

Home Service for August 30, 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:

God, you are made known to us in the rustling wind that blows, in the blazing fire that does not consume, in the face of the good, in the deep of the unknown. We meet you here. We accept your greeting. We welcome your inspiration. We await the change you have in store for us. Draw us in to you. Inhabit our spirits. Focus our attention. Bring us to you – you who are already with us. Help us to be as you would have us be. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, here and everywhere, now and always. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, we come in search of you and your loving wisdom. Come to us and gather us in your love. Mold us into a community of compassion that is strengthened by the unity and power of your Holy Spirit. In joyous gratitude, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

In the midst of your holy presence, O God, we encounter a mystery deeper than the foundations of the earth. You are who you are, sacred and indefinable. Forgive us when we try to put you in a box, or frame you in our own image. Help us as we allow your divine image to define and shape us. Speak mercy and grace to us, when we deny the path before us, and guide us with your shepherding love, when we are unsure of how to follow. Strengthen us and give us the courage to say: “Here I am, ready to love and serve.” In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

We are in the presence of the Holy One, whose holiness is in our very being. Rejoice and be glad, for in Christ's love we are reminded of this divine truth: We are God's beloved creation, reclaimed for a holy path.

Read Psalm 105:1-6, 23-26, 45

Give thanks to the LORD;

call upon his name;

make his deeds known to all people!

² Sing to God;

sing praises to the Lord;

dwell on all his wondrous works!

³ Give praise to God's holy name!

Let the hearts rejoice of all those seeking the LORD!

⁴ Pursue the LORD and his strength;

seek his face always!

⁵ Remember the wondrous works he has done,

all his marvelous works, and the justice he declared—

⁶ you who are the offspring of Abraham, his servant,

and the children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

²³ That's how Israel came to Egypt,

how Jacob became an immigrant in the land of Ham.

²⁴ God made his people very fruitful,

more powerful than their enemies,

²⁵ whose hearts God changed so they hated his people

and dealt shrewdly with his servants.

²⁶ God sent Moses his servant

and the one he chose, Aaron.

all so that they would keep his laws

and observe his instructions.

Praise the LORD!

Prayers of the People:

Lord, what a blessing it is to come to come to You today as we worship You here, with the knowledge that others are worshipping You in other places. Those who worship You come from all walks of life, from different ages and stages, and are welcomed in your love and your presence! For You have not demanded that

everyone be the same, have the same degree of faith, offer the same service. You have given freely of your healing love to each one of us. Today we bring before you the names of loved ones who are struggling with loss, with illness, with depression, with addiction, with alienation from those that they love. Be with each of them. Lay your hand of healing gently over their lives and pour out your balm of peace on them. Help us to reach out to be of service to each other in Jesus' name. Lord, we also bring to you situations of celebration: birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, family gatherings, special occasions which lift us up and remind us of the goodness that there is in life. Breathe your spirit into these wonderful events that all who gather may rejoice and celebrate the blessings you have given each of us. Keep our hearts and minds open for your reconciling word for us; for we ask this in Jesus' name. 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 3:1-15

Moses was taking care of the flock for his father-in-law Jethro,^[a] Midian's priest. He led his flock out to the edge of the desert, and he came to God's mountain called Horeb. ² The LORD's messenger appeared to him in a flame of fire in the middle of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was in flames, but it didn't burn up. ³ Then Moses said to himself, Let me check out this amazing sight and find out why the bush isn't burning up.

⁴ When the LORD saw that he was coming to look, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!"

Moses said, "I'm here."

⁵ Then the LORD said, "Don't come any closer! Take off your sandals, because you are standing on holy ground." ⁶ He continued, "I am the God of your father, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God." Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the LORD said, "I've clearly seen my people oppressed in Egypt. I've heard their cry of injustice because of their slave masters. I know about their pain. ⁸ I've

come down to rescue them from the Egyptians in order to take them out of that land and bring them to a good and broad land, a land that's full of milk and honey, a place where the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites all live. ⁹ Now the Israelites' cries of injustice have reached me. I've seen just how much the Egyptians have oppressed them. ¹⁰ So get going. I'm sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I to go to Pharaoh and to bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

¹² God said, "I'll be with you. And this will show you that I'm the one who sent you. After you bring the people out of Egypt, you will come back here and worship God on this mountain."

¹³ But Moses said to God, "If I now come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they are going to ask me, 'What's this God's name?' What am I supposed to say to them?"

¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I Am Who I Am.^[b] So say to the Israelites, 'I Am has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God continued, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, Abraham's God, Isaac's God, and Jacob's God, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever; this is how all generations will remember me.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 12:9-21

Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. ¹¹ Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! ¹² Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers into your home. ¹⁴ Bless people who harass you—bless and don't curse them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying. ¹⁶ Consider everyone as equal, and don't think that you're better than anyone else. Instead, associate with people who have no status. Don't think that you're so smart. ¹⁷ Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good.

¹⁸ If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. ¹⁹ Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. It is written, *Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord.*^[a] ²⁰ Instead, *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. By doing this, you will pile burning coals of fire upon his head.*^[b] ²¹ Don't be defeated by evil, but defeat evil with good.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 16:21-28

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and legal experts, and that he had to be killed and raised on the third day. ²² Then Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him: “God forbid, Lord! This won’t happen to you.” ²³ But he turned to Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan. You are a stone that could make me stumble, for you are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, “All who want to come after me must say no to themselves, take up their cross, and follow me. ²⁵ All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them. ²⁶ Why would people gain the whole world but lose their lives? What will people give in exchange for their lives? ²⁷ For the Human One^[a] is about to come with the majesty of his Father with his angels. And then he will repay each one for what that person has done. ²⁸ I assure you that some standing here won’t die before they see the Human One^[b] coming in his kingdom.”

Message:

Before we look at what Paul has set before us in Romans 12, we need to be reminded of our foundation. No Christian community is even possible without the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The sacrifice of God through his Son, Jesus Christ, made the Christian community a reality, and it is on this foundation that we are built. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we have been united by a common bond of salvation; we are a community saved by grace through faith. And from the life and ministry of Jesus, we draw our own life and ministry; our purpose is revealed. Christ is our sure foundation, and knowing this, we can begin using what Paul lays out in Romans.

Paul puts before us today are the core essentials to an authentic Christian community; as important as Christ the foundation himself! They are: to be peaceful, not vengeful; humble and compassionate. Our words should be filled with blessings, not curses. We should be hospitable, prayerful, patient, hopeful, passionate, and above all full of love. Love is the key. Love is what makes all those other traits Paul mentions possible. Love is what holds everything together. When we have genuine love it is possible for us to be truly passionate, compassionate, hospitable, and all those other things.

Paul calls the Romans to “let [their] love be genuine,” we need to understand the two different Greek words which describe “love.” The first of these Greek words is philadelphia, which refers to brotherly love; the love that blood relatives hopefully have toward one another. We as the church are to love one another with brotherly and sisterly love in such a way that reflects the love we have with God the Father. We are to care for one another just as if we are blood relatives. If we have this kind of love for one another, this philadelphia, then it will be apparent through our actions, which is what the Greek word agape refers to. Agape is much more than any feelings of love; it is the love that I show you by my actions, even if I don’t feel it! Quite simply, love is more about what people do than about how we feel. We often think of agape as unconditional love, which couldn’t be truer. If we act with compassion and love towards others, even when we may not feel love for them; that is unconditional love, agape. When we love one another in such a way that it is reflected through our actions, then we are loving genuinely, we begin to share our lives together, and we are drawn together as an authentic Christian community. That’s the really amazing thing about the Christian life; over and over again we discover that when we behave toward someone as though we really did love them, to our surprise, love, care, and concern for the person’s welfare quickly springs up!

All of us, every human being, created in the image of God, has this capacity to love. We may not exercise it, but it is available to us through Christ, through the grace which surrounds every one of us. For many, the idea of the image of God has been linked to those unique abilities that we humans have that set us apart from other creatures.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, saw the image of God not so much in terms of what we possess ourselves, but as the way we relate to God and then live out that relationship in the world. As those endowed with the image of God we are to receive the love of God and then reflect that love toward all other creatures. We were created to be mirrors of God, but as a result of the Fall this natural image of God in us has been corrupted.

According to Wesley, instead of reflecting the image of God, we reflect the very “image of the devil,” and he saw no stronger evidence of this fact than in our universal practice of resorting to war in order to settle our disputes. War, revenge and violence are a natural outgrowth of our Fallen Nature, but as Christians, we are called to regain that image of God for which we were originally created! We are to be new creations, not of this world, but of the kingdom of God!

Therefore, as Paul instructs us in our Epistle Lesson we are to Love sincerely with a love that is real, without selfish motives. We are to share with those in need. We are to pray for and bless those who hurt us. We are to “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

We are to “Live in harmony, not be proud, be willing to associate with people of low position.” We are “not to repay anyone evil for evil.” We are not to take revenge, but we are to feed our enemies, give them a drink. We are to love others with such a genuine love that it will move others to repentance and salvation. We are “not to be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

All of us, are faced with the natural inclination toward angry, vengeful thoughts. But as those who are called to be mirrors who reflect God’s love to others, we are to see the sin in these thoughts and not allow them to fester. We are to see others, all others, persons who are red, yellow, black, and white, persons who live in poverty or prosperity, persons who treat us kindly or hurt us deeply as our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are to see them as individuals for whom Christ has died. I think everyone has heard the statement, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy,” but Paul is telling us: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. When someone hurts us how do we respond? With revenge or love? Revenge has no place in the life of a Christian! As Christ’s followers, we are called to a higher standing of morality than the standards of this world.

It’s not about us, it’s about Christ and Christ alone! Christ is our only hope! Christ is the only way to overcome evil with good! Christ is the only one, Who can save, heal and forgive! The love Jesus has for sinners such as we! The power of that love which is available for any and all who seek it!

When Christ tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with His command, the love itself! This is grace: God’s love for Fallen humanity made available and evident only through Christ. And this grace, when it is received by Fallen humanity both forgives and makes it possible for God’s reflection to be mirrored through us! It’s really amazing what a huge difference even the smallest gesture can make. Imagine what an impact the very act of genuine love might have in the lives of people. Let’s be that kind of church that welcomes everybody, and makes them feel a part of our family. Let’s be that kind of church that is a community that shares life together through love for one another and even for those beyond this community. Let’s love as Christ has first loved us!

Let us pray:

Lord, help us to love. Help us to give of ourselves to serve the needs of others; to put their needs before our own. Help us forgive those who have wronged us and show them grace. May we be a church that seeks to change the world, to welcome all of your children, and to love people well. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Benediction:

Love, as Jesus has loved you. Go to serve, as Jesus served. Go with the peace that passes all understanding. Go to heal the world, as Jesus healed. Amen.