



Westminster Presbyterian Church  
Eugene, Oregon  
“At Home” Worship  
July 26, 2020

Please keep in your prayers:  
*Arlen Salthouse as he recovers from surgery.*

*(if you have a prayer request you would like added to  
the At- Home Worship service,  
please email Brooke [office@wpceugene.org](mailto: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. The sermon is embedded in this document in word form and is also in a separate video link so you can watch it. It will be available on the church’s YouTube Channel or on the website: [www.wpceugene.org](http://www.wpceugene.org) under the Worship Menu by selecting Sermons.*

**Call to Worship from Psalm 119**

**Blessed be God whose word gives hope and  
shapes our dreams,  
whose love has conquered death.**

**Blessed be God who orders our way and guides  
our steps,  
who leads us into life.**

**Opening Hymn *We Gather Together***

**#336**

## Call to Confession

If God is for us, who can be against us? Let us confess our sins to the One who searches us and knows us.

## Prayer of Confession

**We confess that we have turned away from you and have not lived with upright hearts. Forgive us for failing to follow you. Guide our feet to walk in your ways and serve your world to the glory of your name. Amen.**

## Assurance of Pardon

Your sins are forgiven; be at peace, for all things work together for good for those who love God.

## *The Word*

## Prayer for Illumination

Spirit of life, we do not know how to pray as we ought. Meet us in words written, in words spoken; intercede for us with sighs too deep for words, until we shine with the hope that is hidden in our hearts, for we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

*Old Testament Reading: Psalm 119:129-136*

**Your decrees are wonderful;  
therefore my soul keeps them.  
The unfolding of your words gives light;**

it imparts understanding to the simple.  
With open mouth I pant,  
because I long for your commandments.  
Turn to me and be gracious to me,  
as is your custom toward those who love your name.  
Keep my steps steady according to your promise,  
and never let iniquity have dominion over me.  
Redeem me from human oppression,  
that I may keep your precepts.  
Make your face shine upon your servant,  
and teach me your statutes.  
My eyes shed streams of tears  
because your law is not kept.

*New Testament Reading: Romans 8:26-39*

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of

Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection

The Rev. Marta Z Ukropina

If you’ve been to many weddings, you have probably heard Paul’s words as found in I Corinthians 13:

*Love is patient, Love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast.*

And if you have been to memorial services, you have probably heard Paul’s words as found in Romans 8:

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.*

When we gather together for a memorial service on the occasion of a loved one’s death, hearing these words that proclaim the fact that NOTHING—including death—can separate us from God’s love in Christ is indeed powerful and comforting.

But, If the only time we read 1 Corinthians 13 was at a wedding and the only time we read Romans 8 was at a funeral, we would be limiting their message and missing out on much. In fact, I have been known to read 1

Corinthians 13 at many a memorial service. It is often fitting when talking about a life well lived and loved.

Though I have yet to use Romans 8 at a wedding—I'll get back to you on that one. I am not sure verse 36 would go over too well with the bride—or the groom for that matter...

*“for your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

All joking aside, when I read Romans 8 this week I found that it truly meets us where we are today. It doesn't only speak about death, but about hardships, suffering, persecution, distress, and so on. It speaks about things that cause separation. But Paul is quick to proclaim that **NOTHING** can ever separate us from God's love.

Separation is a normal part of life. We cannot do everything in life and so our decisions often lead us to exclude something. Times of separation are a *leaving behind* and it often causes us great pain or sadness. We grow up and separate from our parents as we leave the house. Now of course, this is also an exciting time for many a young person, but it also comes with leaving childhood (and perhaps a time of security) behind. Parents raise their children, knowing they will one day leave the house, but that separation is hard, too. Identities are reformed and refreshed as we go through the separations of life.

We all have relationships, whether romantic or friends, that we have left behind in our lives. We may have made a conscious decision to separate from them or we were separated by distance, time or changes in life. Anyone who has moved knows the pain of separation from “home.”

Illness and disease cause separation from the bodies that we thought we could depend on. And death of course

causes the ultimate separation. We no longer are able to be with those who have died. The pain is great. The hole left behind is real.

All of us are experiencing lives of separation right now. We have been separated from those we love, from worshipping and other activities in the church, from celebrating life in groups, from gathering together for funerals. We have been separated from school, the normalcy of our daily routines, from a false sense of security. We have been separated from loved ones who live in care facilities or who have been hospitalized. We have been separated from many things that we have just taken for granted as people living in the 2000s. And even when we are together, we are separated by at least 6 feet.

There is further separation between the “haves and have-nots” in our society. There is further separation in respect to socio-economic issues. And we are becoming more keenly aware of the separation between races that we liked to pretend was not there. There is great separation in this country for education as some children have more access than others.

We have become further separated in politics adopting an US v. THEM philosophy that is almost always equated anymore as WRONG v. RIGHT. I mean goodness sake—even the simple act of wearing a mask to protect others and ourselves and cut down on the spread of a virus that has wreaked havoc on all of our lives has caused deep, painful separation.

Our world is separated. We are separated in how we are dealing with a global pandemic. We are separated physically as many countries are banning travel from certain places. We are separated in how we care for each other.

We have been separated from a false sense of safety and security.

I call all of this to our attention just so we can really reflect upon all the places of separation. When we think of it all, we realize that even more so than usual, we really are witnessing a great deal of separation in life right now. And if we are honest, we realize that light is being shined on separations that have been there all along. And perhaps, a good that will come of it all is that we are finally seeing it and we can seek to make a change.

Because the truth is that separation is usually there, but it is not always as prominent as it is at this current time.

I feel like because of the current state of our lives and our world perhaps we are more able to *hear and listen* to what Paul is telling the church today. Paul's message is perhaps even more important to us as we go about our lives during this time. We feel like the separation could easily take over—it is a force to be reckoned with for sure. But Paul gives a firm, adamant answer.

**NO!** Separation will not take over. God's love always wins. God's love unites.

Yes, life is full of things that separate us, but NO, they will never have the last word. They will never win because of the love God has shown for us through Jesus Christ. Life is hard, pain is real, suffering is all around us. And unfortunately, on this side of heaven, that is just a reality we have to live with. This is where hope and faith enter into the equation because we also get to live with the knowledge that God is with us every step of the way. Even when we are weak and do not know how to even pray about such things, we are reminded that the "Spirit helps us in our weakness....The Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

I don't know about you, but I have had a lot of "sighs too deep for words" these last few months. In reading this

**Biblical text this week, I was reminded that the Spirit is there in the midst of those sighs. In fact, the Spirit's sighs are even deeper.**

**Our God is a good and gracious God that does not want His beloved creation to suffer so it is hard for us to understand why in the world there is so much suffering. We often wonder—where is God? Why would a good God allow so much suffering? There are no easy answers—this question has been around forever. It has been debated, discussed, and volumes have been written on the subject. And my prediction is that it will continue to be a source of great question and discussion until God's Kingdom is revealed in its entirety.**

**But as we turn to God's word revealed to us in scripture and if we look to the actions of God past, present and even future, we see God and Christ fully involved in the world. We see a God that has delivered people time and time again—a God that calls us each by name and welcomes us home even when we do not deserve any of it. We see a God that offers forgiveness and redemption to people that have been destructive and cruel. We see glimmers of God's kingdom breaking into our world offering a hope, peace, and joy that at times we cannot even fathom. We see a love so great in Christ—a life willing to suffer and die so that we may live for all time. We see reasons to rejoice even in the midst of fears and sorrows. If we truly believe in this Good News, our eyes can see the goodness of God's kingdom that is surrounding us even in the midst of a separated world. And we can boldly proclaim with Paul that nothing—NOTHING—will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. NOTHING! Praise be to God. Amen.**



## *Responding to God's Word*

### **Affirmation of Faith—*from Romans 8***

**We believe there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus; for we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose. We are convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

### **Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer**

**Holy God, we do not know how to pray, but Jesus invites us into the life he shares with you, and so we keep coming. Hear our prayers today:**

**We pray for your church all over the world that it would hear and listen to where you may be leading. Merciful God, give us wisdom and courage beyond our imagining.**

**We pray for unsettled economies and those whose needs are overlooked in the choices of the powerful. May we, who know so much privilege, bear our responsibilities with open hearts, open minds and open hands.**

**We pray for our world—for nations and leaders, that all the violence that fills the earth may cease and your wisdom and goodness may govern all so that the earth can live in peace.**

**We pray for our world as it battles a global pandemic. For all those who are sick, those who are**

suffering, those who are care providers, and those who have died.

We pray for all who stand at the thresholds of life: for your children who are soon to be born and your children who are soon to go home.

We pray for those whom we love, both near and far. We give thanks for new faces to love, ideas to ponder, work to do— as we marvel at the sturdy friendships and persistent memories that sustain us when the way is hard. May each be a reminder of your love and your provision.

Holy One, keep calling us to work together to bring your love, peace, hope and grace to our hurting world. We pray all this through 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:            *Thine is the Glory*            #238

### Charge and Benediction

May the love of God, the grace of Christ, and the Spirit's peace be with you always. Amen.