

IDLEWILD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Reverend David J. Powers

Sunday, August 10, 2025

As we prepare to hear God's word read and proclaimed, let's take a deep breath in and breathe it out slowly. Take another deep breath in and breathe it out slowly. Breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others. Breathe in God's mercies and breathe out God's mercies to others. And let us pray together.

Good and gracious God, as we prepare to hear your word read and proclaimed, we pray that you would open our hearts, that we might hear the words of Christ anew this day. That they might convict us and call us forth. That they might comfort us and remind us that we are your beloved children. We pray, oh Lord, that you would have us hear exactly what we need to hear and nothing else. So may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

So we're in Luke chapter 12: verses 32-34.

Let us listen together for God's word to each of us and indeed to the church this day.

Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our Lord endures forever. Amen.

You're going to get tired of hearing stories about my time on sabbatical. But I've got a lot of them and so I'm going to share, right? I'm going to tell a story in just a little bit about this trek that I took called the Camino. It's...there's actually a lot of paths of the Camino, and I took the one that's called the Primitivo. By the way, I mean I hiked the Primitivo. It's the original path. It's the most rural. Some say it's the most difficult, right? And for me, it's...it's also the least traveled, right? 250ish,000 people walk a Camino a year. About 20 to 25,000 walk the Primitivo, right? Lots of...lots of things happened when I was on that journey. Things that were really important to me. I'll share a story in just a second; but before I do, I want to root us in what Jesus is trying to accomplish in these couple verses that we read just a moment ago. These verses are about identity. They are about identity. Jesus is concerned with his disciples and those who are hearing this word. He is concerned with them knowing who they are. Knowing who they are. This is really, really important because what he wants them to understand is that who they are in Jesus Christ is different from who they are in the world. They are all sort...they have all sorts of

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different identities in their lives. They're...they're fishermen. They're ...they're farmers, right? Some do some accounting, right? They have all sorts of different identities, but what he wants them to know is that they have the deepest and truest identity when they identify themselves in Christ. So the image he gives is that of a purse, a purse that they would carry with them that will not wear out, a purse that can't be eaten by moths or destroyed in any way. Right? That's the image that he gives for their identity. They carry it with them on their journey.

Now when I was walking the Camino, I carried with me a 30 lb pack because I did not plan well. I carried with me a 30 lb pack for the first 5 days until I mailed like 8 lb ahead to the last hotel I was going to stay in because it was too heavy to carry. Right? The image that Jesus gives to his disciples is of a purse that they are going to carry. You can think of it as a backpack if you're a student. The identity that they are given in Christ is not going to wear out. It can't be taken away. Nothing can destroy it. And he wants them to know that this is the case, because they, like us, they have the propensity to overidentify with the work that they do. They have a propensity to overidentify with the labels that their family or their community or even their church gives them. And he wants them to know that whatever those labels are, they will fall away. The moths will eat them up. They'll get destroyed over time. But there's another identity more deeply rooted in their truest self that will never be taken away from them.

So, one of the anxieties that I had when I was taking...when I started out on the Camino was how I was going to talk about why I was walking the Camino. All right? And in so doing, I knew I was going to have to say, "Well, I'm a pastor." And if I'm being really honest, one of the things I wanted to do over the last 13 weeks is just not identify as a pastor. Okay? I don't really get that opportunity very much. I'm up here every, almost every week, right? We wear these things, okay? Out in the community, I'm introduced as Reverend. If I'm having...if I see you out in public and you introduce me to a friend, you'll say something like, "Oh, this is my pastor or one of my pastors," right? Or, if you grew up Baptist, you say, "This is my preacher," right? And I'm identified in that way. So, one of the things I didn't want to do was be identified as a pastor or a preacher on the trip; but I couldn't really, unless I was going to lie, I couldn't really not identify in that way. Okay? So, it's halfway through the trip. It's the hardest day of the hike. Uh, we're on this...this particular journey called the Hospitalis. That'll be preached about in a couple sermons from now. And these two folks kind of are...are paused on the trail when me and a buddy come up to them, right? And they're ready to go. So, we just join up. That happens when you're hiking, right? We join up with these two people, and we are just walking. We're hiking, and one of them is a tattoo artist, and it's evident that she is a tattoo artist because she has tattoos from head to toe, right? And they're beautiful. They're gorgeous, right? And...and she's talking a lot about the artistry of that. And another of them is a cantor, and that's evident because he sings as

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he walks. Okay? And it's beautiful singing. It's beautiful singing. So much so that I turn...I take the headphones out of my ears. I put them away and I just listen to this new friend. And we walk for about an hour and they're talking about what they do, right? And then one of them turns to me and goes, "Am I supposed to assume what you do?" And I said, "Well, that...this could be a fun thing actually. Do you want to guess?" I said, "I'm a...I'm a pastor. I'm a pastor, and I'm here because I'm on this sabbatical." And they were...and for the next hour we talked about being a pastor. And they were kind of in awe of that in some ways, which doesn't happen often. So I kind of liked that. And then...and then we stopped talking about that, and then we didn't talk about that again for the next 10 days, right? And whatever fear I had just kind of melted away because they stopped bringing it up, and we didn't talk about it. And instead we talked about life, and we talked about calling, and we talked about the things that we have passion about, and the things that we do in the world that bring energy and take away energy as well, right? And what I realized a couple days into that was that to them I was not a pastor. I was just a pilgrim, just like them. Just a pilgrim on the road, only identified by the pack I was carrying and the shoes on my feet. All of us were pilgrims actually on the journey, on the path. What I realized is that that title that I carry with me all the time, that's the sort of title that a moth will eat and that will ultimately get destroyed. It's actually not going to get me an extra or a privileged seat in the kingdom of God. Right? I knew that. I think we all know that. But sometimes we can forget. And Jesus is wanting, I think, his disciples to know in this instance that whatever...whatever identifier they most identify with, whether it be fisherman or potter or tax collector, it doesn't define who they truly are. not in light of Jesus Christ.

But that's a hard thing to carry with us in the world. That's a hard reality, because the world tells us over and over again we are judge, we are lawyer, we are fundraiser, we are teacher, we are wealth manager, we are professor, we are retired, we are mother, father, grandmother, grandfather.

The identities of the world don't relent in trying to claim us. And we are all of those things. You are all of those things, right? But you're not just those things. Brene Brown talks about how we have propensity because of how the world works to hustle for our worthiness. And we often do that in the work that we do or in the social and civic circles that we try to inhabit, right? We hustle to gain our importance or status or power. And Jesus is telling them, "That is not the sort of bag you want to carry with you. That one is going to get eaten up. It's going to be destroyed." But there is something deeper, something richer, something born of God, an identity that cannot go away, in fact, will not ever go away. and that is that you are children of the living God and you are followers of Christ.

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What I love about this verse is that Jesus actually...it affords us this ability to join in this work of reimagining our identities. Sell your possessions, give alms to the poor is what Jesus tells the disciples. What he's telling them is that in order for you to be fully rooted in your deepest identity, it's going to take sacrifice on your behalf. Okay? You're going to have to give something up in order to be truly known and seen as a follower of Jesus. And what I want to posit to you this morning is that you're going to have to give up the title that the world has bestowed upon you. Whatever that title is, whatever status or privilege it gains you, you're gonna have to set that aside. And that's going to be tough if you've wrapped up your identity in the social circle that you move through or the work that you do, even your volunteerism. If that's where you have found your true identity or you think you have, that's going to go away. It has to be set aside.

But what I love, what I love is this idea that we are members of this little flock and that it is God's good pleasure for that to happen, to be set aside. I think God, I think Jesus is telling the disciples that God delights in us and in our discovering that we are not the labels that we have been given in the world. The identities that we've tried to take on. I think God delights when we discover that there is freedom in identifying solely as the beloved children of the most high God. I know that when I was walking that journey and I realized they weren't going to bring pastor up anymore and I was just a pilgrim, I thought, "Oh, this is what freedom feels like. Oh, this is what it feels like not to have this concept of who I'm supposed to be in the world and move through in the world." Not that, you know, not that I felt inauthentic, but we might find ourselves taking on the identities, the labels, the titles that we are given, overidentifying with them. When we, I think Jesus is telling the disciples, when you...when you take those off and you put those aside, you're going to be putting on this thing that you can carry with you, this identity in Jesus that no one can take away, that cannot be destroyed by hell or fire or anything else. You are indeed the beloved of God.

So, I realized I was not pastor but pilgrim. And when I was thinking about it this morning, I thought about some of y'all's identities.

I was not pastor. I was a pilgrim. You...you are not a wealth manager. You are washed in the blood of the lamb. That you are not a lawyer, you have been lifted up. You are not a doctor, you are a daughter of the most high. You are not just a student, you have been sanctified. You are being sanctified. You're not just a broker, but you are beloved. You're not just retired. You have been redeemed. You're not just a choir member, even though you can't see anything but the top of my head from up there. Right? You are chosen, right? You are not just a mother. You have been made new. You're not just a father. You have been forgiven. You are not just a coach. You have been commissioned. You're not just a judge. You have been justified. You're not just a realtor.

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You have been restored. You are not just single. You are saved. You're not just coupled. You are called. You are not just a member of a church. You are a Christ follower amongst a community of Christ followers called to do the work of Christ in the world.

I think Jesus desires the hearts of his disciples to be healed and healthy. He desires for them to rightly identify themselves because he wants them to be at home in their bodies and amongst all of their neighbors. Specifically, actually, I think that when we take off the identifiers that the world tries to give us and instead put on this identity of being followers of Jesus Christ, when we do that, I think we unconsciously begin to do that for others and with others. I think as I stop seeing myself so much as a pastor but a disciple of Jesus, then I stop seeing you as an account manager, as an architect, as an IT expert, right? as a pharmacist, as a counselor.

I think I stop seeing you in that way and start seeing you more clearly as a beloved child of the most high God as well. And I think that's what happens to each of us. And I think that's why Jesus is telling his disciples to do this. He wants them to be at home in themselves, in their belovedness in the sight of God so that they can help others to feel at home in their belovedness. He wants their hearts to be transformed so that they are comfortable amongst the vulnerable because they know they are vulnerable too.

There's this beautiful thing that Jesus is trying to do, and I hope you take it to heart this morning. Whatever label you walked in here with, I wonder what it might look like for you to set it aside and to put on something fresh and new as you walk out this morning—that you are a beloved child of God. You are a Christ follower amongst Christ followers in a congregation called to do the work of Christ. May you experience that new thing that you put on. May you know that nothing can destroy it. Nothing can take it away. And when Jesus talks about unfailing treasure in Heaven, may you know that that's what he's talking about. That is the greatest gift that we are given. It's the thing that cannot be destroyed, cannot be taken away, that changes absolutely everything and allows us to be partners in the transforming power of Christ in the world.

I want to close this morning with a prayer written by our parish associate, Reverend Joshua Narcisse. This is a prayer that he shared with us this Tuesday morning in our staff meeting. If you've read his book,(plug plug) then maybe you've read one of these prayers, right? This one is entitled The Kingdom of God. Let's pray together.

The kingdom of God is in your midst. Yes, that's right. God is right here. Not above you that you have to overstretch to reach it. Not beneath you that you have to shrink to grasp it. Not beyond you that you can never quite catch it. It is right here. Right there. In the breath that you just took,

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in the thought that you just journeyed, that just journeyed across your mind. In the itch you can't scratch, in the pain you can't bear, in the joy words cannot contain. The kingdom of God is in your midst. Not above you. Not above you that you have overstretched to reach it. Not beneath you that you have to shrink to grasp it. Not beyond you that you can never quite catch it. Not another thing to accomplish, another expectation to live up to. It is right here. It is within you. So still yourself. Let all your striving cease. Let the strain and stress of your soul release. that your life may confess the beauty of the peace found right here in this little space where kingdom and kindred meet, where love is made complete where you recognize God within you, beside you, surrounding you, in your midst. It is right here, right there. Amen.