



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
December 06, 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)

Liturgist: Dawn Champoux

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH: The Schukart Family

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Why do we light two candles?

We light the first candle, the candle of hope, to help us remember the prophets’ hope in the coming of the Messiah. We light the second candle, the candle of peace, knowing that God is always with us. In our world, peace can be hard to find, but in this season of Advent we trust that God is always with us and is preparing something new. And even where there is war or discord, whether between countries, within families, or within our own hearts, God is present, gently leading us to new possibilities.

Listen to these words from Isaiah chapter 40, verse 5: “Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it.”

Today we hope for the peace of Christ to come into all of our lives.

CALL TO WORSHIP

A new branch will grow from the root of Jesse.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him.

We will live in peace, a child will lead us.

Let us walk in the light of the Lord.

Let us Pray:

Loving God, in this time of preparation and planning, we thank you for the hope and peace you offer us. Show us the creative power of hope. Teach us your peace and prepare our hearts to be transformed by you, that we may walk in the light of Christ. Come Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

CALL TO CONFESSION

God does not want anyone to perish, but rather for all to come to repentance. Therefore, let us confess our sins, for God's salvation is at hand.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION.

Faithful God, we confess that we have not led lives of holiness. We suffer from impatience, apathy, and greed; we have not been at peace. We repent of those offenses and turn to you in love. Forgive our iniquity and pardon our sins, that we may walk in righteousness to the glory of your name. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Brothers and sisters, by the mercy of Christ, your sins are forgiven, for salvation is at hand for all who turn to God.

The Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Gracious God, heaven and earth will pass away, but your words will not pass away: Your Word stands forever. May our generation be attentive so that, by the power of your Holy Spirit, we remember your ways and gladly do right, meeting you wherever and whenever you appear. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SERMON

"Going Home"

John R. Mahon

I thank Pastor Marta for inviting me to preach. I begin with a time for the young of all ages. It's a story entitled, "Who is coming to our house?" by Joseph Slate. It's a imaginative tale that takes place in a barn. A cow greets the other animals and says, 'who is coming to our house?' 'Someone, someone, says Mouse. 'Make room' says Pig. 'I will butt aside the rig,' says the goat. 'We must clean,' says Lamb. "Dust the beams,' says Ram. 'Who is coming to our house?' 'Someone, someone,' says Mouse. 'Sweep the earth,' says Chick. 'Stack the hay,' says Goose, 'and quick!' 'Who is coming to our house?' 'Someone, someone,' says Mouse. 'Someone's coming from afar.' 'I will nose the door ajar.' 'But it is dark,' says Cat. 'They will never come,' says Rat. 'Yes, they'll come says Mouse. 'Someone's coming to this house.' 'Who is coming to our house?' Mary and Joseph,' whispers Mouse.

Going home for Christmas may be the last thing you think you can do this morning. The pandemic has curtailed going home plans for many. Frederick Buechner defines home as the place to which we feel we belong, and in some cases make us belong to it. He claims it is a universal experience. I lived in many locations that I have called home. There is my boyhood home in New Jersey. Then there is my home Clatskanie when my children were small, and my home in Utah where my children grew up. Today my home is here in Eugene where it has been for the past twenty years. One ideal vision of home, a family gathered around a dining table is depicted in the first Christmas card designed in Britain by John Calcott in 1846. It depicted what home was then.

Our Scripture this morning is about going home. The people of Israel are in exile in Babylon. Jerusalem was destroyed. Now the prophet Isaiah proclaims hope. "Comfort, comfort, my people, your iniquity is pardoned." Salvation is at hand. A highway is being prepared across the desert. The mountains will be leveled, the valleys raised up. The Lord himself will lead the procession back to the Promised Land. All the nations shall see this glorious return. Isaiah objects. He knows that the Israelites are fickle. They chase after other gods. He says that the people are like grass, here today and gone tomorrow. The divine messenger retorts: The Word of the Lord stands forever. Therefore, go tell it on the mountain. Behold your God!

It's hard for us today to hear these words without Handel's music running in the back of our minds. In his oratorio, Handel set these words to a divine tenor solo. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned." Comfort. On one hand, many of us are fairly comfortable. We have a roof over our head, and food on the table. Unfortunately, a growing segment of our population is not as fortunate. There are more and more homeless every day, while the rich in our society seem to be getting richer. On the other hand, those of us in the

middle find it harder to maintain our comfort. Anxiety naws in our stomachs. Our souls are disillusioned. Material things do not satisfy. We long for something more.

Our Scripture this morning is associated with John the Baptist. In fact, according to the Gospel of John, he preached upon it. "I am the voice. says John, the voice of one crying in the wilderness...as the prophet Isaiah said." John preached repentance. Nine times in our Isaiah Scripture God asks for our response. "Comfort, speak, cry, make clear, make straight, preach, get up, do not be afraid, speak." Clearly God want us to do something. What are the valleys and mountains in our society that God wants to change? I forgot to mention that the first Christmas card contained also two side panels which each depicted an act of charity. One showed feeding the poor; the other clothing the poor.

Where are the places in our lives that could use some leveling out? What about the crooked places in our lives, and those rough places that make us so difficult to live with at times? How do we change? Do we simply will to do better? As another commentator has pointed out, "when habit and will are in conflict, habit wins every time."(McCabe, HANDEL'S MESSIAH: A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY.

This year we may be only going home only in our mind. In the novel, *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* by Oscar Hijuelos, the main character Cesar Castillo goes home" in memory only. The looking-back structure of the novel articulates the fantasies we have for the past, and how our personal histories are subject to the golden lens of nostalgia. Home also appears in the *Song of Solomon* by Toni Morrison. The main character Macon "Milkman" Dead III, journeys to a lost family farm in Pennsylvania which proves perilous, suggesting that both redemption and damnation are consequences of going home. Home is also a theme in what has been called one of the best novels of this century, *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson. John Ames, a minister, is both protagonist and narrator. He is aging (any resemblance here is coincidental) and, in his mind he is close to death. He records his story to pass on to his very young son who he thinks will not remember him otherwise. Ames' project is really to find a home within his faith, which is complicated by the history of his abolitionist grandfather and his contentious relationship with the ne'er-do-well son of a close friend. Throughout the book Ames pursues a sense of clarity regarding his life, and the tension of the story comes from his struggle to be at home in a world that so regularly challenges the tenets and durability of his faith. This tension is expressed in the spiritual where it says, "This world is not my home, I am just a passing through, if heaven's not my home, Lord, what will I do. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door. I can't fell at home in this world anymore."

Last year in a sermon, I mentioned a story "The Burglar's Christmas" by Willa Cather, my favorite author. It is a retelling of the prodigal son set in the turn of the twentieth century urban America. It's about a young man down on his luck who unknowingly robs the home of his own mother. She catches him in the act and embraces him. He struggles to get free. She will not let him go. "Who says I will not kiss my son?" she says. The young man protests. "My pockets are full of your jewels." His mother replies. "How can you take what is your own? They are all yours, my son, as wholly as my great love..." After a while, the young man says, "I wonder if you know how much your pardon?" "Oh, my poor boy, much or little, what does it matter? Have you wandered so far and paid such a bitter price for knowledge and not yet learned that love has nothing to do with pardon and forgiveness, that it only loves, and loves, and loves?"

When George Buttrick in a famous sermon asks the question, are you going home for Christmas? The answer he expected had nothing to do with homes of sticks and stone or even home as family. The answer he pointed to was Christ. Our Scripture from Isaiah concludes with the image of the Good Shepherd. He will feed his flock; he will gather his lambs; he will carry them; he will gently lead them. When I was in Greece several years ago, I was struck how in antiquity a common symbol was a shepherd with a lamb over his shoulders. It was repeated over and over in statues from Corinth to Athens. Home is where Christ is. Christ invites you to his table this morning. It is truly our home, the place to which we belong and the place that calls us to belong. Jesus stands at the table and offers us his love. It's a love that only loves, loves, loves. Jesus stands here at his table with open arms wanting to embrace us like Cather's mother hugged her son and wouldn't let him go. The table is ready. Let's go home.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH – from Philippians 2:5-11

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Responding to God's Word

The Sacrament of Communion
Invitation to the Table

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them unto the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

How can we thank you, O God? For sun and moon and stars, for breath and life and all things good, for your steadfast promise and your faithful love, for the day is surely coming when all things will be made new.

We give you thanks, Holy God, for Jesus who came to be your living Word to baptize us with Spirit and fire, to feed the hungry, to humble the mighty, and to announce the good news of your coming realm. With thanksgiving, we remember how, when the hour had come, Jesus took his place at the table with the apostles. He took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

After supper, he took a cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood which has been shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. When you drink it, remember me.

With thanks and praise we offer ourselves to you, sharing this holy meal, remembering Christ's dying and rising, and praying: Come Lord Jesus.

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us—this bread, this cup, these people

Christ's body and blood, given in love for the world. Make us one in the Spirit, one in the church, and one with Christ our Lord.

Make us gentle, joyful, thankful people, serving our neighbors, worshipping you alone. We lift prayers this morning for those who need you the most this day...

for places where peace is hard to find...

and for all those working together to make the world a better place...

Unite us in every place as we share this Holy meal of mystery from so many various places.

Keep us in the peace of Christ until you gather us at your table in glory. For now, a voice is crying out in the wilderness: prepare the way of the Lord!

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit all glory and honor are yours, almighty God, now and forever. Amen.

Let us join our voices together as we pray the prayer Jesus has taught us...

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by 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.

Sharing of The Bread and Cup

Take a few moments to share Communion

Prayer After Communion

Sending of God's Word

CLOSING HYMN

Comfort, Comfort Now My People

#87

BENEDICTION

May God the creator bless you, May God the Son walk with you and may God the Holy Spirit fill your lives with love. Go in Peace, Amen.