

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost, Year A (October 22, 2023) – The End in Sight: The Things That Are God's

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, look around you, then discuss, "What belongs to God in the room/space?"

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Exodus 33:12-23](#) and [Matthew 22:15-22](#).

- In the Exodus passage, Moses's relationship with God was like a friendship. He was able to engage God with questions, and Moses reminded God that he needed help with his assignment of leading the Israelites. What might it look like if you received a mission from God and you did not know how to proceed? Have you had such an experience?
- God said to Moses, *"I will make all my **goodness** pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, 'The LORD'"* (Exodus 33:19a).

"Goodness is not some ethical standard, some state of being, it is the empowering force that equips us to live as God's people. It is a blessing. God blessed Moses on that mountaintop, just as God blesses us any time we let the Spirit fill us. 'Filled with my goodness,' God says to us, 'you can be who I created you to be. Filled with my goodness.'" (October 22 Preaching Notes). What would it look like to live "filled with God's goodness?"

- What did the Pharisees and the Herodians try to do to Jesus? (Matthew 22:15-16) [They tried to put Jesus to the test; see Matthew 22:18.] Jewish people had to pay taxes to the emperor. If Jesus said it was lawful to pay taxes, the Jewish people might be upset. If he said it was not lawful, he might have been seen as encouraging Jewish people not to pay taxes and rallying them against Rome.
- Jesus said, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21b). What does this mean to you personally?
- *"Give to God the things that are God's. What is the logical next question after that? What are God's things? There were hundreds of laws and stipulations determining what was sacred – fit for use in the service of God— and what was mundane – of this earth and therefore not sacred and not fit for use in God's service. But Jesus wants us to take a different look. Everything is sacred and fit for use in the service of God. Everything, starting with us and everyone around us, belongs to God and therefore is a part of our calling to surrender ourselves to God"* (October 22 Preaching Note). How do you feel about the statement, *"Everything, starting with us and everyone around us, belongs to God?"* What might it look like to *give God the things that are God's* in your life?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

Wonderful God, you remind us that you have chosen us and favored us, and your goodness has passed before us. Help us to use your love in its many forms: chosen, favored, goodness, and more to help others experience your favor and goodness in a world that will try to deny your love and presence on earth.

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year A (October 29, 2023) – The End in Sight: Face to Face

Fellowship – Snacks or a Meal (10 minutes with snacks; longer, obviously, if there is a meal).

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer, “Where do you go to meet God face to face?”

Group Dialogue (Approximately 30 minutes). Read [Deuteronomy 34:1-12](#) and [Matthew 22:34-46](#).

- Where was Moses? [“Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah (Deuteronomy 34:1a)]
 - After the LORD showed him the Promised Land, what happened to Moses? [“Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command.” (Deuteronomy 34:5)]
 - How do you interpret the significance of the statement, “The Lord knew Moses, face to face?”
- In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus emphasizes the greatest commandment. *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22:37-39). Why do you think Jesus mentioned both loving God and loving one's neighbor?
 - What might loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind mean? How does this affect our daily lives?
- *“When we are given this commandment to love God and love neighbor, it is all about how we act, about what we do, how we show love in day-by-day encounters and in casual points of contact as well as moments of mission and ministry. How do we live in community, face to face with the people Jesus told us to serve?”* (October 29 Planning Worship)
 - How does our love for our neighbor manifest in our actions and interactions with them? When you think about people who serve in the faith community, do you perceive the presence of God in their actions? What does this divine presence look like to you?
 - Do we encounter the face of God in individuals who are oppressed, migrants, hungry, or even those who have committed theft? How can we recognize God's presence in such situations?
- How do you believe the call to love God and neighbor challenges us in our current society and culture? What might you do this week to love God and love your neighbors?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). End with the following prayer, a similar prayer, or the Lord's Prayer:

Loving God, we are thankful when you see our face; you see your son Jesus. Help us see your divine presence within ourselves and within every person we encounter. Forgive us, O God, for the barriers we sometimes erect to distinguish who we consider our neighbor. Let us remove all barriers that block us from seeing you in our neighbors. When we gather, may we be filled with a love that mirrors the intimate connection you shared with Moses, seeing you face to face. Amen.

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