



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
"At Home" Worship
3rd Sunday after Pentecost: June 21, 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.

CALL TO WORSHIP

God cares for us completely and calls for our total commitment.

Christ gave his life that we might live and calls us to give our lives to him.

Through Christ we have died to sin; in Christ we are fully alive to God.

Come, let us worship God.

OPENING HYMN

You Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim

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CALL TO CONFESSION

Let us trust the love of God and confess our sin, that we might receive grace and find true freedom.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God, help us confess and repent of our sins. We turn against one another; we fail to care for the weak and poor among us. We ignore the cries of the powerless, and we seek our own advantage. Your Son emptied himself upon a cross and revealed your eternal, self-giving love. Forgive us, merciful God. Wipe sin from our lives and let us find ourselves wholly in Jesus Christ, our Savior. It is in his name that we pray. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

God, who loves us, does not abandon or forsake us. Our Savior hears and answers when we cry out from the wastelands of sin. Death cannot bind us, for the risen Christ sets us free. Hear the good news: in Jesus Christ you are forgiven.

The Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O God, you have the power to make a desert a place of renewal and a cross a sign of redemption. Send your Holy Spirit so that we can hear you and entrust ourselves completely to you, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 86:1-10,16-17

Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all day long. Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication. In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me. There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God. Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant; save the child of your serving girl. Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame, because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

New Testament Reading: Matthew 10:24-39

“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! “So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. “Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

SERMON

“A Theology of Discipleship”

Rev. David Ukropina

Just this past weekend, my family and I watched the two recent movies about Mr. Rogers. We first watched the 2019 Tom Hanks movie, *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*, and then the next night we watched the 2018 documentary *Won’t You Be My Neighbor?* I thought both of them were excellent, and it’s hard for me to think about them separately.

Now you would think that since Fred Rogers was an ordained Presbyterian pastor who ministered to young children that I would have seen both these movies a lot sooner. I’m an ordained Presbyterian minister married to another Presbyterian minister and we have two young children.

It would be easy for me to blame our busy lives. We had always meant to see both movies, but had just never taken the time. In any event, I’m just glad that we did as I know we all enjoyed them very much. They also both struck me as rich and complex movies that are worthy of further reflection.

So I've been thinking about why I liked both movies so much. Something about them reminded me of a theme that came up in the "Westminster Goes to the Movies" class I led last fall. One of the things I talked about was the experience of watching a movie or TV show where you're watching it on one level, and then it suddenly seems a whole lot deeper or richer than you knew.

I shared that I had that experience with the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*, where on one surface level it was a prison movie, but on a deeper level it was a real meditation on what real freedom is. Another time, this experience happened when I watched an episode of *Everybody Loves Raymond* called *Boys Therapy* where a scene with a father and sons at a race track suddenly turns into a communion scene of love and forgiveness around a shared meal.

In both the documentary and Tom Hanks film, there were so many things that I liked. I really liked the acting in the Hanks film and all the great historical footage in the documentary. I loved getting to find out more about a character, Mr. Rogers, who we all think we know, but who is very easy to over-simplify.

In the Tom Hanks film, there's a scene where a magazine journalist is assigned an interview with Mr. Rogers by his boss, and he has the reaction of surprise. You can tell by his response that he thinks Mr. Rogers is just some simple, slow speaking, one-dimensionally happy person who talks simply with children. In a word, he sees to the journalist as kind of a doofus.

As the journalist goes to interview Fred Rogers for what is supposed to be a short, simple article, the movie focuses on their developing relationship. Rather than being a simple-minded, naïve, overly happy dim-wit, Fred Rogers is shown to be closer to the reality of who he was: extremely intelligent, extremely hard working and diligent in listening and honoring other people, both children and adults, and deeply committed to affirming and loving all those around him.

As the film goes on, through great love, care, discipline and attention. Fred Rogers has an enormous effect on the journalist, and on repairing damaged relationships he has with his father, his family and his wife. By the end of the film, the journalist's life is transformed, all through the power of love shown by Fred Rogers.

If you have not seen either film, I would highly recommend them. Even with what I have described, there is so much about both of them to enjoy and reflect upon, both in and of themselves, but also as a meditative reflection for us and our lives as we continue on our Christian journey of discipleship.

Our gospel text for this week comes to us from Matthew, chapter 10, verses 24 to 39. As usual, there are many themes and ideas that we could focus upon, but the main theme continues to be on discipleship. In many ways, this passage continues themes of discipleship that I talked about in the sermon two weeks ago from the passage on the Great Commission.

Not only are there many themes to the passage, but there are many questions that it raises. For example, when Jesus says, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword", what does that mean? Most of us think of Jesus as being about peace and love, and not violence, so what does he mean here?

Another verse has Jesus saying "I have come to set a man against his father, and daughter against her mother..." Again, what is Jesus saying? Or in verse 39, Jesus mysteriously says "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." We could spend a long time puzzling over many of these questions.

When I preached at Westminster on this passage several years ago, I mentioned that Jesus is not intentionally saying that we should war with our families or parents or children. I mentioned that Jesus is not

against the family, nor is he for violence. He's not against the family, he's just for something much, much bigger, which is the kingdom of God.

As I mentioned earlier, I think this whole passage is primarily about discipleship, and as I wrote in my sermon from two weeks ago, a disciple is essentially a learner. Discipleship is a lifelong process of learning, listening, hearing and studying Jesus, and trying to live by what we hear and what we learn.

One of the commentaries I read this week mentioned that since the passage is mainly about discipleship, we should be invited to reflect upon our own understanding and theology of discipleship. That same commentary also argued that in thinking about discipleship, we really need to think about both obedience and the nature of power.

When we think about power, we tend to think of it in terms of control, rule and domination. This is a more authoritarian understanding of obedience based on submission. Power here has to do with power and domination over others, and making oneself invulnerable to the control of others.

This kind of authoritarian power is very prevalent in our world. It's interesting to me that the countries that seem to have handled the coronavirus the worst are ones with rulers that tend to be authoritarian, overbearing and power hungry, whereas the countries who have fared the best had rulers that tended to be relational, conciliatory and interpersonal.

In our passage this week, Jesus says, "Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." Throughout his ministry, and in this passage, Jesus models a way that is not about power, control and being authoritarian, but it is an invitational style that is gentle, loving, and self-sacrificial.

That is ultimately the model that the master shows us, and that we as disciples are to follow. We are to follow the way of lifelong, committed, hard-working discipleship that is loving, graceful, mutually forbearing, forgiving, patient and kind, rather than violent, overbearing, controlling, manipulative or forceful.

As I reflected and prepared for this sermon this week, there were a number of strands that were going through my mind. As always, I started with the text and with commentaries I read. However, I also had on my mind that this Sunday is Father's Day, and as I've already mentioned, I had on my mind the two Mr. Rogers films that we just watched.

Like I said earlier, I always start with the text, and so for me I knew early that the focus would be on discipleship, and what Christian discipleship looks like. I always recall the quote about discipleship from the great Presbyterian minister Eugene Peterson, who called discipleship "a long obedience in the same direction."

I've also been thinking about fatherhood, given the holiday, and what it means for us as a society and as Christians. There is certainly a stream in historical, cultural Christianity of the father as paterfamilias, the head of the family, the final authority, and the powerful, domineering, controlling autocrat.

But there is another stream, especially one we find in our Presbyterian culture and tradition, that I am much more attracted to and find much more closely resembles the pattern and model that Jesus sets for us and expects from us as disciples who are trying to follow him and model our lives after.

I see this model in people like Fred Rogers, who affirmed everyone around him, children and adults, through the often hard, disciplined work of attention, discipline, affirmation and unconditional positive regard. A cynical journalist, or the world in general, might easily dismiss this quiet, disciplined, loving approach as

overly simple, naïve and out of touch, but this is so much closer, in my mind, to the powerful grace of Jesus that we find in the Bible.

I see it in the model of someone like Presbyterian minister Eugene Peterson, who served the same church in Maryland for almost thirty years, and whose quiet but powerful witness left such a strong mark on the world and exemplified the kind of quiet but powerful discipleship that I believe Jesus wants from us.

I see it modeled in a person like Tom Hanks. While I am wary of celebrity worship, I learned prior to the Mr. Rogers film that Tom Hanks is a lifelong Christian, who belonged to an evangelical church as a youth and has attended church for over thirty years at a Greek Orthodox church where his wife was a member. Hanks does not make a loud, boastful point of his faith, but it clearly has influenced his whole life and way of being.

In a way, these models, and this ultimate model from Christ, remind me a lot of the Presbyterian church. As with Mr. Rogers, the cynical world might look at us as something naïve, simplistic, and completely culturally irrelevant. It's easy to ignore us as a denomination or as a local church on the corner of Coburg and Harlow.

However, as with Fred Rogers, there is so much more going on here than initially meets the eye. Like Mr. Rogers, our faith and discipleship involve hard work, discipline, wrestling with deeply difficult and complex issues. We have a commitment to the truth that is often a real struggle in this world, but we persevere, and in doing so, help keep alive the gospel in a world that is so often loud, obnoxious and violent, and at best is indifferent to the gospel, love, grace and peace.

May we continue to look towards models like Fred Rogers, Tom Hanks, Eugene Peterson, and ultimately to Jesus for our idea of what it means to be disciples in this world. In doing so, perhaps we will help transform others, like Fred Rogers did, and like Jesus does, over and over, throughout all of time. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human, fully God. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God; preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives, teaching by word and deed and blessing the children, healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted, eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners, and calling all to repent and believe the gospel. Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition, Jesus was crucified, suffering the depths of human pain and giving his life for the sins of the world. God raised this Jesus from the dead, vindicating his sinless life, breaking the power of sin and evil, delivering us from death to life eternal. Amen.

Responding to God's Word

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

God of our past, God of our future, we pray that you heal the divisions between all peoples on earth today...

We pray that the church of Jesus Christ stay so committed to the head of the church that we will have Christ's mind among us...

We pray for world leaders who seek to make peace among nations. May their success be measured in generations who live free from war...

We pray for medical professionals committed to healing, especially those in areas of poverty or violence. May they be guided by the Spirit who lifts up the brokenhearted...

We pray for teachers and students, especially those in high-risk communities. May they find strength in you to reach beyond themselves and embrace the future with the hope that you are holding for them...

We pray for your promised kingdom to come, when all wars cease, and there will be no disease; when courageous faith, hope and love cast out hatred and poverty. All this we pray 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

Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life

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BENEDICTION

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