



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
"At Home" Worship
Trinity Sunday: June 7, 2020

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. You can also call/FaceTime someone to worship together.
(If you have a prayer request you would like added to the At- Home Worship service, please email Brooke office@wpceugene.org)*

CALL TO WORSHIP

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit
be with all of you.

OPENING HYMN

Holy! Holy! Holy! Lord God Almighty!

#1

CALL TO CONFESSION

Creation displays the glory of God, but our sin keeps us from rejoicing in the love God reveals. Yet Christ Jesus the Son carried our sins to the cross, and the Holy Spirit breathes new life into us so that we can praise God, our Savior. Let us confess our sins, that we may receive such grace.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty God, you have brought the world into being and created each of us in your image. We confess that we have not cared for your world as we should. We have neglected ourselves and each other. We have squandered the resources of the world you created. You ask us to mend our ways, agree with one another, and live in peace. Yet we continue to hold grudges and thrive on divisiveness rather than peace. Forgive us God and strengthen us to honor your creation and creatures. Give us courage to follow Jesus and share the good news of your love for all. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

The Holy One of Israel, the Redeemer of all the world, and the Holy Spirit who comes as the breath of new life forgets the sins of all who repent. I declare to you, therefore, that you are forgiven, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, amen.

The Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Speak to us, Holy Spirit, the holy word of life. Tell us who we are and to whom we belong so that we may live with gratitude for all that you have done. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 8

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark because of your foes, to silence the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

New Testament Reading: Matthew 28:16-20

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

SERMON

"In This Together"

Rev. David Ukropina

Well today is Trinity Sunday, and our gospel text is from Matthew 28, verses 16 to 20. This passage was almost certainly picked for this Sunday as it includes the baptismal formula we use with the Trinitarian language of baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Of course the doctrine of the Trinity was not fully developed until several centuries after the gospels were written in many of the important church councils in places like Nicaea, Chalcedon and Ephesus. However, Presbyterian minister Tom Long reminds us that Christian theology was not just dreamed up in ivory towers by academics and intellectuals.

Rather, theology was a lived experience by real people, living and figuring out how to live their lives, looking foolish to the world while caring for widows and orphans rather than just living for their own well-being and trying to get ahead of everyone else. It was only after centuries of people living like Christians that the full doctrine of the Trinity was established.

Long writes that "Christian doctrines tend to originate like river bridges built by armies; that is, they are assembled on the fly in seasons of need and are crafted in the field to bear the weight of people marching on a mission." They are not just invented by disconnected thinkers or powerful leaders and then imposed on others.

Another way of putting this is to say that the doctrine of the Trinity arose out of real lived lives, and it really matters, even if it's not something we go around thinking about every day. It's also hard to make the case of how the Trinity matters, and trying to defend the Trinity in a sermon can sometimes lead to a tedious sermon.

However, I do think we can see the importance of the Trinity if we suddenly asked the question, what if there were no Trinity? If we only had the Father, we deny the person of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. It would not

be a full picture of who God is. God would be very powerful but much more mysterious, and we might slide into mere mysticism.

If we only had Jesus, the part of God that is much larger and more mysterious than we can know would be lost. If we only had the Holy Spirit, we would miss the part of God that rose from the dead and overcame our human sin. We just can't leave any of these parts out. We need all the persons of the Trinity.

A few years ago, I preached on Trinity Sunday, and I made a similar argument for the importance of the doctrine. I remember that my main message was that since there was equality and relationship within the three persons of the Trinity, then that was an inherent argument that we should pursue equality and relationships in our own lives as well.

This might affect us in many different ways in our lives. In church, we should resist the urge to put our pastors and leaders up on some pedestal where they are seen as being "above" everyone else. While pastors are set apart for a special and important role and responsibility, we are not above others or inherently more important or perfect.

We should also look at the Trinity and be moved to seek equality in all our relationships. The Trinity, and the call for justice in the Bible, lead us to remove inequalities that the world tends to create. We should resist lifting the pastor over parishioners, putting men over women, adults over children, white over black, rich over poor.

As I mentioned, since God is relational at the very heart of who God is, then by nature God is not singular, isolated and utterly transcendent, but instead God is plural, involved, and incarnationally transcendent, a mixture of both immanence and transcendence. These inherent aspects of the Trinity move into our lives, and affect our reality and behavior as Christians.

As I mentioned, I preached on this theme three years ago, so I'm less inclined to pursue that course again. Instead, I was struck this time around by the passage mentioning two related words and ideas: teaching, and discipleship. I could talk a long time about both, but I'll try to be brief in writing about them.

I could talk a long time about Christian education, especially since its been so important to my own faith development. As I've said before, I did not become a Christian until I was about 30 years old, and I felt that I had a lot to learn, so I really threw myself into adult Christian education and trying to learn as much as I could.

One of the parts of my path to seminary was starting off attending adult Sunday classes, then offering ideas for classes, then volunteering to fill in when the pastors were gone, then joining the Adult CE committee, and then moderating the committee. Before I knew it, people were talking to both me and the pastors about going to seminary. So, when someone asks you to chair a church committee, watch out! You never know what might happen.

I get a lot of energy and joy from both leading and participating in Christian Education groups. This does not mean I set myself up as the expert or authority, but I do hope my enthusiasm comes through. Gatherings of Christians in small groups of people to talk about issues of faith is one of my favorite Christian and ministerial experiences.

In the gospel passage from Matthew, Jesus tells the disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples...teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you." Just as Jesus was a teacher, so were the disciples to be teachers, and so are we. Yet over and over, I've seen Christians recoil at the idea of them teaching.

Especially on the CE committee, over and over we'd see parishioners with abundant gifts for teaching, but who would decline to teach, saying some version of "Who me?" My suspicion was that they usually feared the idea of having to be the "expert" or "authority", but as I said before, that is not the requirement. The requirement is just a willingness to share what you've found.

I remember in seminary when we were studying Hebrew that the word for teaching and the word for learning were closely related, and that linguistically, the word for teacher was really the word for learner, but with an ending attached. That's the image I like not only for Christian education but also for lifelong discipleship. We are to be constant, ongoing learners.

So the passage asks us to be disciples, but what does that mean, and how do we do it? Well a disciple is really a kind of student. You could also think of it as being like an intern. Of course education is an important part of that, but so are worship, prayer, mission, volunteering, fellowship, all the things we emphasize in the church that shape us into individual Christians and the people of God.

You might also be wondering how we do all these things in the midst of a pandemic and a quarantine. My response would be to keep doing all the things we normally do, as best we can. We need to keep worshiping, and I know my own home worship experiences have been powerful. I see worship as a discipline, and even though I greatly miss the sanctuary and the community, worshipping at home is powerful too. It even connects me to the history of the early church and small groups that worshipped in homes.

We also need to keep praying for the world. We need to remain engaged with events that are going on around us. If we want to make disciples, we need to continue to be disciples, always learning, always growing, always responding to the word of God with prayer and action of our own, both individually and communally.

Of course the big news story over the last few months has been the coronavirus and the effect it's had on all our lives. While the virus hasn't made it into all my recent sermons, it's been in most of them, because it is our current shared reality, and whatever the gospel or sermon message is, they are currently affected by what we are living through.

Yet as big as the virus has been in the news, this past week has been focused even more on the killing of George Floyd in Minnesota. I'm hesitant to write about this for a number of reasons. One is that I don't feel like I should be the one talking, but rather I should be the one listening, as I've been trying to do this past week and into the future. I'm trying to listen to people in pain, whose repeated trauma invokes historical trauma.

I also am hesitant because as soon as I start talking about issues like race, I can almost feel people retreating to their political tribes and getting defensive, and that is one of the things that I lament right now, that we are living in such a polarized time where our political tribes can't seem to talk much with each other.

As a pastor, a Christian, and just as a person, I have to confess to an enormous degree of sadness and lament. I'm sure it's tied into all the suffering and death caused by the virus, but it's also in response to the pain and deep divisions between us due to race, income inequality, political views, and an inability to live in peace.

I don't think I could say or write very much that you haven't already heard somewhere else. Like a lot of other times, when things seem so difficult, I find myself instinctively digging deep, and moving to the center, and asking where is God in all of this? And that's the main benchmark I try to use in judging any situation, is to ask of any behavior, "Does this look like Jesus?"

That's my benchmark for just about anything. If we're going to call ourselves Christians, then our behavior has to look something like Jesus. White or black, protestor or police, Republican or Democrat, we

need to ask, “Does it look something like Jesus?” One of the few times I’ve seen this recently is when I’ve seen protestors and police kneeling together and praying together.

As my family and I take walks in our neighborhood, we’ve been seeing a lot of signs posted that say something like: we are in this together. Sometimes it’s written as #InThisTogether. The direct reference is to the coronavirus, and how we all need to care about others in practicing safe social distancing, so we can help one another, the most vulnerable, and health care workers.

But in that message of “In This Together”, I detect a deeper longing. We are so divided in this country, from the top leadership on down, that I sense a deep lament and a deep desire to transcend our differences. I honestly don’t know how we can do this, but I feel like it’s something we ultimately desire, and I believe as a Christian that the only way we can do it is with God’s help.

And that brings me back to discipleship. The process of discipleship is a lifelong discipline. Discipleship is not conversion. Jesus did not say, “Go and convert people and then be done with them.” He said make disciples. And in order to make disciples, we need to be disciples, continuing our worship, giving people a place to worship and belong, bringing our faith to the troubles of the world, and helping to bring about the peace we all so deeply long for. Amen.

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. Amen.

Responding to God’s Word

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD’S PRAYER

Let us pray for the church, the world, and all for whom we are called to pray, saying, God of mercy, **hear our prayer...**

We pray that the love which moved between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit may renew our lives and draw us into your life. God of mercy, **hear our prayer...**

We pray for the church, that we may be brought closer to each other and to you. God of mercy, **hear our prayer...**

We pray for the Earth and all its creatures, that the laws we pass may regard our home in God’s universe as a precious gift. God of mercy, **hear our prayer...**

We pray for our families and our communities, that you may show us the importance of each other, and strengthen us in your grace and truth. God of mercy, **hear our prayer...**

We pray for the sick and those who suffer; for those who struggle to pay rent or a mortgage; for those who have no home; for those who are abused in our communities; for people who long for family but are alone; for children who do not have good guides to raise them; and for whatever else you see that we need. God of mercy, **hear our prayer...**

Into your hands we entrust all that is of concern this day, sure that you hear our pleas, grateful that your will be done on earth as in heaven. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray...

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

Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples

#757

BENEDICTION

And now may the Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other. -Genesis, 31:49