

Home Service for September 6, 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, awaken my heart to the dawning of your revolutionary day; a day of justice and joy, a day of peace and repair. And especially when the night is most dim, give me friends to huddle in the dark with me, to face the horizon together, and to remind one another that the sun is about to rise Amen.

The love of God brings peace to our lives. The judgement of God brings peace to our world.

Opening Prayer:

God of love and judgement, when the Egyptians enslaved your people, your love set them free; when rulers oppress the poor and powerless, your judgement brings peace and justice to the land. Reach our minds, O God, that we may fulfill your law of love. Touch our hearts, Holy One, that we may love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

God of freedom, you help us leave behind all that keeps us from being fully human, yet we resist your help and the change you offer. Clinging to old, familiar patterns, we are reluctant to move on. When others challenge us, we grow defensive. Give us open and generous hearts, that we may hear your call and follow you on new adventures of love and compassion. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Jesus promises that if two agree and ask, God hears our prayers and grants our request. Together, let us forgive what is past and ask God to lead us into a future of hope.

Read Psalm 148

Praise the LORD.^[a]

Praise the LORD from the heavens;
praise him in the heights above.

² Praise him, all his angels;
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

³ Praise him, sun and moon;
praise him, all you shining stars.

⁴ Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.

⁵ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for at his command they were created,
⁶ and he established them for ever and ever—
he issued a decree that will never pass away.

⁷ Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

⁸ lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,

⁹ you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,

¹⁰ wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,

¹¹ kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth,

¹² young men and women,
old men and children.

¹³ Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

¹⁴ And he has raised up for his people a horn,^[b]
the praise of all his faithful servants,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

Praise the LORD.

Prayers of the People:

Merciful God, help us become the people you have created us to be. Help us cast aside the things that chain our spirits, that we might be free to care for one another and fulfill your law of love. You have called us to be your church and we ask for your transforming love that we might be better witnesses for you. Today we name in our hearts before you people that we love who are dealing with sorrow and illnesses; people who feel abandoned and alone; people who are entering schools and colleges, military service, the workforce. We also name those people and situations filled with joy and hope; a new home, the birth of a child, celebrations of special occasions, and often just a beautiful day. Hear the cries of our hearts to you, O God. Heal and transform lives. For we ask these things 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 12:1-14

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, ²“This month is to be for you the first month, the first month of your year. ³Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb^[a] for his family, one for each household. ⁴If any household is too small for a whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. ⁵The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. ⁶Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight. ⁷Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs. ⁸That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. ⁹Do not eat the meat raw or boiled in water, but roast it over a fire—with the head, legs and internal organs. ¹⁰Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning, you must burn it. ¹¹This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your

sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD's Passover.

¹² "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. ¹³ The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

¹⁴ "This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD—a lasting ordinance.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 13:8-14

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. ⁹ The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet,"^[a] and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."^[b] ¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

¹¹ And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.^[c]

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 18:15-20

"If your brother or sister^[a] sins,^[b] go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶ But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'^[c] ¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

¹⁸ "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be^[d] bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be^[e] loosed in heaven.

¹⁹ "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

Message

This morning Paul is reminding us that some of the simplest passages come with the most profound concepts. The purest of truths are some of these simple words. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not cheat on your spouse. These are all simple concepts adopted by both Christians and non-Christians. The summary of these commands is not as simple to follow. Love your neighbor as yourself. One of the simplest commands Jesus gave us and yet profound concept can affect everything we do and impact those around us.

The world can make you think that love can be picked up at a garage sale or enveloped in a Hallmark card. But the kind of love that God created and demonstrated is a costly one because it involves sacrifice and presence. Love should not be a foreign concept to us. Through the caring for one another, we can spread the love of Christ and create a nurturing climate. Our actions often speak louder than words. Whether we realize it or not, the world is paying attention. As Christians, we should express Love by caring for one another, listening to what people actually have to say and by taking time out of our busy lives and trying to make a difference. The life that we lead here on earth is a temporary existence which compared to the eternal salvation of heaven.

God loved us so much that He gave his only begotten Son to die for us. He showed His love for us by sending His Son to atone for our sins. During his life on earth, Jesus was the example of love. He showed compassion and mercy for those who needed it and offered forgiveness to the repentant. He also explained the standard of love we are to share with others “love your neighbor as yourself.” We may not always find it easy to follow His command. But, we should make every attempt to treat even total strangers with a spirit of love and compassion in everything we do. God didn’t ignore us when we stumbled in sin. He offered his hand to help us back to our feet.

“Don’t be in debt to anyone,” Paul says, “except for the obligation to love each other.” Have you ever thought about what it might mean to be in debt to someone in love only? Have you ever considered the fact that you owe people love? It seems to me that if we owe people love, then we constantly have to be working at giving love to others. Love is nothing less than an action, and it should govern every decision we make. Paul tells us that “Love doesn’t do anything wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is what fulfills the law.”

If we are to understand the magnitude of what Paul is pressing upon us here, then we have to be willing to act in love. It means that when we see a person in need, we are obligated to respond to them, to offer them our love through our presence, sacrifice, and support. And if we don't respond to a neighbor in need, then we are actually doing them harm.

Thousands of years ago, just after Moses led the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt; God gave to his people the law. At the heart of this Law are what we know as the Ten Commandments, but there are many other parts to the Law as well. The idea behind this Law was to give people guidance in how they were to relate to God and to one another. God, in God's compassion, had freed the people from Pharaoh, and now God desired that the Israelites would become a light to all nations as they shared that same compassion with others. They had a new standard, and it was quite specific. Still, we know that laws are often violated, and they certainly were violated by the Israelites over and over again. But the limits of the law are overpowered by love. So there, in the middle of God's law, was this one statement, "You must love your neighbor as you love yourself." It's found now in the book of Leviticus 19:18, and it's repeated twice in both Mark and Matthew, once in both Luke and Galatians and here again by Paul in his letter to the Romans. I'm sure, following the very teachings of Jesus, Paul reasoned that this one command is the fulfillment of the entire law, because the point of the law is to keep us in a right relationship with God and one another. And if we love others just as we love ourselves, then we cannot hurt others. Our neighbors will know that we love them by how we treat them. What the law cannot accomplish, love can. Because love is something greater than a list of rules, it is a complete transformation of the heart; the core of our being. And when we can live empowered by love of God and neighbor, then the spirit of the Law is fulfilled.

Paul would have us to understand that this love is not some secret to be kept among some small circle of believers, or tucked away deep in our hearts. It is only through Christians living their love that the world will know Christ and be prepared for the transformative kingdom to be established when Christ returns. Christians are not called to be subtle and secret, but to live so that everyone can see clearly who they are. So Paul stretches even beyond our obligation to love one another, to how we conduct our own lives.

This stands at the heart of what is often referred to as "Paul's ethic," which goes something like this: the new world is here, those who belong to Jesus belong to the new world. Therefore, they must live by its standards, not by the present standards of society. I believe Paul is saying in the thirteenth chapter of his letter to the

Romans, is: if we are living in love, then we cannot help but to live as people who belong to God's new world!

We should also be willing to lend a hand when a stranger needs assistance. We should be an example of love and compassion that has the chance of changing the mood within our own communities. God's love doesn't end at the church door. It extends to the whole world. In the same way, our love should not stop at our families, but stretch to all people.

The point of love, genuine Christian love, is to copy the self-giving love of Jesus himself. This is a love that is active, extravagant, and enthusiastic. Paul urges that it is this same sort of love that should be shared by Christians every single day with all we meet. As the people of Christ, loved immensely by Christ, we should be eager to shower others with an extravagant, generous love that will change their lives forever. So may we all leave this place and share God's love with everyone who we meet and reach out to those who are able to be out and about. Amen.

Benediction:

Beloved, as our spiritual ancestors did in days before, go out today into this changing world, holding your claim to the principles and the persistent presence of our loving God. Go in peace and serve the Lord. Amen.