



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
9th Sunday after Pentecost: August 02, 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)*

Prelude:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RiAWKUKLreNp0gmIuoD5QZDhf5SqSerZ/view?usp=drivesdk>
Soliloquy, David Conte
Christopher Keady, Assistant Director of Music, Grace Episcopal Cathedral, San Francisco

CALL TO WORSHIP (from Psalm 17)

Come into the presence of the Lord

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

Come to praise God, to wrestle with God, to seek a blessing.

God upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.

From wherever we are in body, we gather in spirit this morning in the presence of the Lord.

The Lord is near to all who call on the Lord, to all who call on the Lord in truth.

Let us worship God together.

OPENING HYMN

Just as I Am

#442

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

God of compassion, we are disheartened. We have wrestled all night with worry instead of resting in you. We have asserted our own goodness instead of awakening to yours. We have turned away those hungry for your help instead of trusting you and feeding them from your limitless supply of blessings. Forgive us, heal us, and help us to hold on to you. We call upon you, for you will answer us, O God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

The God of steadfast love is our refuge and Savior. In Christ, we who are broken are healed. Life-changing God has touched us and transformed us to reach out to all who hunger for what only God can give. God blesses us to multiply blessings to others, through Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Lord. **Alleluia! Amen.**

The Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Awaken and illumine us by your Word, Lord, that we may behold your likeness. **Amen.**

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 32:22-31

The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

New Testament Reading: Matthew 14:13-21

Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a deserted place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them and cured their sick. When it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now late; send the crowds away so that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." Jesus said to them, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." They replied, "We have nothing here but five loaves and two fish." And he said, "Bring them here to me." Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. And all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full. And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

REFLECTION

The Abundance Is Here

Let us take a moment to pray together:

Creator God, you know us and love us. May the words spoken and the meditations of our hearts draw us ever closer to you. Amen.

SERMON

by: Karen Keady

Jacob was a chancer. Webster defines a chancer as a scheming opportunist. Earlier in his story in Genesis, Jacob took advantage of his brother Esau and fooled his father Isaac. Jacob and his father-in-law took turns deceiving each other. In this week's reading, Jacob, on the run, has sent his family and wealth ahead as a buffer between himself and his angry brother Esau and Esau's army, while Jacob waits on the other side of the river Jabbok. I picture him standing alone at the river's edge, wondering if his latest clever, desperate scheme will work.

Possibly he is wondering how he came to this point—the point where he will sacrifice his wealth and even his family to skate through once again.

If we're honest, most of us, at some point in our life, have had our Jacob moments. Honor and deceit work side by side in Jacob. In the end, Jacob has to wrestle with who he's been up to now. It takes a long night, and he is exhausted. He senses that his opponent wants to end it, and so he goes for the win, his kind of win. Bless me, Jacob demands. But his opponent is not through. Without yielding his own name, he requires Jacob to name himself. Jacob yields. I am "y'acob (The Usurper)."

In Jacob's world, names told who and what you were, maybe even your path for life. Jacob admits—to God—that he has used his quick wits and daring to get ahead at the expense of others. And God says, in effect, Yes. You have struggled with man and you have struggled with God. And you are at last ready to be who you are created to be: yees-rah-el—Israel—founder of a nation.

Jacob receives a new identity—one he didn't connive to get—and a new direction for his life. He leaves that encounter changed, limping, even.

Jacob was above all a creative man, and when the time for change came, he struggled his way through it and emerged stronger, focused on God's will for his life. He would mend his relationship with the brother he had injured and give strength and direction to others. In these days I find great reason for hope in Jacob's story. Not unlike Jacob, we are living through a time that calls for change, change in daily habits, change in how we build community, changes in how we think and talk about each other. Our world has wounds, and we are called to heal them. Jacob had taken away his brother's rights, and now he had to go back and do the repairing work to heal that wound. Healing a long-festering wound is harder than preventing one.

Jacob did the work, and we can, too, with our brothers and sisters who have been denied their human dignity and opportunities through deeply rooted racism in this nation. These wounds leave many of our oppressed brothers and sisters, their grandparents, and children more vulnerable to disease and with less access to health care and good food. Wounds that started long ago and were never properly treated will take learning, understanding, awakened compassion, and action to heal.

I know this is a time when we are confronted by needs to change on so many fronts. And it is so tempting to throw up our hands and say, "too much, too late," and look away in defeat. But to do that is to forget the good news: God is in our story. In fact, this is God's story, we are here to help God tell it through to its glorious, victorious, and peaceful end.

Like Jacob, we are fortunate to be children of God, who, even when we stand alone on the river's edge and wonder how we got to this place, gets in and wrestles right along with us.

Gary V. Simpson, Baptist pastor in Brooklyn, New York, writes that in times like these we "do not need a God who sits on a throne and controls everything as much as we need a God willing to become intimately intertwined in our struggles for our change and the change of creation." He adds, "Whatever we struggle with in our time of isolation, we are ultimately struggling with what we believe about God. The place where we are both isolated and committed to our struggle is the place where we meet God."

I want to turn for a moment to our New Testament reading for today. This is truly a story of isolation and commitment. Jesus models for us what it means to turn, not away from, but toward great need for change, to go at our troubles with compassion in one hand and grace in the other.

Jesus has just heard that his cousin John the Baptizer has been killed. He goes away to be alone with his grief, and maybe his fears, and huge crowds of people, having also heard the news, trail after him. They are disheartened and living on the edge of hunger and homelessness. Some are probably feeling crazy and angry. The disciples are overwhelmed. They want the people to go away and take care of themselves, even though this is almost impossible for most.

D. Mark Davis translates the Greek in this passage as Jesus feels "internally torn because he shares in their gut-wrenching pain." At a point like this, Davis says, a revolutionary leader such as a Zealot would have rallied the mob to go after Herod. But instead, the story becomes about healing, strengthening, and feeding the upset and the dispirited. I think a more self-oriented leader would have insisted on being the one who does the feeding. But perhaps one of the greatest miracles of this story is that in the end, it's the disciples who feed the multitude.

It is their time to change, their time to realize that they don't need to send the people away; the abundance is here, through Christ, by their hands.

To Jacob's energy, intelligence, and imagination, Jesus taught the disciples to add compassion, solidarity, and love. And with those gifts on board, they worked miracles.

Our Book of Order's ordination questions ask ruling and teaching elders and deacons if they are willing to serve God's people with energy, intelligence, and imagination, and also with love.

In a time when church happens away from the building, these are gifts of God that we all can call on to help us through the loneliness, the frustrations, and the fears. And we do, and often we find ways to use them in joy.

Anyone who has followed Pastor Marta's Wednesday meditations and read Pastor David's quotations of the week knows that our newer ways of worshipping together can be both deeply inspirational and directly connected to the holy funny bone.

I am in awe of the families who have recorded and posted hilarious songs on line about COVID-19. They know it's serious, and they know it's deadly for many. But they are giving us the gift of a brave group smile. I'm thankful for people who have decorated their doorways and yards with encouraging messages. For people who have sewn masks and gowns, and for people who wear masks and practice distancing as an act of community spirit to create a safer world for everyone. I'm thankful for Zoom birthdays and anniversary gatherings. For the Zoom Presbytery meeting I attended that was one of the most heartwarming and encouraging, faith-filled gatherings I've been to in a long time. More than a hundred of us on Zoom discussed churchwide issues, debated and voted, encouraged those working toward ordination, and shared worship, all in changed ways with all the tech hiccups and learning that goes with it. I wish you'd been there with us, too.

I'm thankful for our incoming elders and deacons—especially the first-timers—who all will pledge their energy, intelligence, imagination, and love to serving God's people. Creative hope in action, practiced by ordinary people who have chosen change.

Now, while the world is slower, it's a good time to wrestle with finding hope in change. How can we, just as we are, apply our own particular brand of energy, intelligence, imagination, and love to God's hurting world?

It takes creativity to discover new ways to help others, to cheer them on, to lift them up, to offer equal bread for the journey. Some of us shy away from "creative," and others embrace it. I think the trick is for each of us to embrace creativity with our particular gifts—to give it traction through our kind of action. I pray we will each find our way to do some healing in this hurting world. What do you believe God hopes for in the situations you see unfolding? How might Westminster, and how might you live into that hope? I pray that in the days to come you will search out and find your way, Westminster's way to respond to God's hope in us. God has given us many gifts—joy among them. May we leave the river's edge with God's blessing. May we know the abundance is here, and may we have the joy of seeing all others fed as well. Alleluia.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH from The Confession of Belhar, 1986

We believe in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects and cares for the church through Word and Spirit. This, God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end. We believe in one holy, universal Christian church, the communion of saints called from the entire human family. We believe that Christ's work of reconciliation is made manifest in the church as the community of believers who have been reconciled with God and with one another; that unity is, therefore, both a gift and an obligation for the church of Jesus Christ; that through the working of God's Spirit it is a binding force, yet simultaneously a reality which must be earnestly pursued and sought: one which the people of God must continually be built up to attain; that this unity must become visible so that the world may believe that separation, enmity and hatred between people and groups is sin which Christ has already conquered, and accordingly that anything which threatens this unity may have no place in the church and must be resisted. Amen.

Responding to God's Word

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Compassionate God, you are good to all. Help us to trust in you and to share what we have with a hungry world. We pray for your church universal. Enable us to join with people of all faiths to work for the well-being of all your children. Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

We pray for the earth and all creatures who look to you for sustenance in due season. May we do our part in restoring the balance of your creation and deepen our commitment to follow Jesus in ministries that nurture and give dignity to all. Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

We pray for all the people of the world, for their ethnic groups, nations, and leaders, that wars will cease, that the hungry will be fed, that justice will reign, and that refugees will live in safety and peace. Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

We pray for all those who suffer from mental and physical ills, including COVID-19, and for all those who wrestle with you for personal identity and spiritual peace. May they find their truth without money and peace without cost. Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat."

Gracious and merciful God, abounding in steadfast love, we join our voices with all that you have made in speaking your praises and blessing your name, for, with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, you are just in all your ways and kind in all your doings. 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.

Reflection on Our Offering

In the faithful hands of Christ, our little is multiplied to feed many. We thank you, loving God, that you bless us to participate in the miraculous multiplying ministry of your Son. Help us, we pray, to pass along the gifts you have provide us out of your abundance that your miracle ministry may multiply to satisfy the hungry of this world today; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Sending of God's Word

CLOSING HYMN

Today We All Are Called to be Disciples

#757

Charge and Benediction

Christ calls us all to remember that God's beloved and needful need not go away. The abundance is here. So, wrestle with God, ask for your blessing, and find your way to be part of the miraculous multiplying of compassion and love.

And know that God, Creator; Christ, Redeemer; and Holy Spirit, Sustainer, go with you always and everywhere. Alleluia!

(Parts of this liturgy adapted from *Feasting on the Word*, Bracken Long, and *Taught by Love*, Baylor.)

Postlude:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iW19ixYUIIU>

Fanfare for the Common Man, Aaron Copland

Christopher Keady, Assistant Director of Music, Grace Episcopal Cathedral, San Francisco