



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
October 25, 2020

*(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

*. The sermon 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

**You shall love the Lord your God
with all your heart,
and with all your soul,
and with all your mind.
And you shall love your neighbor as yourself.
Drawn by love, we come,
to offer our whole selves in Christ’s service.
Let us worship the Lord!**

Opening Hymn

What Does the Lord Require of You? #70

Call to Confession

**Let us speak the truth about ourselves to our
neighbors and to God, acknowledging what we have
done and what we have left undone.**

Prayer of Confession

**Your holiness, O God, commands that we confess:
We have neither loved our neighbors as ourselves
nor honored ourselves as your beloved creation.
We have judged unjustly, regarded others
ungenerously, profited at the losses of those near
and distant, borne grudges, desired vengeance,
and kept silence in the face of wrongdoing. We
long to live in accord with your desire that your
way of compassion, kindness, and honesty will
govern our hearts and minds, turning us toward
lives of peace. Forgive us and lead us. Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone; a new life has begun. Know that you are forgiven and be at peace. Amen.

The Word

Prayer for Illumination

Come, Holy Spirit, in the Word of God, as the breath of life, amidst your people gathered here, into our hearts and minds. Stir us to know the happiness of life in your blessings. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 1

**Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the
wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the
seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law
they meditate day and night.**

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

New Testament Reading: Matthew 22:34-46

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”’? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Sermon

“God Give Us the Love” The Rev. Marta Z Ukropina

I am a bookworm—I absolutely LOVE to read. In fact, one of my favorite things in life is sitting on a warm beach with my feet in the sand, book in hand; preferably in a chair right near the breaking waves. Yes, I have had one or two waves catch me by surprise and almost take my book out to sea.

But, I digress...

I love to read—it is how I unwind at night and it is a way I find to relax anytime. One of my favorite genres is historical fiction and most specifically WWII and the Holocaust. Just ask David—when I crack open a new book he runs through the same checklist: Is it about World War II? The Holocaust? Women? Women and Children? I often answer yes to all four of those questions. I am not sure when books like that became my wheelhouse, but I am pretty sure my interest in the Holocaust dates back to elementary school. I remember reading *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry. One of my best friends I had since pre-school was Jewish and I still remember not being able to wrap my head around how such atrocities occurred. It was probably one of the first times in my life that I began to wrestle with the notion that people could be so evil. And then of course as I got older in middle school and high school, I read *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom and *Night* by Elie Weisel.

Around the same time, two profound experiences happened to me.

I grew up spending all my childhood and teenage/college summers at my grandmother's house in Pennsylvania. We also had close family in Washington DC and spent time there, too. What an opportunity it was to have so much time there—we visited all the historical and governmental sites and museums.

One year, we visited the Holocaust Museum and it had a lasting impact on me. I have since been back as an adult and it was interesting to find myself remembering things from my first visit and being captivated and deeply moved once again.

When I was 17, however, I went to Auschwitz and that was an experience I will never forget. My dad is from Poland and all my family on his side still live there

and so we were there visiting family, but we also traveled throughout the country. What a place Auschwitz is. I will never forget it. As I approached the entrance, an eerie feeling washed over me as if I could feel the souls—the voices who were silenced. The life stories that abruptly ended. The injustice, terror, cruelty and pure evil. But also, I could feel resilience and life; love and faith. The strength that people had that allowed them to take one more breath and live even in the midst of such atrocities. For me, I do not often have the experience of feeling a place so deeply as I did in Auschwitz. Visiting the Holocaust museum in DC was one thing, but this took the experience to a whole other level. The walls seemed to cry out—the whole place just felt heavy.

People talk about thin places in life—those places where the veil between this world and the next are thin. That is one of the best descriptions for how I felt walking around. I felt that I was not worthy to be there; that it was both a place of despair and a sacred place all at the same time. Auschwitz is a memorial to all who perished, but it is also a reminder of the pure evil and hatred that prevailed within its fences. It is a reminder of how horrible people can be, how fallen we are and how desperately we need a savior. It reminds us how quickly we can fall and do things we know are wrong. People can be cruel—we all know this. And if we are honest, we know that we, too, can be cruel. We forget to love our neighbor—or worse, we choose not to. We like to think that the Holocaust happened a long time ago—or we would never allow such a thing to happen again, but being at Auschwitz reminded me that in fact, we are never so far off from such evil and cruelty.

Unfortunately, we humans do not have an easy time following the two simple commands that Jesus gives us in our scripture reading today. You don't have to look very far to see just how off course we, as a human race or even as individuals, are. But even in the midst of all that fallenness, all that evil, is God's love.

In Matthew's gospel text today, Jesus is again answering tough questions, confounding those trying to trick him. We know from the text that the lawyer is trying to test him. Possibly, he is trying to show his opposition to Jesus and outwit him by asking an impossible question. Because if all the commandments in the law are important, how could Jesus pick just one? The lawyer may also be furthering the rivalry between the Sadducees and the Pharisees—having Jesus confirm that the Pharisees ask better questions. When you re-read verse 34 in light of this it sounds like people taking advantage of a situation. "When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together.."

I can just hear it:

That Jesus guy—boy he sure showed those sorry Sadducees. We can get him by asking an impossible question and prove to the Sadducees once and for all that we are for sure smarter.

Or maybe the lawyer really did want to know. Maybe he believed in Jesus and wanted to know what was required of him so he could live accordingly. Any of these options are possible.

I do, however, find it interesting that the language used is that the lawyer asked him a question to "test" him. And just like when Jesus was "tested" in the wilderness by the devil, he answers by quoting scripture.

His first quote is from Deuteronomy and is what the Jewish people call the Shema: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."

And his second scripture quote is from Leviticus: "You shall love you neighbor as yourself." And then he

strings the two of them together stating: “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

It is easy for us to think of loving our neighbor as loving the person that is down on their luck—or the person who asks us for help. Or the person that we think needs our help. Or It is even easy to love our neighbor who looks different from us or has different tastes in music or food or the type of car they drive.

But what about the neighbor who votes for the other political candidate? What about the neighbor who lets their dog leave unpleasant packages in your front yard? Or the neighbor who is mean? Or the neighbor who flicks us off when we don't drive fast enough? Or the neighbor who affiliates themselves with hate groups? They are hard to love. They are more like enemies than neighbors. Surely God didn't really mean for us to love them the same way we love ourselves. But the command is there. The command is to love everyone.

EVERYONE. And that truly is an almost impossible calling. Because honestly—some people are just easier to love than others. That is just the plain truth. Jesus' words here are not supposed to be easy. He is smashing all the limits and boundaries of neighbors. To love God is to love everyone—self, neighbor, stranger, enemy—everyone.

People throughout history have offered examples of modeling Christ's command even in the midst of impossible circumstances. Many of the books I mentioned earlier are filled with unbelievable stories of human strength and resilience and also love and forgiveness that I cannot even imagine. One quote always stuck in my mind and seems pertinent for today's Biblical text. Corrie Ten Boom said: “When God tells us to love our enemies He gives along with the command, the love itself.”

God gives us the love. And this is how we can ever hope to love others including those who are hard, if not impossible to love. This is not easy. If it were easy then the world would be a perfect place where everyone got along and worked together for good.

How can we love people that we do not agree with? How can we love people who have hurt us or wronged us? How can we love people who are hateful and cruel? How can we love people who contribute to systems of oppression and hate? The more I think about it, the more I want to find the loophole here. Surely Jesus didn't really mean that we had to love people like that. Except that he did...

But, I think when we are overwhelmed by what feels like an impossible calling, we need to go back to Jesus' first command. We are to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds. When we love God so completely we are equipped with the grace that allows us to attempt to love all of those around us.

And how do we love God? We love God by praying, studying God's Word, attending worship, asking for help when we feel our hearts growing cold, seeking forgiveness when we go astray. All of these things help us focus our love on God. What are some ways that you love God? Take a minute to think about that.

Of course the other side of this is knowing that God is pouring out love to us. And that love allows us to do extraordinary things, like find ways to love others, even those who are completely unlovable for so many reasons. God's love allows us to work for change and fight against evil in our world. God's love allows us to work for justice and mercy.

I like what Rabbi Hillel said. When a man challenged Hillel to teach him the whole Torah while standing on one foot, the Babylonian Talmud reports

Hillel's response as follows: "That which is despicable to you, do not do to your fellow, this is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary."

Maybe we could take Rabbi Hillel's words to heart. We cannot change other people, but we can always work on changing ourselves. We can become more loving toward God, toward ourselves and thus toward our neighbors and enemies. It will not be easy. It is a constant battle fought within ourselves as we hear on the one hand God's call to love everyone, but on the other hand we have to face very real human feelings of anger, fear, hurt or anguish as we live into that call. Loving others certainly does not mean being a doormat or enabling or condoning bad behavior. We must believe that God's love allows us to push against the evil, hatred and wrongdoing we see each and every day both in others and in ourselves.

God's love allows us to care for each other and try to work toward seeing all people as what we are: God's beloved child. God's love allows us to cry out and seek to make the world a better place offering all people a glimpse into God's kingdom. God's love allows us to stand up against evil and seek to fill the world with Christ's peace, forgiveness and joy. God's love allows us to see all people as our neighbors; those whom we are called to love. As you go about your day, be mindful about how you love God and how you can thus receive God's love which will enable you to love everyone.

Amen.

Responding to God's Word

Affirmation of Faith—from A Brief Statement 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.

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Let us go to God in prayer, saying Holy God, hear our prayer.

For people of faith in every land, in every religion and in every home. **Holy God, hear our prayer.**

For the church all over the world. For those worshipping together and those worshipping apart. **Holy God, hear our prayer.**

For world leaders, peacekeepers, diplomats and government workers.
Holy God, hear our prayer.

For trees and plants. For creatures large and small. For pets and working animals. For oceans and mountains. For drylands and forests.
Holy God, hear our prayer.

For farmers in this harvest time, for those who fish and hunt, for those who ship and store what is gathered, and those who cook and serve.
Holy God, hear our prayer.

For children in virtual school or in person school. for teachers, for parents, for those who are facing challenges each day.
Holy God, hear our prayer.

For all who are suffering, or sick, or lonely,
or grieving, or anxious. **Holy God, hear our prayer.**

For all that we have not named, but which you
know, O Lord. We trust that you will hear our prayer
in the name of Jesus, Our Savior, who taught us to
pray together:

**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: *Lord, I Want to Be a Christian #729*

Benediction from Deuteronomy 34:9

May the Lord bless you and lay loving hands
upon you, that you may be strengthened to
continue to walk in the faith that others have
passed on to you, to move ahead into the
promised land.