



EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 26, 2021

Someone is casting out demons in Jesus of Nazareth's name who isn't part of Jesus' own circle, and the disciples want him stopped. They appeal to Jesus, as Joshua did to Moses about the elders who prophesied without official authorization. Like Moses, Jesus refuses to see this as a threat. He welcomes good being done in his name, even when it is not under his control. The community formed by our Lord's word must be able to value good being done in ways we wouldn't do it, by people we can't keep tabs on.

Although *Kingsfold* is a hymn tune composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams, it sounds much like the English folk songs that he collected in rural England during his youth. These modern variations (2008) explore the tune in different emotional contexts. This processional is one of the best examples of the dissonant English compositional style of the late twentieth century by one of its most skilled practitioners.

Prelude

Variations on *Kingsfold*

Robert Lind
(b. 1940)

Hymn

How Small Our Span of Life



1 How small our span of life, O God, our years from birth till death:
2 And yet our speck of life is spanned by your in - fin - i - ty;
3 O Christ, you left e - ter - ni - ty to plunge in time's swift stream,
4 We thank you, God, for kind-ling faith that lights our tran - sient years,



a sin - gle beat with - in the heart, the catch - ing of a breath,
our tick of time on earth is caught in your e - ter - ni - ty.
to share the short-ness of our span, our mor - tal lives re - deem.
il - lu - min - ing our pil - grim - age through mists of doubt and fears;



a drop with - in the o - cean's deep, a grain up - on the shore,
While suns and stars spin end - less - ly through depths of cos - mic space,
You filled your cross - closed years with love; you loved us to the end
for hope that sees a life be - yond the swift - ly pass - ing days;



a flash of light be - fore we sleep to see the sun no more.
while ae - ons roll and ag - es pass, you hold us in your grace.
and touch us with your ris - en life that ours may time trans - cend.
for love, both hu - man and di - vine, that lifts our hearts to praise.

Text: Herman G. Stuempfle Jr., b. 1923
Music: KINGSFOLD, English traditional
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Apostolic Greeting

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

Prayer of the Day

Generous God, your Son gave his life that we might come to peace with you. Give us a share of your Spirit, and in all we do empower us to bear the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

WE GATHER AROUND THE WORD AND PRAYERS

First Lesson - Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29

What constitutes legitimate need and legitimate leadership is the focus of this reading. God provides manna in the wilderness, yet the people crave meat. What is truly needful? God bestows the spirit on seventy elders, yet two men not designated as leaders prophesy in the power of God's spirit. What constitutes real leadership?

⁴The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! ⁵We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; ⁶but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at."

¹⁰Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the LORD became very angry, and Moses was displeased. ¹¹So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? ¹²Did I conceive all this people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a sucking child, to the land that you promised on oath to their ancestors'? ¹³Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they come weeping to me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' ¹⁴I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me. ¹⁵If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me see my misery."

¹⁶So the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting, and have them take their place there with you."

²⁴So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD; and he gathered seventy elders of the people, and placed them all around the tent. ²⁵Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. ²⁶Two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷And a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."

²⁸And Joshua son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My lord Moses, stop them!" ²⁹But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!"

Psalm 19:7-14

This psalm is a hymn in praise of the law of the Lord together with a prayer for the avoidance of sin.

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.

⁸The statutes of the LORD are just and rejoice the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear and gives light to the eyes.

⁹The fear of the LORD is clean and endures forever;
the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.

¹¹By them also is your servant enlightened,
and in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²Who can tell how often he offends?

Cleanse me from my secret faults.

¹³Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me; then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

Second Lesson - James 5:13-20

Marks of the Christian community include praying for those who are sick and in need, celebrating with those in good health, restoring those who have strayed, confessing sins to one another, and offering forgiveness to each other.

¹³Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. ¹⁷Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

¹⁹My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, ²⁰you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Holy Gospel - Mark 9:38-50

On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus of Nazareth teaches his disciples about ministry that involves service and sacrifice. His disciples are slow to realize that these words apply to them as well as to others.

³⁸John said to Jesus, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." ³⁹But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. ⁴²If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. ⁴³If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. ⁴⁹For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."



Sermon

Mother Teresa once said that "What we sometimes consider a stumbling block is rather a rock we can step on."

Stumbling blocks are those barriers that we come up against, or create in our own minds, or allow others to pass on to us that interrupt or stop our forward movement in life. Think for a moment about what have been stumbling blocks in your own life. Perhaps it is regret over actions taken or untaken that now leave you feeling stuck. Maybe it's people in your life who have a frozen image of who or what you are, and you are trapped in the expectations associated with that image. Perhaps it's confusion that impedes your ability to make decisions, creating uncertainty and chaos. Maybe it's fear of the unknown, of failure, of success, of real or imagined adversaries. There are many people, events, and circumstances that can trip us up and interfere with life. However, it is also good to flip the issue around and consider how **WE** may have been or are stumbling blocks to others along the way. Where do **WE** fit into *their* tapestries of regret, unfair expectations, confusion, or fear?

A stumbling block is one aspect of our gospel reading today, which is the second half of the story we heard last week from the gospel according to Mark. Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples are still gathered around a table in a house in Capernaum. Jesus has taken a child – symbolizing vulnerability, powerlessness, and dependency – into his arms, as he tries to deepen and move the conversation inward with his disciples, who had been arguing among themselves about which of them was the greatest. As this week’s portion of the story unfolds, John wants to redirect the focus and make the conversation about some *other* guy. “Teacher,” says John, “we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

Now, it’s interesting how John doesn’t say that this guy interfered with the disciples’ work, that he had a different purpose, or that he opposed them. He simply says, “He was not following **US**.” Never mind that the *other* guy was casting out demons in **Jesus’** name. The *other* guy’s offense is that he is not one of **THEM**, and that is the disciples’ stumbling block. Whatever it was for John and the disciples, they felt threatened by this guy. He was casting out demons, alleviating oppression, offering a new life, all in the name of Jesus. Could it be that he was cutting into the status, power, and recognition that the disciples thought should be theirs alone?

US versus **THEM** – the age-old tension. Isn’t that what we often do or want to do with **our** stumbling blocks? We draw lines in the sand, circle the wagons, divide into **us** and **them**, and then try to stop **them**. We see that happening in the world today. We read and see it in the news. We’ve done it. We’ve been like “John” along the way if we are honest with ourselves.

Jesus, however, takes a different approach. He erases the line and enlarges the circle. He isn’t so concerned about this *other* guy, telling the disciples, “Whoever is not against us is for us.” Jesus’ concern is focused on whether **WE** as his followers have become a stumbling block to the “little ones,” **and** whether or not we are a stumbling block to ourselves. He’s asking us to take an honest look at ourselves, because many of the greater stumbling blocks are not **outside** of us but **within**: our anger and desire for revenge, our judgmentalism, our biases and prejudices, our desire to get ahead and be number one, our need to be right, our unwillingness to listen, our self-centeredness, our fear, our desire for power and control.

Stumbling blocks can also be systemic. In what ways is our legal system a stumbling block to justice for all? In what ways has exceptionalism become a stumbling block to another’s freedom? In what ways is the Church a stumbling block to the message of our Lord’s life, death, and resurrection and the life he offers the world? These, and countless other things like them, can be the ‘hand, foot, or eye’ that causes us – and others – to stumble and fall.

As baptized children of God, our Lord calls us to lives of humble service to others in order to bring the savory saltiness of his love and grace to a hurting world. Using the graphic, figurative images of drowning, self-maiming, a never-dying worm, and unquenchable fire, his “It is better for you…” instructions call us to amendment of life and growth in discipleship. To paraphrase Mother Teresa, what we sometimes consider a stumbling block can really be a rock on which we can step to make our world a better place.

By God’s grace, just as the shame of the cross was transformed by the resurrection, a stumbling block can be transformed into a stepping stone by which we may more fully reveal the risen Christ through deed and word. May we follow Jesus of Nazareth’s example by erasing the lines that separate and divide people into **US** versus **THEM**, so that the circle can be enlarged and redrawn to include the *other* guy, to include **ALL** God’s children. May we be at peace with one another. May we be **building** blocks for the kingdom of God rather than **stumbling** blocks. Amen

Hymn of the Day

Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service



- 1 Lord, whose love in hum-ble ser-vice bore the weight of hu-man need,
- 2 Still your chil-dren wan-der home-less; still the hun-gry cry for bread;
- 3 As we wor-ship, grant us vi-sion, till your love's re-veal-ing light
- 4 Called by wor-ship to your ser-vice, forth in your dear name we go,



who up-on the cross, for-sak-en, worked your mer-cy's per-fect deed:
still the cap-tives long for free-dom; still in grief we mourn our dead.
in its height and depth and great-ness dawns up-on our quick-ened sight,
to the child, the youth, the a-ged, love in liv-ing deeds to show;



we, your ser-vants, bring the wor-ship not of voice a-lone, but heart;
As you, Lord, in deep com-pas-sion healed the sick and freed the soul,
mak-ing known the needs and bur-dens your com-pas-sion bids us bear,
hope and health, good-will and com-fort, coun-sel, aid, and peace we give,



con-se-crat-ing to your pur-pose ev-'ry gift which you im-part.
by your Spir-it send your pow-er to our world to make it whole.
stir-ring us to ar-dent ser-vice, your a-bun-dant life to share.
that your ser-vants, Lord, in free-dom may your mer-cy know and live.

Text: Albert F. Bayly, 1901–1984
Music: BEACH SPRING, *The Sacred Harp*, Philadelphia, 1844
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The Prayers

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Gracious God, you gather together people of faith in every time and every place to be the risen body of Christ in the world. Enliven the Church to nourish its members and serve its neighbors.

Creative God, you weave together the fabric of the universe. Forests and fields bear the banner of your abundance. Give us wisdom and discernment to be good stewards of our resources.

Sovereign God, we pray for those in authority. Give them wise minds and compassionate hearts. Strengthen in them a desire to protect the vulnerable and care for those underserved or forgotten.

Loving God, you empower us to house the homeless, free the captive, and heal the sick. Make our hands your hands in service to strangers and friends.

Welcoming God, you have given us to each other in this congregation. Make us glad to receive those you send to us, and ready to receive their unique gifts and perspectives.

In every time and place you raise up witnesses who testify to your love and tender mercy. We remember with thanksgiving all who have made your word known in the world.

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

WE WORSHIP WITH OUR OFFERINGS

The needs of Holy Trinity's mission and ministry are ongoing.

May we be faithful and generous as we support our mission

"to care actively in the name of Jesus Christ."

Offerings may be mailed to the church or dropped off at the church office.

You may also use the online giving portal on our website.

Go to www.holytrinitylynchburg.org and click on "Give."

You may also download the "GivePlus Church" app for your smart phone from Apple or Google.

Offertory Prayer

Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us – our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, 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,
forever and ever. Amen*

Blessing

Almighty God, Father, ✙ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. Amen

Dismissal

*Our service now begins. Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
Thanks be to God.*

Postlude

Processional

William Mathias
(1934-1992)



The altar flowers are given to the glory of God
 by Debbie Repass
 in memory of Bill Repass for his birthday on September 29.



The candles are given to the glory of God
 by Faye Hesson
 in celebration of her birthday today.

THIS WEEK AT HOLY TRINITY

Sunday, September 26	8:30 a.m.	Worship Service (via YouTube)
	9:30 a.m.	Service of Holy Communion
	10:30 a.m.	Sunday Church School (for adults)
	4:30 p.m.	Service of Holy Communion
	6:00 p.m.	Holy Trinity Youth
Monday, September 27	6:00 p.m.	Confirmation Class (grades six - nine)
	9:15 a.m.	Strength & Balance Exercise Class
	9:50 a.m.	Chair Yoga Class
Wednesday, September 29	7:00 p.m.	Bible Study - <i>Dreams That Shaped the Church and Other Fascinating Things About Dreams</i> (via Zoom)
	12:10 p.m.	Service of Holy Communion
Thursday, September 30	5:30 p.m.	Fall Seminar - <i>Beyond Belief: A Marcus Borg Retrospective</i>
	9:00 a.m.	Parish Nurse available in office (until 10:00 a.m.)
Friday, October 1	9:00 a.m.	<i>Apfelstrudel</i> Making (Fellowship Hall)
	9:15 a.m.	Strength & Balance Exercise Class
	9:50 a.m.	Chair Yoga Class
Saturday, October 2	11:00 a.m.	Book Discussion Group - <i>The Making of Biblical Womanhood</i>
	10:00 a.m.	Altar Guild
Sunday, October 3	8:30 a.m.	Worship Service (via YouTube)
	9:30 a.m.	Service of Holy Communion
	10:30 a.m.	Sunday Church School (for adults)
	5:00 p.m.	Service of Holy Communion
		Holy Trinity Youth

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Our Mission: "To care actively in the name of Jesus Christ."

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Parish Nurse: Gail Midkiff

Pastor: Dennis S. Roberts

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