



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
May 17, 2020

Please Remember in Your Prayers:

The family of Mariann Kay upon her death.
The family of Chuck Ganzel upon his death.

*(if you have a prayer request you would like added to
the At- Home Worship service,
please email Brooke office@wpceugene.org.)*

Gathering Around God’s Word

*If you are worshipping with another family member or with
children, you are invited to have different voices share and
read the various parts of the service.*

Call to Worship

O people, praise our God—
the Artist of creation, the Lord of heaven and earth.
We worship our Maker with resounding praise!
In God we live and move and have our being; it is
the Lord who gives us life and breath.
**God has kept us among the living and not let our
feet slip.**
God formed all people to seek the Lord; indeed, our
Creator is never far away.
Bless the Lord, who is faithful to us!

Opening Hymn

I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art # 624

Call to Confession

God not only asks us to repent, but also assures us of forgiveness. Therefore, let us confess our sins to the one who is steadfast love.

Prayer of Confession

Loving God, we do not always keep your commandments; we fail to love you; our conscience is not clear. Wash us in the water of life that we may live again through the grace and mercy of Jesus, our resurrected Savior. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Our God forgives, restores, and strengthens us through the risen Christ. Know that you are forgiven and be at peace.

The Word

Prayer for Illumination

Come Holy Spirit, our helper and advocate: open our hearts and minds this day, entice us with your presence. Speak to us with a word of life—a message that we may share with others as we seek to live Christ's love in the world. All this we ask in the name of God, who creates, redeems, and sustains us. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 66

- ¹Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;
²sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise.
³Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds! Because of
your great power, your enemies cringe before you.
⁴All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing
praises to your name.” Selah
⁵Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his
deeds among mortals.
⁶He turned the sea into dry land; they passed through the
river on foot. There we rejoiced in him,
⁷who rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch
on the nations— let the rebellious not exalt themselves.
Selah
⁸Bless our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be
heard, ⁹who has kept us among the living, and has not let
our feet slip. ¹⁰For you, O God, have tested us; you have
tried us as silver is tried. ¹¹You brought us into the net;
you laid burdens on our backs;
¹²you let people ride over our heads; we went through fire
and through water; yet you have brought us out to a
spacious place. ¹³I will come into your house with burnt
offerings; I will pay you my vows,
¹⁴those that my lips uttered and my mouth promised when
I was in trouble.
¹⁵I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings, with the
smoke of the sacrifice of rams; I will make an offering of
bulls and goats. Selah
¹⁶Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell
what he has done for me.
¹⁷I cried aloud to him, and he was extolled with my
tongue. ¹⁸If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord
would not have listened. ¹⁹But truly God has listened; he
has given heed to the words of my prayer.
²⁰Blessed be God, because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me.

New Testament Reading: John 14: 15-21

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. ¹⁸"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Reflection

The Rev. Marta Z Ukropina

10. This is our 10th Sunday apart. 10! I can't even believe I am writing that number. When this all first happened, I naively thought we would have to suspend in person worship for a few weeks, maybe a month. I never thought it would be 10 weeks and counting. And we still have no definitive answers about when we will return to in person worship. Things are uncertain, but I guess this is what happens when no one has lived through something like this before. We do not have past experiences to draw from—we do not have mentors to call for advice and guidance because we are all in this together for the first time in our lives. Instead, we all take each week as it comes and try to make the best possible decisions with the available information. We are all learning together, even when the way seems anything but clear.

40. The Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years in search of the Promised Land. 40! I think I could argue that our 10 weeks feel a little like wandering in the desert, don't they? We are searching for the Promised

Land—for that time when we see that the way be clear. For that time when we are comfortable and healthy and our lives look “normal.” There are many times in our lives when we feel like we are lost and wandering—perhaps in times of grief or suffering in our personal lives. But this may be one of the first times when we are all collectively wandering together. We are a community wandering through the wilderness in search of the Promised Land.

These past 10 weeks have taught us that things we have built our lives on may not be as strong as we once thought they were. Securities we once thought were a given have perhaps been turned upside down. I think all of us know that money and careers are things that can come and go easily, but I do not think any of us imagined that the simple act of gathering together be it with family, friends, church community or school could all of a sudden just be “gone.” Things we took for granted (running to the store for a few things) have now become a burdensome task or even a dangerous task depending on our age and other risk factors. Things we enjoyed and drew great joy from—watching or participating in sports, singing in a choir, attending a class, meeting people, going to church, attending a party, meeting friends for dinner, traveling, spending time with grandchildren have been completely up in the air. We mourn their loss, but we are also apprehensive as we consider resuming some of those things.

We long for that land flowing with milk and honey where we are together without fear and without restriction. But we aren't there..yet... Perhaps we can understand a bit more what that Biblical wandering was like—what the yearning for the Promised Land, or for the Messiah, or for life outside of an oppressive empire's strong hold felt like. Maybe we can use this time to dive deeper into the Biblical narrative and understand more fully the message of hope that Christ brought not only to the early disciples, but to us as well.

Psalm 66 speaks to the time of the exodus and facing hardship and trial. Yet in the midst of all of that, God is faithful and so the Psalmist testifies to the goodness of God. The Psalmist reminds others to come and hear what God has done—for the whole earth to make a joyful noise to God in response.

The Psalmist reminds us that God brings us out of the dangers and confines of the wilderness to a spacious place (v. 12). The word spacious place recalls the promised land but it also brings to my mind the wideness of God’s mercy and grace.

There has been much theological thought about the concepts of wilderness and promised land. Sure, they can be real, physical places, but they can also be states of consciousness within us. This week, I came across something in a commentary that really spoke to me. Robert Thompson, a pastor, writes in *Feasting on the Word*:

Life is difficult. As the late Martha Graham, the grande dame of modern dance, put it, “Every person is an athlete of God.” Sooner or later, life requires every human being to be a spiritual athlete. There are hurdles to jump over, oceans to swim, and mountains to climb. Sometimes we do not think we can make it. Sometimes it seems that we just do not have it in us. Spiritual athletics requires us to reach down inside of ourselves to discover resources we never knew we had. Properly understood, feeling lost in the wilderness is a preparation for entering the promised land. When we are lost, we are open to the possibility of being found. Life in the wilderness requires us to reach down inside ourselves to discover innate resources we never knew we had.¹

¹ *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Vol.2* (2010), 481.

“Life in the wilderness requires us to reach down inside ourselves to discover innate resources we never knew we had.” Yup! I am guessing almost all of us can relate to this sentence. As we have all journeyed through the wilderness of the COVID-19 Pandemic, I think we all have had to reach down inside ourselves and find those resources. Because right now we are lost in the wilderness. We are all spiritual athletes jumping over hurdles, swimming in vast oceans and climbing the highest mountains.

When I read that sentence, I think of all the young parents juggling their jobs, their households and trying to homeschool their children while providing for their family’s emotional, physical and spiritual well being. Hurdles, Oceans and Mountains.

I think of those who live alone; separated and isolated from family, friends, and life giving activities. Hurdles, Oceans and Mountains.

I think of those living in retirement communities or nursing homes; confined to their rooms or apartments, grappling with loss. Hurdles, Oceans and Mountains.

I think of those who are caregivers and those who are separated from their loved ones and cannot visit whether it be a hospital room or a care facility. Hurdles, Oceans and Mountains.

I think of the children and young people in our society—their childhood being redefined as they adjust to the loss of school, sports, extracurriculars, time with friends and a growing knowledge that the world isn’t as safe as they may have once believed. Hurdles, Oceans and Mountains.

I think of those whose places of work have now become places of great anxiety and hardship. Hurdles, Oceans and Mountains.

And of course, I think of those who have been sick and those who have died—for their loved ones that are unable to say goodbye or attend a memorial service. Hurdles, Oceans and Mountains.

I also think of the church. Never, in our lifetimes has the church not been able to gather together in person to offer respite to all of those facing hurdles, oceans and mountains. We have always been a place of welcome to those facing life's hardships to come and find rest for their souls—to come and find a community to build them up even during their roughest moments. But here we are—our 10th week apart and even though we have turned to new ways of being church during this time, the church is facing Hurdles, Oceans and Mountains. Even as we look toward gathering together again, we are aware that it will be “different” at least for a while.

“Life in the wilderness requires us to reach down inside ourselves to discover innate resources we never knew we had.” And of course, the most essential resource of all is our faith and trust in God. When we are lost in the wilderness, God will find us. In fact, God has been and will be with us throughout our wilderness time.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus' earthly ministry is drawing to a close. And as he addresses his followers he tells them that although he will no longer be with them, he is sending his Advocate to be with them forever. He says “he abides with you and he will be in you.” The Advocate, or the Holy Spirit, is God with us all the time. The Advocate is God's love poured out for us in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. The Advocate is love embodied and fulfilled. The Spirit is with us throughout the wilderness leading us home to the Promised Land.

God's Spirit is the strength we find when we are facing Hurdles, Oceans and Mountains. God's Spirit is with us: comforting, sustaining, nudging and carrying us through all our wilderness times. As we move toward Pentecost, where we celebrate the gift of the Spirit, I encourage all of us to look for the Spirit's daily presence in our lives.

Look for God's Spirit and presence and you will find that:

God's Spirit is in the new life that is blooming all around us in spring. God's Spirit is in the sunshine and the rain. God's Spirit is in the phone call that connects us to loved ones both near and far. God's Spirit is in the hospital room. God's Spirit is in the smile of a child or the laughter of a dear friend. God's Spirit is in our "At Home" worship and in our devotion time. God's Spirit is in a walk around the block. God's Spirit is in a family gathered together to play a game or watch a movie. God's Spirit is in the still small voice that speaks to us when the world around seems too unbearable. God's Spirit is in a newborn's first cry and in a person's last breath.

God's Spirit is in the Promised Land AND in the wilderness. God's Spirit is everywhere and that is worth recalling the words of the Psalmist: "Make a joyful noise to God all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise!"

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Responding to God's Word

Affirmation of Faith— *From A Brief Statement of Faith*

**We trust in God, whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image**

male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community. But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation. In everlasting love, the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people to bless all families of the earth. Hearing their cry, God delivered the children of Israel from the house of bondage. Loving us still, God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant. Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child, like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home, God is faithful still. With believers of every time and place, we rejoice that nothing in life or in death can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Let us give thanks to God who listens and gives heed to our prayers:

We pray for all who search for you: may they find their way in you. Bless us with lips that sing your praise and lives that tell the stories of all that you have done for us. Open our eyes to find you among us as we go about our daily lives and share your love with others. Lord in your mercy, receive our prayer.

We pray for all who are oppressed by governments or institutions: for those whose voices are not heard or believed, those with no one on their side. Bless us with a joy for justice and the strength to persevere as we work toward your coming realm. Lord in your mercy, receive our prayer.

We pray for all who hunger, and those who worry each day how they will care for their families. Bless us with meaningful work and fill us with good things as we love and care for each other. Lord in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for your church all over the world as people enter difficult decisions on how and when to reopen safely. Guide church leaders through these new waters so that your church can continue to be a place of hope, comfort and joy for our hurting world. Lord in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

We pray for all who are lonely...sick...suffering whether in body, mind or spirit. We remember before you all who have died, and pray for all who will die today, that they may know your peace. Lord in your mercy, **receive our prayer.**

Bless us with the gift of faith, that we may know you and love you, and enjoy eternal life shared with you. Let us pray the words that Jesus taught us:

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Sending of God's Word

Closing Hymn: *God of Our Life* #686

Charge and Benediction

May God, who creates, redeems and sustains, keep you steadfast in faith, buoyant in hope, and abounding in love. And the blessing of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be among you and remain in you always.