

Home Service for May 14, 2023

Welcome and Announcements

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

Call to Worship:

Come into God's house! Come and hear what God has done! God has made the world and breathed the breath of life into us! But God hasn't stopped there. There's more! God is still on the scene, upholding all our life, surrounding us in power and love. We live, move, and have our very being in God! Let the sound of God's praise be heard! Praise God! Praise God! Praise God!

Opening Prayer:

Source of all creation, maker of the world and everything in it, you are never far from each one of us. We come into your house seeking you, O giver of life and breath. Reveal yourself to us; dwell with us; and abide in us. We live because of you. We hope because of you. In the name of Jesus Christ in whom we live, and the Spirit of Truth who abides in us, amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Lord of mercy, there are so many times in our lives when we feel alone. We wonder where you are. We cry out to you in our confusion, pain, and hurt. And when you do not immediately grant the prayers of our cries, we begin to doubt that you even care or exist. Stop us from going down this path of self-destruction. Help us look around and find the many ways in which you have blessed our lives. Forgive us when we are so quick to doubt and so arrogant in our demands of your responses. Give us a spirit of patience and willingness to be ready to hear your voice. Strengthen us for the ministries of love and hope that you have placed before us; for we ask this in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

*Even in the midst of doubt and darkness, the light of God is shining in you, on you, and through you. Out of God's great love, you have been redeemed and made whole. Rejoice, beloved of God! AMEN.*

Read Psalm 66:8-20

Praise our God, all peoples,  
let the sound of his praise be heard;  
<sup>9</sup> he has preserved our lives  
and kept our feet from slipping.  
<sup>10</sup> For you, God, tested us;  
you refined us like silver.  
<sup>11</sup> You brought us into prison  
and laid burdens on our backs.  
<sup>12</sup> You let people ride over our heads;  
we went through fire and water,  
but you brought us to a place of abundance.  
<sup>13</sup> I will come to your temple with burnt offerings  
and fulfill my vows to you—  
<sup>14</sup> vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke  
when I was in trouble.  
<sup>15</sup> I will sacrifice fat animals to you  
and an offering of rams;  
I will offer bulls and goats.  
<sup>16</sup> Come and hear, all you who fear God;  
let me tell you what he has done for me.  
<sup>17</sup> I cried out to him with my mouth;  
his praise was on my tongue.  
<sup>18</sup> If I had cherished sin in my heart,  
the Lord would not have listened;  
<sup>19</sup> but God has surely listened  
and has heard my prayer.  
<sup>20</sup> Praise be to God,  
who has not rejected my prayer  
or withheld his love from me!

Prayers of the People:

*Lord of love, you have asked us to keep your commandments. In your life you demonstrated the power of love to effect healing, redemption, and hope in the lives of all your people. Yet we are so unsure of the gifts that you have given us for ministry that we wonder if we can really do what you want us to do. We are a strange mixture, Lord. We are arrogant in our demands of your mercy and timid in our awareness of the blessings and gifts you have given to us. That's why we're*

*here today. We really want to sense your presence and receive courage truly to be your people in this world that you have loaned to us. Remind us when we bring names and circumstances before your throne of Grace that we also bring our own needs and concerns. Lay your healing hand upon our hearts and spirits. We place our lives and our trust in you, O 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 17:22-31

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup> For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

<sup>24</sup> "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. <sup>25</sup> And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. <sup>26</sup> From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. <sup>27</sup> God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. <sup>28</sup> 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'<sup>[a]</sup> As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. <sup>30</sup> In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. <sup>31</sup> For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 Peter 3:13-22

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats<sup>[a]</sup>; do not be frightened.”<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>15</sup> But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, <sup>16</sup> keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. <sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. <sup>19</sup> After being made alive,<sup>[c]</sup> he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits— <sup>20</sup> to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.<sup>[d]</sup> It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, <sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 14:15-21

“If you love me, keep my commands. <sup>16</sup> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— <sup>17</sup> the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be<sup>[a]</sup> in you. <sup>18</sup> I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

Message

As I read the scriptures for today and thought about what they were saying, I discovered the fact that each Christian has the desire to be near our creator, through faith and prayer. That desire is expressed in each of today’s scriptures. A important part of being a Christian is knowing that God is present, even when we are unaware. God is present in the hearing of our prayers. God is present when we surer for doing good. God is present in the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, when the

world believes human lies. No matter where we are in our faith journeys, God is present. He is there for us. Again this week there are so many ideas for possible sermons that I had to choose the one or two that spoke the loudest to me. The two phrases that did so were from our Gospel when Jesus tells his disciples, “I will not leave you orphaned.” And from 1 Peter 3:15 when Peter tells us to “always be prepared.” After much internal debate I decided that the Gospel spoke the loudest.

In our gospel reading, Jesus tells his disciples, “I will not leave you orphaned.” Jesus promised his disciples that he would not leave them orphaned. That God would be with them and us through all things. We all know what the definition of an orphan is in the dictionary and we usually think in terms of a child. Working in the classroom, as a foster parent and having a husband who was adopted, I have listened to what some of the feelings they experienced. The feeling of abandonment was the most common, but the feelings of being unworthy of being loved, lonely, lost, many times feeling totally vulnerable and not belonging anywhere or to anyone are just some of the feelings.

There are many ways that we can feel orphaned, and we are never too old to become orphaned. Grown adults can feel orphaned when both of their parents have died. We can feel orphaned when we have moved to a distant location, far away from family. Immigrants who leave home and country behind them can feel like orphans in a strange land. We can feel orphaned and alien if we sense that we don't fit within a social setting. So there are many orphans beyond the strict definition of an orphan.

Jesus made his reassuring statement on the night of his arrest. He knew that his life was going to take a dramatic turn, and soon. This would change the intimate relationship that he had shared with his disciples. It would forever be altered. He spoke these words to assure them in his pending absence. Even though he would no longer be with them, God was not abandoning them. God would become present with them in a new way.

It seems just a little strange to be reflecting on this passage from Holy Week when we are well into our season of Easter. But the reason this text shows up today is because Thursday of this coming week will be Ascension Day. After Jesus rose from his tomb, he appeared to his disciples for 40 days. On that final day, Jesus was with his disciples in rural area east of Jerusalem. He gave them a blessing. And then, before their eyes, he was carried upwards and out of their sight. So it makes sense to hear this passage today, on this final Sunday before Ascension Day. Jesus would never again be with his disciples, with the Christian community, in a bodily way. The daily reality of the disciples would be radically changed. Before,

Jesus had walked with them every day. But now they would be without the joy of his presence. So Jesus assures them, “I will NOT leave you orphaned!” His departure would bring another heavenly presence. Jesus called it “The Advocate.” I thought it was interesting that in the Greek text, that word is Paraclete. No, that is Paraclete, not parakeet! Sometimes the Holy Spirit is depicted as a bird. But that bird is a dove, not a parakeet! The Greek word is literally translated “Called beside.” The Holy Spirit is called to dwell with us, beside us, in us. Various Bible versions will translate the word as Counselor, or Advocate, or Comforter.

Jesus promised that after he departed, another heavenly presence will walk beside them. This Advocate is with us through all of the windings and avenues of our lives. Another way to think of this is Accompaniment. When we accompany someone, we walk with them. We step into their situation, we feel their struggles, we encounter the world through their perspective. In accompaniment, we share their joys and sorrows and everything in between. We do not walk with them only on sunny days and pleasant pathways. We are with them also through their difficulties and painful realities.

This is what the Holy Spirit does with us. God’s Holy Spirit is ever present with us. It is not in a way that can be physically seen. But maybe that makes it even closer. God’s Holy Spirit walks with us, before us, and behind us. The Spirit is within us, beneath us, and above us. This Advocate is to our left and to our right. The Holy Comforter is with us when we sit down and when we arise, when we lie down in sleep and when we awaken to a new day.

God’s Spirit accompanies us now as surely as God has always promised to accompany us. Think about it: first when God spoke to Moses in the burning bush and called him to confront Pharaoh, God said, “I will be with you.” How about when Joshua led Israel after Moses had died, God promised him, As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you.” Another example is when Israel faced exile and challenges, God vowed, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.” Of course do not forget when Jesus departed from his disciples, his final words were the promise: “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Friends, the Spirit of God, the Comforter, the Counselor, our Advocate, is with us in all times and in all places. We are not alone. We are not left orphaned. God’s Spirit walks with us, arm in arm each and every day. There is not a moment when we are really alone.

Each of the scriptures has a message for us. In Acts, Paul describes God as the source of all creation and the source of life for all humankind. More than this, “we live and move and have our being” in God. Indeed, how can this God be far from

us when we are in God? First Peter speaks of our being brought to God by Jesus Christ and describes lives of integrity “in Christ.” John takes this human/divine spatial imagery the furthest in Jesus’ description of himself as in God, while we the disciples are in Christ and Christ is in us. More than this, the Spirit is with us and in us as well. These passages call us to recognize the mysterious interrelationship that undergirds our being; they challenge us to live lives of love and goodness, courage and hope. Amen.

**Benediction:**

*Being washed in the love of Christ, now go into this world with the healing love of God to be given generously in peace and hope. God’s peace will always be with those who live in God’s love. AMEN.*