

Home Service for October 11, 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.

Opening Prayer:

Beloved God, we gather in the shelter of your love, grateful for the banquet of worship you have prepared for us. Focus our hearts and our minds on the beauty of this time, the blessings of our lives, and the fullness of your message. Strengthen our call to fulfill our role as your partners in ministry to the world. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Gracious God, you know how we confuse our roles, miss your invitation, and ignore your banquet of grace and abundant love. Clear the clouds from our eyes, that we may clearly see clearly your call to partner and serve with you. Clear our calendars, that we don't miss your invitation to love and serve the world. Clear our minds and soothe our troubled souls, that we may remember and treasure the opportunity to receive your abundant grace and your loving nourishment. Nourish us with your forgiveness and your mercy, that we may rejoice fully in this time of worship. In your love and grace, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Rejoice in God, whose grace is ours. Rejoice in the power of love!

Read Psalm 106:1-6, 19-23

Praise the LORD.^[a]

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his love endures forever.

²Who can proclaim the mighty acts of the LORD

or fully declare his praise?
³ Blessed are those who act justly,
who always do what is right.
⁴ Remember me, LORD, when you show favor to your people,
come to my aid when you save them,
⁵ that I may enjoy the prosperity of your chosen ones,
that I may share in the joy of your nation
and join your inheritance in giving praise.
⁶ We have sinned, even as our ancestors did;
we have done wrong and acted wickedly.
¹⁹ At Horeb they made a calf
and worshiped an idol cast from metal.
²⁰ They exchanged their glorious God
for an image of a bull, which eats grass.
²¹ They forgot the God who saved them,
who had done great things in Egypt,
²² miracles in the land of Ham
and awesome deeds by the Red Sea.
²³ So he said he would destroy them—
had not Moses, his chosen one,
stood in the breach before him
to keep his wrath from destroying them.

Prayers of the People:

Lord of hope and healing, you have heard the cries of our hearts. You know that we do want to serve you, and yet when things get tough, we buckle and cave in. We lack the courage and strength to work for you. You have reminded us that you will be continually with us and we need to place our trust in that fact. Your love will sustain and heal us. Your mercy and grace will give us courage and strength, joy and peace. As we have come before you this day, offering our prayers for those near and dear to us, let us remember that you constantly lift and carry us in your love. Bring us to the knowledge of your mercy and powerful love that will never leave us. Prepare us for ministry in areas of need and desolation. 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 32:1-14

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods^[a] who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.”

² Aaron answered them, “Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me.” ³ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, “These are your gods,^[b] Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”

⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, “Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD.” ⁶ So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

⁷ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. ⁸ They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’

⁹ “I have seen these people,” the LORD said to Moses, “and they are a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

¹¹ But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. “LORD,” he said, “why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” ¹⁴ Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Philippians 4:1-9

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

²I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ³He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. ⁴“Then he sent some more servants and said, ‘Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.’

⁵“But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. ⁶The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. ⁷The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

⁸“Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. ⁹So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.’ ¹⁰So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. ¹²He asked, ‘How did you get in here without wedding clothes, friend?’ The man was speechless.

¹³“Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

¹⁴“For many are invited, but few are chosen.”

Message

As I was reading the Epistle Lesson I started to think about the situation we all find ourselves living in. As we live during these so different and many times difficult times when everything feels uncertain and sometimes even scary, I find my mind often jumps to the worst-case scenarios.

I have no control over this pandemic; No control over who visits my family and grandkids; No control over whether a loved one will contract COVID-19; No control over what is happening in town, county, or state, let alone anywhere else in the country or the world. I have no control over whether another recession may happen or how people react to one and another. Face it, I have no control over anything, but myself and I even find myself questioning that.

I’m a Christian and I’m worried. And what, if anything, can I do about it? Perhaps you have been dealing with some of the same thoughts and worries. I think most of us have, to one degree or another. Let us revisit today’s Epistle Lesson. It may seem strange that the letter in which Paul writes the most about peace, joy and rejoicing is Philippians since when he wrote it, while he was in prison.

He didn’t even know whether he would be set free or if he would be put to death. But it is in the midst of this terribly difficult and uncertain situation that Paul writes about discovering the secret of peace and joy in Christ Jesus.

Paul had found a source of happiness that will never fail. It consists in an ongoing relationship with the risen Christ, Who has already gone through the lowest point of the human condition. Rooted in Christ’s life, Paul experienced a joy that nothing can take away. Whether he lives or dies, whether others shower him with praise or contempt, all is the same to him when it is seen from the standpoint of His relationship with Jesus Christ. And that kind of God-given peace and joy does not make natural sense to us as humans, but it is available to us every day.

It truly is a gift from God. The Bible tells us that God isn’t indifferent about the details of our lives. God knows each of us personally. He cares about us personally and deeply and nothing is out of God’s control. Most humans feel their joy or happiness or contentment depends on their circumstances. We are happy when we are surrounded by friends, when our future looks bright, when we have a rewarding job. But if our happiness depended solely on outward circumstances, it would be impossible to “Rejoice in the Lord always,” because, no matter what in this life we all go through dark valleys and exhilarating mountaintops.

I think about my maternal Grandparents and the lives they lived. They were strong Christians, but they lived a hard life. They lived through the Great Depression like many of our grandparents did, my Grandfather lost his eyes and therefore with his sight in a mining accident. There wasn't workman compensation in those days. God did not give them an easy life, but He provided them with a life full of happiness if you had listened to them tell their story. As my Grandfather would say, "Happiness comes only when you live your life in God's Presence, for the happiness comes from knowing His peace."

We all have problems; we all have difficulties, but there is a "peace of God, which transcends all understanding," which is available to us no matter the circumstances of our lives. That peace, that happiness comes from a deep relationship with God, the kind of wholeness that comes from having the image of God, once shattered by sin, restored in those who believe. The difference between having "peace with God" and experiencing "the peace of God" is the difference between Jesus Christ being just your Savior and Jesus Christ being your Lord as well.

Having "the Peace of God, which transcends all understanding," is a free gift from God that we learn to cultivate through bringing everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving. It really is a choice we make.

When Paul's famous, "Rejoice in the Lord always" arrived at the Church in Philippi, it wasn't to a untroubled group that the scroll was read out loud to. The Philippians were troubled by external threats and internal strife, but it turns out that Paul did know.

It's no accident that Paul talks so much about his own hardships in the beginning of the letter. He offers himself as an example of suffering to the Philippians. He's imprisoned and has enemies all over the place. But Paul tells them that his response to all this is "I rejoice." And his reason for this joy is Jesus Christ. "Rejoice in the Lord," says Paul, because prosperity and happy times and the other potential reasons for rejoicing can't be counted on to continue "always."

When our concerns have been left in God's loving care, the peace of God that is beyond comprehension will guard and protect our hearts and minds. We can have security knowing that God is caring for us, and we can have sanity when we replace worry with faith and prayer.

Trusting in God, includes giving our troubles and fears to God and then allowing the Holy Spirit to direct our hearts and minds; to guard our hearts and minds; by thinking about good things rather than obsessing about worries. And Paul not only urges the Philippians and us, to think about good things, he urges us to put these good things into practice, when he wrote, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice."

We are in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic. And peace doesn't mean that we ignore the risks or the situation. Peace isn't saying, "Oh, everything will be fine." Peace doesn't mean we shouldn't take precautions for our safety and the safety of others. Peace is acknowledging that the present circumstances may be bad, but we have the opportunity to live unafraid because of a hope that isn't based on wearing a mask or the development of a vaccine, but a hope that rests in a relationship with the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

Paul doesn't just simply tell the Philippians and us to stop worrying, he gives us the antidote, prayer. In any and every situation we can bring our requests, our needs, our problems to God in prayer and leave them, with gratitude in God's capable hands. God cares about you and me. Peter understood this when he wrote: "Cast all your anxieties on Him because he cares for you."

Have you handed over ownership of your life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Do you trust God with your cares, your troubles, your hardships, your anxiety?

Every time you start to feel worried and anxious, make the conscious decision to pray about whatever is bothering you and hand the situation over to God. And be thankful for we are all children of God. And may you experience the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Benediction:

May we go from this sacred place and this sacred time, our minds filled with the Word and the fellowship of the community of faith, to live out our call in the world as a people of joy and of hope. Go with God. Amen.