



Westminster Presbyterian Church
Eugene, Oregon
“At Home” Worship
February 28, 2021

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)*

CALL TO WORSHIP

The journey of Lent

is a journey to examine our hearts.

The journey of faith

is a journey of trust, following God’s promises.

The journey of life

is a journey spending our lives for the sake of love.

OPENING HYMN

Lift High the Cross

#826

CALL TO CONFESSION

Trusting in God’s promise of salvation, let us confess our sin and repent.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess that we have not been sincere Christians. We claim to follow Jesus but have not taken his path of sacrificial love. We profess to be disciples, but we are not willing to bear the cost of discipleship. We affirm self-denial, but we indulge our desires and seek earthly gain. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for sincere repentance through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Hear the good news: God deems as righteous all who trust that Jesus has been raised from the dead for our salvation. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

The Word

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Holy Spirit, open our hearts to received your Word, reveal to us the good news, and enable us to trust in the promise of salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Old Testament Reading: Psalm 22:23-31

You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him. From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

New Testament Reading: Mark 8:31-38

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

ANTHEM

O Lord, My God, You Are My Refuge

Bach (arr. Hal Hopson)

SERMON

"The Way of Sacrificial Love"

Rev. David Ukropina

Over the years, I've watched a lot of movies, and a lot of different kinds of movies, including dramas, action movies, sci-fi moves, sports films, etc. Over the course of that time, some of the movies I've watched have ended up being violent, but it may surprise you that one of the most violent movies I ever saw was a religious film I watched while I was in seminary.

Marta and I both started seminary in 2003 and graduated in 2006, and it happened that in 2004, we both saw the movie *The Passion of the Christ* by Mel Gibson. I imagine that most of you either saw the film or at least heard about it, and just mentioning this movie brings up strong memories and reactions.

For those of you unfamiliar with the film, it covers roughly the final twelve hours of Jesus life, from his agony in the garden of Gethsemane to his death on the cross. It earned over \$600,000,000 worldwide, and created very divided opinions both from movie goers and movie critics.

In general, the evangelical community was very supportive of the film, but so were many mainstream critics. The film critic Roger Ebert gave the movie four out of four stars, and wrote "What Gibson has provided for me, for the first time in my life, is a visceral idea of what the Passion consisted of... This is not a sermon or a homily, but a visualization of the central event in the Christian religion. Take it or leave it."

In terms of historical accuracy, again, opinions were divided. Some praised the attempt at historical accuracy with the use of languages from the time. Others criticized Mel Gibson for filtering the film through his own worldview, with some commentators calling the movie anti-Semitic.

Other critics focused on the incredibly violent nature of the film. One critic called it the Jesus Chainsaw Massacre. Other critics pointed to the exclusion of any teachings or healings of Jesus. As Roger Ebert said, however, this was not the point. The point of the film it seemed was to show an incredibly violent portrayal of what was, in fact, an incredibly violent moment in history, the beating and execution of a man on a cross.

For myself and my own reaction, looking back seventeen years now, it was interesting that I saw the film during seminary. We even re-watched the film during an adjunct class Marta and I took on the Images of Jesus, which included portrayals of Jesus in art, books, and films over the years.

While some seemed to love the film and some seemed to hate it, I was somewhere in the middle. I can't deny that the film made a very intense impression on me, which I think it had on most others, whatever they thought of the film. At the time, I noted the many criticism and the praise of the film, but I tried to come to my own conclusions.

As I've mentioned before, I only became a Christian around the time I was 30 years old, so when I entered seminary at the age of 35 in 2003, I had only been a Christian for 5 years. While I had obviously seen and read other depictions of Good Friday and the crucifixion, the Passion of the Christ was the most vivid and realistic, in a gruesome sense, that I had ever seen.

And one of the things that it forced me to do was to really stop and think about what the suffering and death of Jesus really might have been like. However accurate or inaccurate the film was, something like that did happen in history. It also made me realize that in general, we don't like to pause too long on the actual agonizing, bloody death of Jesus.

And as I think about what lessons the film and indeed the event have for us, it's not that we should strive to be some kind of masochist or seek out punishment, as some followers do, but it should point us in the direction of self-sacrifice and love for others, even if they are faint echoes of the tremendous sacrifice Jesus went through for us.

Turning to Mark's gospel lectionary passage for this week, we have not a depiction of the crucifixion, but a passage that represents a turning point in the narrative. Up until now, the disciples have seen healings and heard teachings from Jesus, but now Jesus suddenly moves from healings and teachings to discipleship.

And what Jesus says most prominently in this passage is that if people wanted to follow him, they had to deny themselves and take up their cross. He also told them "quite openly" that he must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, priests and scribes, and be killed. His saying this caused such a strong response that Peter actually rebuked him.

I've mentioned this before, but its not a big surprise that Peter rebuked Jesus, even though this seems somewhat shocking to us. Peter's idea of the messiah, like most people of the time, was that the messiah would drive out the hated Romans and re-establish a political and physical kingdom, much like King David's, who was the political high point of Israel in history.

In many ways, Peter was blinded by his own preconceptions of what the messiah would come and do. But to try and follow along with Peter, it would be natural to question at the time how Jesus could accomplish anything if he was brutally killed. Remember that before the resurrection, death would have just meant death.

And yet we ourselves, living today, aren't all that different from Peter. Just focusing on 21st century North American culture, we tend to focus so much more on winning and power and worldly success than on sacrifice and "losing" and giving things up. This attitude pervades our culture, even in the churches.

People greatly prefer big, successful churches with more people, more power, more prestige, preferably with pastors who sell a lot of books. Meanwhile, we have Jesus, who keeps insisting that to understand

discipleship, we have to understand him, and to understand him, we have to understand sacrificial service.

I once heard details about a very popular and “successful” preacher who told his parishioners and others that you can’t succeed preaching the cross. People don’t want to hear that. They already have enough problems. When his interviewer asked him why he didn’t have any crosses in his church, he said, well it’s just so negative. One commentator mentioned, no wonder he’s popular.

The great theologian Martin Luther once made a distinction between the theology of glory and theology of the cross. He said theology of glory is what people want. People prefer accomplishment to suffering. They prefer glory to the cross. They prefer wisdom to folly. Peter certainly did. However, the theology of the cross is different.

The theology of the cross says that “church” is not Christendom. It says that faith is not certainty. It says that hope is not optimism. The theology of the cross says that love is not painless. Jesus tells us, and Peter, that to reject the suffering Messiah is to reject God’s plan. Instead, the disciples, and us, have to reject prestige and power, and serve God and others through sacrificial giving.

One of the famous titles of a book by William Penn, a Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania, was called “No Cross, No Crown.” I try to remember this title and this idea from time to time, especially during a season like Lent. It’s been said that although Lent leads to the resurrection, we can’t use Easter to escape Lent.

During all times and places, the cross is as central to understanding Jesus and discipleship as anything, but it’s especially interesting this year during the pandemic. Last week in her sermon, Marta tied together Lent and various elements of the pandemic, and those things are on my mind as well.

I’ve heard so many people in society complain about the discomfort of wearing a mask, even to the point of not wearing them. I’ve heard so many people complain about the deprivations we’ve all gone through, and surely, most everyone in our society has suffered over the last year.

What I haven’t heard as much of in American society is a focus on why we are doing this. I mentioned this in a sermon early on in the pandemic in March of last year, when I mentioned that the reason we are doing these sacrifices is for the sake of the most vulnerable, and those who can’t protect themselves.

I haven’t heard a whole lot of people in contemporary America talk about giving up some of our comforts as a sacrificial Christian discipline for the sake of others. As we are still in the pandemic and still in Lent, this seems like a natural connection for us to make, even if it’s not something that’s prominent in American culture these days.

I’m reminded of a longer passage in a book by Philip Yancey called *Where is God When it Hurts?* I’ve mentioned before that I’ve liked a lot of Yancey’s books, and this was one of his earlier ones. Yancey was an editor of Christianity Today, and he mentions in this passage that in his career as a journalist, he’s interviewed a lot of different people.

In general, he said that he could roughly divide them into two types of people: stars and servants. “The stars include NFL football greats, movie actors, music performers, famous authors, TV personalities, and the like. These are the people who dominate our magazines and our television programs. We fawn over them, poring over the minutiae of their lives.”

Yancey goes on to say that in his experience, these stars were “as miserable a group of people as I have ever met. Most have troubled or broken marriages... In a heavy irony, these larger-than-life heroes seem tormented by incurable self-doubt.”

In contrast, Yancey describes people he would describe as servants. These are people who are health care workers who volunteer to help the poor, or relief workers working overseas. Yancey writes, “I was prepared to honor and admire these servants, to hold them up as inspiring examples.

I was not, however, prepared to envy them. But as I now reflect on the two groups side by side, stars and servants, the servants clearly emerge as the favored ones, the graced ones. They work for low pay, long hours,

and no applause, wasting their talents and skills among the poor and uneducated. But somehow in the process of losing their lives they have found them. They have received the peace that is not of this world.”

Of course, not many of us completely fit this description of sacrificial servants, but in general, as a church, I do see us trying to travel in the direction of sacrificial service, and in the end, this actually ends up benefitting us. It may be a paradox, but in my experience, happiness recedes from those who pursue her, but true fulfillment is found, as Jesus taught us, through sacrificial service to God and to others. Amen.

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. Amen.

Responding to God's Word

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Trusting in God's promises, let us pray for the world and for our needs.

Loving God, Jesus your son called disciples to follow his way of sacrificial love. We pray for all pastors and teachers, that they lead by example, and take up their cross in service, and live for the sake of the gospel...

God, you reign over all the earth. We pray for peace among the nations, and integrity within governments, that your will be done on earth as in heaven...

You hear the cry of the poor. We pray for the poor and oppressed, that they may find deliverance, and for all those who take up their cross to serve the poor and ease human misery...

God, you know the needs of the afflicted and you hear their cries. For those who suffer in mind or body, may they find relief from suffering and be restored to wholeness...

Grant these prayers, Holy God, by your grace. Help us to seek out your kingdom for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the one 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.

Sending of God's Word

CLOSING HYMN

In the Cross of Christ I Glory

#213

BENEDICTION

And now may the Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other.

-Genesis, 31:49