

Home Service for 5/15/2022

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Each morning we awake to a blank canvass. Our God makes all things new!

Call to Worship:

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise God from the heights!
Praise the Lord, you angels. Sing praise, you heavenly host! Praise the Lord, O sun
and moon. Join in song, O shining stars! Praise the Lord, snow and rain. Blow
loud, wind and storm! Praise the Lord, O trees. Dance with joy, O birds! Praise the
Lord, women and men. Rejoice, children and rulers! Praise the Lord, weak and
strong. Sing for joy, timid and bold! Praise the Lord, mothers and aunts. Give
praise, grandfathers and cousins! Let all creation praise God's name!
Praise the Lord! Amen!

Opening Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, you meet us where we are. We gather together from
many walks of life, but we are united as one heart in the body of Christ. In our time
of worship, open our ears to hear your voice; open our eyes to see your glory; open
our minds to receive your word; open our hearts to perceive your presence. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Patient God, sometimes we are just too busy for our own good. We pledge
ourselves to hectic schedules, demands on time, energy, and resources that erode
all too quickly. We seem to be rushing through life. The cries of those in need
often go unheeded in our blur of activities which sap our energy, our resources, our
spirits. Slow us down a bit, Lord. Remind us again that we are responsible for the
care of this world, for reaching out and offering your healing love. Help us to hear
the words of patient love that you have for us. Remind us again of Jesus' words to
his disciples when he told them that they should love one another as he loved them.
May we take time to bear witness to that love in all that we do. For we ask this in
Jesus' Name. AMEN

Words of Assurance

Wherever you are, Christ is with you. You are beloved of God and God's care will always surround you. Be at peace and rejoice! AMEN.

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:

When the news is loudly proclaiming anger, hostility, hatred, we are called by Christ to love one another. How hard that is, O Lord! Prejudice abounds in our land, and it is our shame, as we proclaim our faith in you. You call us to love one another, but we put conditions on that love: some of these conditions regard race, economic status, gender, age, nationality. It is easy to love people with whom we feel comfortable. It is more difficult to love those who are different from us. And that, O Lord, is our dilemma. Teach us how to love and accept the diversity in our land. Help us to treasure each other for the wondrous gifts and talents each person has. Sharpen our ears to hear words of love when whispered and shouted. Tune our hearts to your healing message of acceptance and compassion for all. Help us to be the people of the Resurrection - who have been freed from the bonds of death. We place our lives in your care, merciful Lord. 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: Acts 11:1-18

The apostles and the believers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him ³ and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

⁴ Starting from the beginning, Peter told them the whole story: ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. ⁶ I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles and birds. ⁷ Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.'

⁸ "I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'

⁹ "The voice spoke from heaven a second time, 'Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.' ¹⁰ This happened three times, and then it was all pulled up to heaven again.

¹¹ “Right then three men who had been sent to me from Caesarea stopped at the house where I was staying. ¹² The Spirit told me to have no hesitation about going with them. These six brothers also went with me, and we entered the man’s house. ¹³ He told us how he had seen an angel appear in his house and say, ‘Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. ¹⁴ He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved.’

¹⁵ “As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning. ¹⁶ Then I remembered what the Lord had said: ‘John baptized with^[a] water, but you will be baptized with^[b] the Holy Spirit.’ ¹⁷ So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God’s way?”

¹⁸ When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, “So then, even to Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

Read the Epistle Lesson: Revelation 21:1-6

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,”^[a] for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’^[b] or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

⁵ He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

⁶ He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 13:31-35

When he was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him,^[a] God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

³³ “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Message

Today's scriptures proclaim both the power of God, who creates all that is, and the love of God for all people. Through a vision, God shows Peter that the Gentiles are to be included in the promises of Jesus Christ. The psalmist calls all creation to praise its creator. In Revelation, we hear that God's home is among people and we receive the promise that grief will be no more. In John's Gospel, Jesus gives his disciples the commandment to love one another.

Love is four letters long, but it is probably the most difficult word to understand in the English language. This word has caused more thorns in peoples' sides, it has divided more people and families into different groups, it has as many different meanings to it as people who think about the word, love. Love has made heroes out of ordinary people, it has been the source of tension, the source of doubt, the source of wonderment for many centuries. Love, a simple but most complex of words. For this word, love has allowed people to change the course of history, it has allowed nations to go to war, it has allowed mankind to advance in its compassion and kindness to one another, but for all of its qualities, this word love is probably the most misunderstood, the less understood, the most highly charged word in our English language.

Jesus is talking about this word, love, in our gospel lesson. He says "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Jesus says love one another. So, why does he command us to love? Notice who Jesus was addressing when he gave this commandment. He was addressing his disciples, people who were already part of his family, people who had experienced his grace, people who were in a relationship to him. The new command has nothing to do with life or becoming a child of God. Christ has forgiven us and given us life before we even thought of obeying him.

It is a command to us as members of God's family. Only here does Jesus addressed his disciples as "little children. He is speaking to them as part of the family, not as people who are seeking admission. He is not telling them or us how to become members but how we are to act as family members. We become members of God's family not by obeying his commands but by receiving the new birth He gives us.

Our obedience is how we glorify God. As part of the family, Jesus tells us how we are to give Glory to the Father of the family, by loving one another. Jesus is saying, if it is your intention to glorify God, to give praise to God who has made you a member of his household, if you want to respond to God's grace in your life, if you want to respond to God's love in your life, if you want to be a responsible family member, here is how to do that; obey the command of love.

Why does Jesus command us to love, because God has loved us so much that we should be motivated to reflect his love to others. As members of the family of God, our love reflects the love that God has for us.

“Love one another.” It is the simplest, clearest, and hardest command of all. It is sort of like telling an young child or toddler to listen. It seems like an easy enough instruction, but for that child, listening is about the hardest thing to do, except maybe to sit still. Love one another. Jesus' words sound so very easy, but when we really get down to trying to live that out; we find ourselves weak, broken, sinful creatures, that it is not so very simple at all. Yet, this is nothing less than what Jesus commands of us. And this command stands at the very heart of Christianity; it encapsulates the full spirit of discipleship. When it comes to following Christ, there is nothing more important than to love one another as Christ has loved us.

It is far from easy to love the way Jesus commands us to, for ultimately, love shows itself most fully not by self-service or by simple declarations of affection, but by the service we render to the ones we profess to love, especially service that inconveniences us or that calls us to sacrifice.

You see love, the kind of love that Jesus commands of us, is all about the other person. Such love overflows into service not in order to show off how hard-work it is, but because that is its natural form. This is the kind of love the God has for us; the love that Jesus showed to this world during his time walking among us. It may take us a long time to understand how vastly great this love is; a lifetime, perhaps. But it is also at the core of getting to know who the true God is and what God is calling us to do. And here's what we need to know about the love that Jesus demanded of his disciples that night in the Upper Room just before he was arrested; there is no greater love than this. This love that Jesus asks of us is more than just “loving your neighbor as yourself.” When Jesus says to us, “love one another as I have loved you,” he's telling us to take ourselves completely out of the equation; true love is all about the other person, the love that Jesus asks of us is all about serving God by being obedient and by serving the needs of others. And isn't this exactly what Jesus did? The love that Jesus shows us and asks of us is a

sacrificial love, but that sacrifice is borne out of complete love of God and obedience to God's will; it is unconditional, including everyone, excluding no one!

Love is about obedience, whatever the cost. It is not about us, for love is all about the other person. That's all that Jesus was saying to us as he spoke with the disciples in the Upper Room. The newness of this commandment from Jesus is not a matter of never having heard these words before; it is a matter of the mode of this love, the depth and type of this love: love one another in the same way that I have loved you! Such love will overflow into service, not in order to show-off how hard-working it is, but because that is love's natural form. This is the love that we were made for, and it is the badge that the Christian community wears before the watching world.

Following Jesus' command to love one another as he loves us is no easy task, and it will take us to the most unexpected and sometimes undesirable places. But it will open up to us the abundance of life offered through Christ.

Let us pray: Dear Heavenly Father, through the power of your Holy Spirit, push us out beyond the safe confines of our congregation. Restore us to the great adventure of the Gospel, that leaps like wildfire over all boundaries, and makes families out of strangers. Give us the courage to follow your leading, wherever it takes us, even among people we don't know, and to places we don't think we want to go. Inspire us to be your apostles, to take the good news of Christ's death and resurrection to those around us. Teach us to love one another as Christ has first loved us. This we ask in Christ's holy name. Amen.

Benediction:

May the love of God which was lavished upon you by Jesus Christ be in your hearts, your minds, and your spirits as you go forth into God's world. Be bearers of peace and hope to all you meet, and may God's peace be with you always.
AMEN.