

Home Service for August 23, 2020

Welcome and Announcements

Although we cannot meet together in the church building we can share worship together in our individual homes. We will continue to work to stay connected and be there for each other during the difficult time. We are going through something never experience before. I hope this will help you worship God today with those who are in your home. Add hymns if possible, too.

Gathering Prayer:

Gracious God, you have gathered us together, united in love for you and for your children. Dwell with us now as we worship your holy name. Bind us, Your Children, together in love that we may embody your love in our life together. Send us forth in love that we may bear witness to Your love in the world. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

Gracious God, we come this day, to present our minds and bodies to you as a holy and living sacrifice. We seek the blessings that come from the renewal of our minds. May we discern your will and come to know what is good and acceptable and perfect in your sight. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Almighty God, we have failed to do justice. We have failed to show mercy to others but expect it for ourselves. We have forgotten to be kind. Wake us up to see the violence, the injustice and oppression in our world. Call us away from the worldly ways of looking after ourselves and our loved ones, and to Your ways of seeing all of Your people as our kin, all of creation as our home. Forgive us, help us to repent, to turn to You and to live into your ways of justice, peace and mercy. Amen.

Words of Assurance

God knows our hearts, and God knows when we desire to change how we view the world and how we live. God will help us onto right paths. God forgives us, and restores us, to do God's work in this world. Know that you are a beloved child of God, and that there is always the time to do something new. Share the Good News.

Read Psalm 124

If the LORD had not been on our side—
let Israel say—
² if the LORD had not been on our side
when people attacked us,
³ they would have swallowed us alive
when their anger flared against us;
⁴ the flood would have engulfed us,
the torrent would have swept over us,
⁵ the raging waters
would have swept us away.
⁶ Praise be to the LORD,
who has not let us be torn by their teeth.
⁷ We have escaped like a bird
from the fowler's snare;
the snare has been broken,
and we have escaped.
⁸ Our help is in the name of the LORD,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

Prayers of the People:

Compassionate God, we like to think that all we have to do is be “religious”, to speak the words, but that we really don't have to “walk the walk”. We can get so caught up in ritual and rules, that we forget the essence of your word for us. We forget that we are called to truly be people of peace, not just to speak the words, but to practice lives of compassion and hope. So many times in this world, we are challenged to “take sides”, one against the other; but that is contrary to your will. You call us to stand for mercy, justice, love, forgiveness, hope, and peace. You want us to be people who care deeply about others and about this world. Help us to be ready to truly and joyfully serve you, O God. Free us from selfishness and self-centeredness. Lift us to lives of peace; for we offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ. 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

Read the Lesson: Exodus 1:8-2:10

⁸Then a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt. ⁹“Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become far too numerous for us. ¹⁰Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

¹¹So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹²But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴They made their lives bitter with harsh labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly.

¹⁵The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, ¹⁶“When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.” ¹⁷The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. ¹⁸Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, “Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?”

¹⁹The midwives answered Pharaoh, “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.”

²⁰So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.

²²Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

2 Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, ² and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket^[a] for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Then Pharaoh’s daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. ⁶ She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said.

⁷ Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

⁸ "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. ⁹ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses,^[b] saying, "I drew him out of the water."

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 12:1-8

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead,^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 16:13-20

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

¹⁵ "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter,^[a] and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades^[b] will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be^[c] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will

be^[d] loosed in heaven.”²⁰ Then he ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Message

So many people in their minds limit worship only to church services, do you? This morning Paul in his letter to the Romans is telling us that we are wrong if we do. Just like in the past the children of God had consisted of only one nation: the nation of Israel. Now, because Jesus' life-saving work of redemption applies to all people, God's promised forgiveness, life, and salvation are a free gift to everyone who believes. The new children of God includes believers from all over the world! Paul's thoughts expand to our worship life. Because of Jesus, worship now includes our entire life, which is lived as a grateful response to God's tender compassion in Jesus our Lord! Let us take a moment to compare worship life before and after Christ changed everything. Before worship was law-centered. There were certain requirements that had to be met: what, where, when, and how sacrifices were to be offered. It was an imposed form of worship. Obedience to the requirements of the law was based on threat of possible consequences, or even punishment. It was an external, symbolic kind of worship. It involved the performance of certain rituals according to prescribed rules and regulations. It was an incomplete kind of worship; nevertheless, the rituals were beneficial in the sense that they pointed to, or foreshadowed certain aspects of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world. Just think, what would it take for all of the daily animal sacrifices that the people of Israel offered generation after generation to be replaced by one supreme, perfect, all-encompassing sacrifice? Only God could do such a thing, but through Jesus, that's exactly what He did!

Our new worship life is supposed to be founded on the mercy of God, his tender compassion. One person described compassion this way: “your pain is in my heart.” Jesus came to take our pain: the pain of our sin, guilt, and death, upon Himself. This understanding of God is truly unique to the Christian faith. It is an inspired form of worship. Since Jesus has already kept and fulfilled the law perfectly on our behalf, we don't worship God as an attempt to impress Him; our worship is an expression of thanks and praise to God for what He has done and still does for us through Jesus, His Son. We show our gratitude to God by reflecting His image, not just with our lips, but with our whole lives. The transformation God has produced on the inside; in our mind, our attitude, our thoughts, gradually works its way through to the outside and is seen in our actions.

Now, there is still some degree of ritual and tradition in the worship of New Testament Christians today. This can be a good thing, as long as it is accompanied with a living, fruitful, productive faith. Tradition is the faith of Christians who

before us is still alive in us today; traditionalism, however, can become the dead faith of today's Christians if we are not open to the Holy Spirit! In Word and Sacrament, we receive through faith the full benefits of Christ's death and resurrection: the forgiveness, life and salvation that He won for us! No further death is needed. In a sense, we do die to our old, sinful nature, but this is something that God himself works in us by His Spirit through our Baptism. The point is that God no longer requires a death to make up for our sins. Instead, He has much more use for Christians with a living faith, who are very much alive to thank, praise, serve and obey him. That is why Paul writes, "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices." When we do this, we often find, by God's merciful grace that He has much more in store for us than we could ever offer him.

When we read the Bible, God's Word, we are reading the very thoughts of God, expressed in human language! Now, we can't do this without the Spirit's help, but the more time we spend in God's Word, the more He works a transformation in our thinking. We begin to let go of earthly, human thoughts, with all of their pride and selfishness. Confessing our worldly, human thoughts to God as sin, we ask Him to forgive us and make us new for Jesus' sake. Even as we rejoice in this forgiveness, the Holy Spirit Himself begins to take over and shape our mind! One way we are transformed is in our thinking about God. God's will for our lives no longer seems harsh, unreasonable, oppressive, or difficult. Instead, we submit ourselves to His will and we begin to see it as good, pleasing, and perfect.

We learn that anything that we can ever do for God is really a gift that He has first given to us. The best we can do is try to use that gift faithfully, with the help that God Himself provides. We also learn to respect and appreciate the gifts He has given to other people, even if theirs differ from ours, and we work together with them to the glory of God. We learn to see ourselves as small parts of something much bigger, the body of Christ himself.

Paul also tells us that one gift is not greater than another and the church needs everyone using their gifts. One way the Spirit of God shows itself in the church is through people putting their skills and gifts to work for the church, its missions and its ministries.

When we commit our way to the Lord, we should bring with us our skills, abilities and gifts. A very simple but meaningful prayer I read: "I offer myself to you, O Lord, and if there is anything in my abilities, gifts, and skills that you can use, help me to use them for thy Glory. Amen." The truth is that the church could not function if we did not just do that. I would like to quote Martin Luther King, Jr. when he said, "You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics

to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love, and you can be that servant.” God really does implant talents in us to use in ways that make the gifts.

The life of faith is lived in community, where many gifts support the body of Christ. Paul said Christ’s followers should use their skills and gifts for the common good. That means that each of us, as we come before God, should pray, “Here I am, O Lord, with all that I am. Use what you wish,” but mostly it means being aware of the skills and gifts we have been given are not just for our own advancement, but also for the advancement of the kingdom of God.

We exalt Christ by living our life, a new life in Christ, to God’s glory forevermore. What a wonderful way to live! If you’ve been caught in the trap of thinking of worship as nothing more a spectator sport, or lost in the emptiness of worshipping created things, there’s a wonderful breakthrough in store for you. God can change your life from within! And that break through is as close as God’s Word, as close as the Holy Spirit in your heart, as close as the love of a Savior who died for you and lives forevermore. Amen!

Benediction:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among us, and remain with us always. Amen.