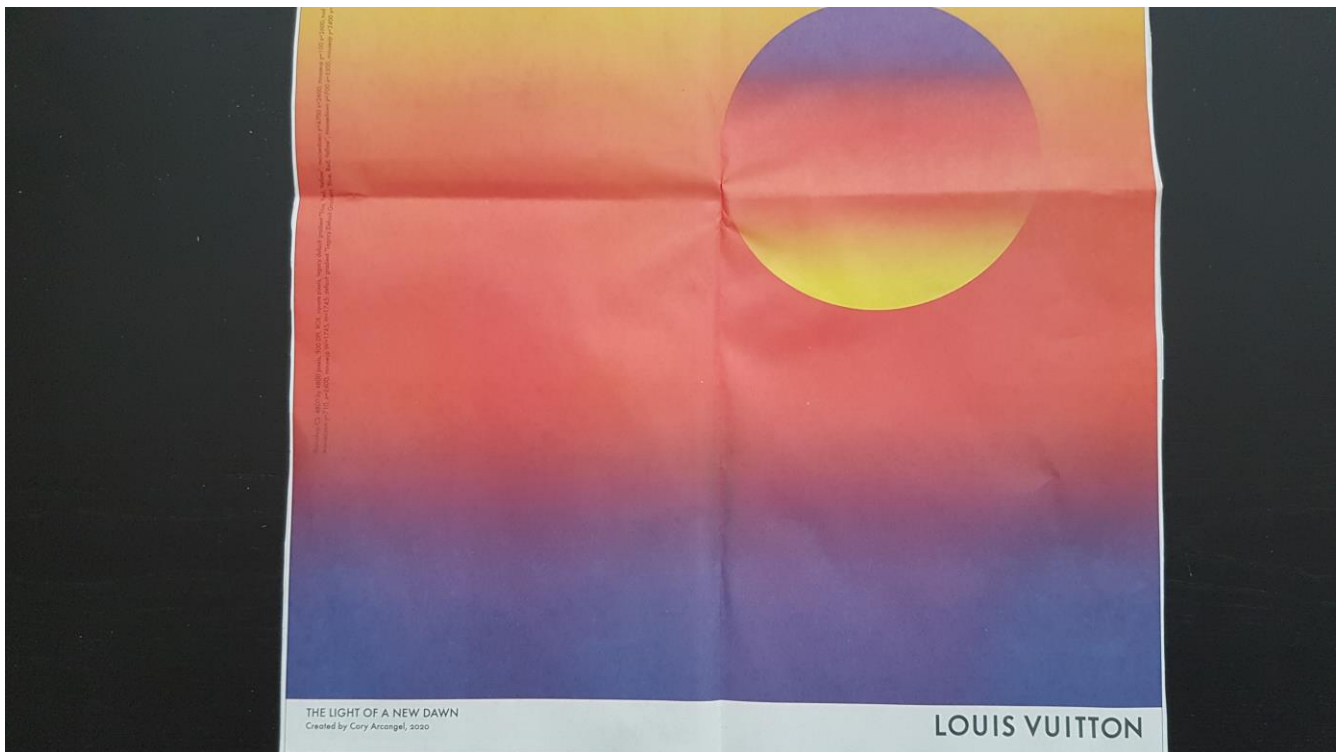
The sign Pharaoh set up pointed in the wrong direction to where people found themselves lost far from home, exploited as slaves to maximize the master's profit. And there are still so many Pharaohs in the world.

Pharaoh was finally stopped by ten plagues in his effort to keep the Israelites, the people of God, in slavery. Remember his name stands for Money.

5. Could the crisis of the covid-19 pandemic help human beings how to newly understand the world? Could it open the eyes where tyranny took over and personal freedom was lost for the sake of money? “You cannot worship God and Money both” Jesus preached in the Sermon on the Mount. “Where your treasure is, is the place you end up being.” (Matthew 6: 21.24)

“Are we going to use the shock to our system to create the real structural change that we need?” a journalist of The New York Times sounded off on the crisis. “We can't let the moment pass without talking about the demand for change and transformation”, Governor Cuomo said in his last press conference. How can we do this?

Remember that the Sundays after Trinity are good for spiritual growth. We can grow if we take the chance to find answers to God's question: “Where are you?” In his first letter to Timothy Paul confesses that he once acted in witch hunts and arrogance, a public sinner number one who could be best described by the words “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see.” Paul writes: “Here's a word you can take to heart and depend on: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” How about reading the today's Epistle lesson in 1 Timothy 1:12-17 ? It might help us find out where we are. If we find us in darkness, it's getting brighter. **If we find ourselves lost, left alone, in uncertainty, in sorrow, in grief, in depression, in sickness, in joblessness, in a strange place which doesn't feel like it was home, we will be found by the mercy of God.**



I'd love to conclude with this colorful picture "The light of a new dawn", created by Cory Arcangel in 2020, I've seen in The Times for your contemplation.

Dear members and friends of Zion, inspired by the biblical readings for this Sunday, I've made a journey across the current situation we face since a couple of months discovering amazing treasures. We announced reopening the church for July, most likely the 12th and will send you new tidings with more details on it.

Your Pastor Klaus Gress