



**I
HATE
MONDAYS**

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Eugene, Oregon

“At Home” Worship

August 23, 2020

Prayer Requests

*(if you have a prayer request you would like added to
the At- Home Worship service,
please email Brooke 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 and is also available on
the church’s YouTube Channel or on the website:
www.wpceugene.org under the Worship Menu
by selecting Sermons.*

Call to Worship from Psalm 138

**We give thanks to God with our whole
heart.**

**We give thanks for God’s steadfast love
and faithfulness!**

**Though high above all things, God sees the
lowly.**

**Even when we are in deep trouble, God
makes us live again. The love of God
lasts forever!**

Call to Confession

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Confident in this ever-gracious, never-failing help, we come before the Lord, confessing our sin and seeking forgiveness.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we confess that we have conformed our lives to the ways of the world and not the ways of your kingdom. We thing of ourselves too highly and regard others as lowly. We exalt possessions and power, when you alone are to be exalted. We let conflicts prevail over grace and divisions over harmony. Have mercy upon us, we pray. Forgive and transform us, that we may be holy and acceptable to you, discerning and doing your will. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

The steadfast love of the Lord never ends. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

The Word

Prayer for Illumination

Lord our God, your name and your word are exalted above everything. We are listening for your word; we are looking for your light. By the power of the Holy Spirit, renew our minds and hearts so we may discern your will and respond in faith. We pray in the name of your Son, our Savior. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 138

I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything.
On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul.

All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, for they have heard the words of your mouth.
They shall sing of the ways of the Lord, for great is the glory of the Lord. For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me against the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me.

The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

New Testament Reading: Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Sermon

God has a Plan for the Church

The Rev. Marta Z Ukropina

I am going to let you in on a little secret. Lately, I hate Mondays. This week began and I found myself staring another Monday in the face. It reminded me that I used to have a button pin featuring Garfield that said “I hate Mondays.” I remember loving that pin especially in middle school and high school as the first bell for the school day rang at 7:10 in the morning which is just plain brutal to most, if not all, teenagers. (And adults for that matter!)

I remember the dread I would feel on Sunday night as I set my alarm, preparing myself for that awful blaring, beeping noise that would awaken me while it was still dark as night outside. Ugh—I still shudder to think about it!

I wish I remembered what happened to that pin because it would apply to my life now, too. And I might just wear it each week. It might make Monday Zoom meetings more interesting. I wonder what people would say if their pastor showed up wearing an *I Hate Mondays* pin.

The truth is Pandemic Mondays are a real struggle for me. Now, that doesn't mean that they are the only tough days. I am sure that all of us can relate to the fact that over the course of these past months we all just have days that are a real struggle. Perhaps it is brought on by yet another horrific news headline. Or maybe it is brought on by yet another cancelled plan. Or maybe it just hits you out of nowhere. The emotions we are all experiencing are raw, real, and often hit us like a ton of bricks.

But back to Mondays. Almost every Monday has been hard lately. In our house, by the end of Monday, we are often all so glad that the next day is Tuesday! A new

day. I think that Mondays are tough right now because Monday as a pastor is the day I usually begin to plan for the following Sunday and Monday as a mom/person usually begins a new week of activities, plans, or school.

Each Monday lately has been a not so subtle reminder that we are still deep in the grips of this pandemic with no clear timeline out.

Mondays mark another Sunday worship to plan where I will not see or be with any of you. Another sermon written that will be delivered in an empty sanctuary to a camera lens.

It marks another week of growing boredom and uncertainty for the kids and maybe even for us adults. Another week of second guessing decisions. Another week of longing for a return to a normal schedule or just any type of predictable routine! It is another week that despite exercise and eating well, I find myself scraping the bottom of the energy barrel.

It is another week of not knowing...

It is another Monday of feeling guilty that I am even complaining because I am doing ok! I have my family, my health, a safe place to call home and meaningful work.

That is not the case for many. I see such great need and pain in our world and community and that causes deep hurt and concern, too. I wonder what I can do to help and then feel limited because of current restrictions.

So yes, Garfield, I hear you—I hate Mondays, too. 15 years ago, Carrie Underwood may have had a hit with her song *Jesus, Take the Wheel*, but I might just rewrite it and hope for my big break: “*Jesus, take my Mondays.*”

Joking aside, If I reflect on my feelings about Monday, I think they just point out to me all of the stuff—

the chains, if you will, that are binding us up, threatening to choke out the good news of salvation brought to us in Jesus Christ. They are heavy chains filled with unrest, pain, turmoil, sin and despair. They drag us down. They are chains that feel even more heavy than usual as we have lost so many things that we often take for granted. As Christians, a hallmark of our identity is the opportunity to come together as a *community* to worship God with a *community* in which we find welcome, belonging and hopefully challenge to be a better follower of Christ. All of that is made so much more difficult, if not impossible feeling, by this era of virtual church.

I am thankful that we have had 2 outdoor worship services with communion, but looking out into a masked worshipping body that is all separated by at least 6 feet reminds us that we are not in normal times. It has been a real joy and privilege to preside at the communion table—a visible reminder that we are all welcome in Christ—a reminder that we are God’s beloved children, forgiven and loved. But never would I have imagined presiding at a communion table where I could not then physically serve and partake in the Lord’s Supper with all of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ. And as someone for whom music is central to who I am, not singing praise to God each week with a gathered community is not only strange, but it saddens me deeply.

But as David said last week that just as we find in the Biblical narrative, God is still going ahead of us, preparing a way. God knows the way out of the grave. God is still preparing a future for us filled with hope. This time of virtual church away from each other will not last forever although at times it does seem like there is no clear end in sight.

God sent Jesus to set us free from all those things that bind us and choke out goodness and hope. In Matthew’s gospel today, Peter confessed as much when he

said of Jesus: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” The messiah had arrived to set people free, to redeem them from all their sin.

Jesus tells Peter that he is the rock on which he will build the church. Matthew is not speaking merely of an institution that is built to promote Jesus’ teachings. The church is to be a continuation, a living body, of the work that Jesus has begun. In other words, the church is not to be a place where one merely studies God’s word to learn about it. But instead, it is a place *to study* God’s word, *to worship* the living God, *to learn*, and *to act* upon that learning. The church is a place where we come together *to serve* our world by teaching and living out the gospel message. It is the place where the body of Christ comes together always seeking out where Christ may be leading.

Usually, when I have read or studied this text, I have spent much time on Peter as the rock and building the church upon a solid foundation—Christ. This time, I kept noticing the second part of that sentence: and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

Darkness will not prevail against the Light. These words of Christ are a promise to the disciples and to the church that no power in the world or even death itself will be able to overcome the work of Christ and thus, the work of the church.

The pandemic and all this time spent apart will not overcome the work of the church. The work of the church will go on because the work of the church is founded upon Jesus and Jesus will prevail and give us all freedom. Sin, destruction, evil, and hardship will all do their best to destroy the church or cause us to have deep doubts. But because of Christ, the church will always prevail. Hope will always win. Christ will break all the chains that bind us. We will have freedom in Christ.

David and I have been watching Ken Burns' documentary about country music. A theme he explores in country music is that of Saturday night/Sunday morning. As Don Reid, of the Statler Brothers said: *"The best Christian in the world is the one that realizes he needs to be. You know, you've got to experience Saturday night sometimes to know what Sunday morning's all about."* This same sentiment has also been illustrated by preacher Tony Campolo in his sermon "It's Friday... but Sunday's Comin." It is a common theme in the church, but one that we can find even more pertinence in today. We are living in the midst of Saturdays, Fridays—or maybe as in my case, Mondays. But the good news is that Sunday is always coming! Our current pandemic world of separation is a dark, scary, unknown place at times—we may feel stuck in a day that more resembles Good Friday. But Sunday is coming. We are experiencing something collectively that hopefully will only serve to help us see and live into the promises of Sunday morning in renewed ways.

We didn't gather together for Easter this year and I have heard many a pastor say that their first normal Sunday back in worship will be the biggest, loudest Easter celebration of all no matter what time of the year it is. Indeed, each and every Sunday is to be a miniature Easter celebration. It is the day that we praise God and remember the saving death of our Lord Jesus Christ. I can only imagine the plan God has for His church once we are all able to be safely together again. Now is the time for us to prepare our hearts and minds to be able to listen for and carry out that plan. The church is alive and well in our world because our leader, the Messiah is alive and well, working through you and me and the church to carry out God's plan for our world.

As Christians we are set free from all that ails us because of the redeeming work of Christ. This does not mean that life is easy or that we can be complacent, but rather it should be a call to work and change—to bring

about God's kingdom to our world that so desperately needs it. We can proclaim with Peter that Jesus is the Messiah, the savior of the world. And Christ will continue to build his church through and beyond all the pain and sorrow leading us all into a new kingdom where peace prevails, suffering ends, love wins and forgiveness and grace abound.
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

Steadfast God, your love and faithfulness are with us always. We give thanks that with you there is no end to our hope. By your power, all exiles will come to an end; all things will be restored.

Therefore we pray with confidence to you who are above all things, knowing that you take notice of those who are bent low; that your strong arm takes hold of those who are in the midst of trouble.

To anyone in despair, send your deliverance swiftly. For those longing for home, return them, we pray, to a place of safety and love. Loving God, you promise comfort to the one in sorrow and help to the one in trouble. Lift us all up so we can see your salvation.

Help us and help all the nations to learn your justice and to practice it.

Comfort those who mourn and who suffer. Heal those who are sick and unwell. Grant us your peace that surpasses all understanding. Hear our prayers, O God, that are on our hearts this day...

We thank you for the gift of the church and for the varied gifts and perspectives you place among us. Help us to welcome diversity in ways that enlarge our witness to the world. We thank you especially for Jesus Christ who has called us to be his body in the world, and pray all things in his name as he 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: *O For A World* #372

Benediction

May the Lord who made heaven and earth, the Christ who lived and died for all, and the Spirit who renews our minds and hearts abide with you and all God's people, now and forever. Amen.