



Westminster Presbyterian Church

Eugene, Oregon

“At- Home” / Outdoor Worship

With the Sacrament of Communion

You may use any bread/cracker and juice you have at home.

Please take some before you begin to worship to prepare the elements for communion

(This service will be streamed live on Sunday and recorded and emailed out if you would like to follow along.
Watch your email or check the church website for details.)

August 16, 2020

Gathering Around God's Word

WELCOME

Welcome to worship. Whether you are gathered together outside at WPC, watching live, watching the video, or reading these words, Welcome. God's love and grace unites us through all space and time. May you all feel God's love, the Spirit's peace and Christ's welcome surrounding you. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Let us gather together to worship God wherever we are.

CALL TO WORSHIP

God has forgiven us and drawn us close,
reconciling us through Jesus Christ,
who has lavished upon us the fullness of the blessed Holy Spirit.
With glad and grateful hearts, praise the Lord!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Almighty God, whose compassion embraces everyone, gather the outcast and the lost, heal the wounds of fear and distrust, and make us a community of reconciliation that we may embody your merciful love and rejoice in your astounding grace in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Gracious God, we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from your mouth. Make us hungry for this heavenly food, that it may nourish us today in the ways of eternal life; through Jesus Christ, the bread of heaven. Amen.

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SCRIPTURE READINGS

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you. The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us. May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere him.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

TIME FOR SILENT REFLECTION

SERMON

“Going Ahead of Us”

Rev. David Ukropina

Well this is our second outdoor worship service, and when Marta preached at the first service last month, she mentioned that her sermon would be brief, and more like a sermonette, and my sermon today will also be on the short side. While I know that everyone is glad to be worshipping and taking communion, I also don’t think anyone wants to hear a really long sermon on this hot morning.

Our lectionary text for this morning comes from Genesis, chapter 45, which covers the climactic moment of reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers. I preached on this text about a year and half ago, so I’ll give a brief recap of the story, but I also want to take the message and focus of the sermon in a different direction than I did the last time.

As you may recall, Joseph was favored by his father Jacob, which made him very unfavored and resented by his brothers. Joseph also angered his brothers by interpreting a dream about them bowing down before him. In response, his brothers first decided to kill Joseph, but when they realized they couldn’t actually make any money from this, they sold him into slavery in Egypt instead.

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After going through many trials and much suffering, Joseph became a leader in Egypt. He also matured and grew in wisdom, and ended up counseling Pharaoh to store up grain for a coming famine. When the famine hit, many foreigners came to Egypt for food, including Joseph's brothers.

Since it had been so many years, the brothers didn't initially recognize Joseph, but he recognized them, and he invented a long series of trials for them to pass before he revealed himself. The set of trials mirrored the trials Joseph himself went through, but they also revealed that his brothers had matured the way Joseph had, and they eventually have the emotional reconciliation we read about today in Genesis.

And over the years, there have been many interpretations and many different takes on this long narrative about Joseph and his brothers. Some interpretations have focused on the way that God can turn evil into good. As Joseph famously says later in the narrative, "Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today."

Other sermons and interpretations have focused on the process and the power of forgiveness, as I did in my sermon a year and a half ago. In that sermon, I focused on the long narrative between Joseph and his brothers, and how in our lives, forgiveness is often long and complicated and messy, and it can take a long time to play out, even as God is working within us and among us.

However, in today's sermon, as I mentioned before, I'd like to go in a different direction of focusing on the way that the Joseph narrative resonates with the story of Jesus himself. Christian interpretation has often focused on the connections between Jesus and Joseph. In seminary, they always warned us not to go looking for Jesus under every rock of the Old Testament, but in this case, the connection is valid.

Like Christ, Joseph was betrayed, mistreated, went through long suffering, was handed over to death, and then later unexpectedly revealed himself as being alive, offering forgiveness and a new beginning, and we can see a close connection between the larger Jesus narrative and Joseph and his brothers.

In both cases, God works through human sin to bring about good, whether with the brothers or through the cross. And a particular detail that I want to focus on today is the way that God goes ahead of us, to prepare a place for us. This is language we are familiar with in the church, and it's right there in the text in Genesis.

We hear Joseph several times telling his brothers that "God sent me before you to preserve life." And a bit later he says, "God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors." And this theme of God going before us resonates so much with the rest of Holy Scripture.

When I hear this language of God going before us, one of the first things I think of is Memorial Services and another Bible text from John chapter 14, where Jesus tells the disciples, and all of us, that he going ahead of us to prepare a place for us in the many dwelling places of his Father.

Of course the reference here is to the resurrection and the way that Jesus goes ahead of us, through death and into life, so that we can know when we die or our loved ones die, that death is not the end for us, and there will be new life waiting for us in the place where Jesus goes.

But we don't have to wait until the New Testament for so many examples of the way God goes ahead of us to bring new life out of death. This is one of the most common themes in the Old Testament, and maybe the central theme of the Bible, of God going ahead of us to bring life from out of the place of death.

It's there at the start of creation, in Genesis, where God brings life and order from out of the watery chaos. It's there when God goes ahead of Abraham to create the covenant with Abraham, even when Abraham is still asleep. It's there in Exodus when God goes ahead of the people to lead them out of the desert, out of the place of death, and into the promised land of life and prosperity.

It's there when God brings the people out of the exile and back to the land that was promised. And in the

New Testament, as mentioned before, it's there in the central story of Jesus coming back to life where the people only thought there would be death. And then God continues to be with his people and to bring life out of death following the destruction of Jerusalem and the diaspora.

What we learn over and over from the testimony of the Bible is that God goes ahead of us, and God knows the way out of the grave. That God can bring life out of death is the steady drumbeat of Biblical witness and testimony, and it's what we must remember in our lives, both individually and as a community of faith.

So as I was thinking about how this connects to our lives here and now, the very first thing I thought about, because it's forever present these days, is the pandemic we are all living through, and specifically the way we are not able to worship in the sanctuary the way that we are accustomed to, and how we are not able to physically meet in so many ways, whether in education or fellowship or mission or pastoral care.

Holy Scripture always has a way of speaking to our lives as they are lived in the moment, and in this historical moment, I am thinking of God going ahead of us as we struggle and crawl our way through so much change and worry and grief over the worldwide trial we are all going through, no matter where we live.

When we see so much death and fear around us, the Biblical, historical witness tells us to look towards the new life to come. It will not only come for our loved ones who have gone ahead of us, but it means that we will one day return to the community practices that we know and value.

Our community will rebound. Our country will rebound. Life will go on. This moment is like a time in the wilderness. It is like a Lenten season, when the land lies barren, like a time of famine in Genesis. But in the midst of a scary time, there is Good News that comes to us, from Genesis, from Jesus, from the Biblical witness, that God is going ahead of us, as God always has, to prepare a good place for us in the time to come. Amen.

Responding to God's Word

INVITATION TO THE LORD'S TABLE

Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God! They will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God. - According to Luke, when our risen Lord was at table with his disciples, he took the bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. - This is the Lord's table. Our Savior invites those who trust him to share the feast which he has prepared.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

It is truly right and our greatest joy to give you thanks and praise, O God our creator and redeemer. In your wisdom, you made all things and sustain them by your power. You formed us in your image to love and serve you, but we forgot your promises and abandoned your commandments. In your mercy, you did not reject us but still claimed us as your own.

You are holy, O God of majesty, and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. He took upon himself the weight of our sin and carried the burden of our guilt. He shared our life in every way, and though tempted, was sinless to the end. - Remembering all your mighty and merciful acts, we take this bread and this cup from the gifts you have given us, and celebrate with joy the redemption won for us in Jesus Christ. Accept this our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving as a living and holy offering of ourselves, that our lives may proclaim the One crucified and risen.

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these your gifts of bread and the cup, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ. By your Spirit unite us with the living Christ, and with all who are baptized in his name, that we may be one in ministry in every place. As this bread is Christ's body for us, send us out to be the body of Christ in the world. - Through Christ, all glory and honor are yours, almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit in the holy church, now and forever. Amen.

THE WORDS OF INSTITUTION

The Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way he took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink of it, do this in remembrance of me. Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord, until he comes.

These are the gifts of God for the people of God.

COMMUNION OF THE PEOPLE

At this time, we invite you to share communion. If you are alone, take a piece of bread and a sip from the cup as you remember these words: This is the body of Christ broken for you, and This is the blood of Christ, shed for you.

If you are with someone in your family, offer the bread/ juice to each other while saying these or similar words. Take some time to pray in silence with God.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

God of grace, you renew us at your table with the bread of life. May this food strengthen us in love and help us to serve you in each other. We ask this in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Sending of God's Word

BENEDICTION

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