



**Westminster Presbyterian Church**  
Eugene, Oregon  
“At Home” Worship  
May 2, 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**

We gather to praise and worship God,  
**the one who created us for love.**  
We gather to worship the true vine,  
**the one in whose love we abide.**  
Easter people, Christ is risen!  
**Christ is risen indeed!**

**OPENING HYMN**

*When Morning Gilds the Skies*

#667

**CALL TO CONFESSION**

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess to God and to one another our failure to love our neighbor.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**God of mercy, we confess that we have not borne the fruit of the Spirit. We have not loved others as you have loved us. We have denied the promises of baptism and cut ourselves off from you. Forgive us, restore us, that we may abide in your love and live out your mercy, for the sake of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

**ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

You have already been cleansed by the word that God has spoken to you. In baptism God claimed you and joined you to Christ, as branches to a vine. Believe in the promise given to you: in Jesus Christ you are forgiven.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O Lord, your Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Give us grace to receive your truth in faith and love, and strength to follow on the path you set before us; through Jesus Christ, Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

*New Testament Reading: 1 John 4:7-21*

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

*New Testament Reading: John 5:1-8*

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk."

ANTHEM

SERMON

"Abiding"

Rev. Marta Ukropina

Some homiletics, or preaching professors, warn seminary students about being too personal in the pulpit. The warning is meant to be a good one—to ensure that the preacher doesn't make the sermon about themselves or even worse make themselves the "hero" of their sermon. But, on the other hand, not being personal in the pulpit can make a preacher seem aloof or hard to relate to. I think most ministers that are serving congregations would agree that meeting somewhere in the middle is a good idea. Preachers are people, too, encountering the same daily struggles and hardships that all humanity is subject to. We have our good days and our bad, our ups and our downs, our joys and our sorrows. And of course, these things relate to our sermon writing and reflection. The key is to make sure that even in the midst of our lives, whatever may be occurring, we keep our eyes and ears heavenward and seek to preach the word of God. So, at the risk of being too personal, I begin this sermon today.

Within the span of a week, I lost two very near and dear people to my life, one to a horrific, quick battle with pancreatic cancer and the other to Covid. I am not sure how many of you know this about me, but my dad is from Poland—coming to the states in his 20s. All of my family on my father's side still live in his hometown in Poland and about 2 weeks ago we received word that several of them tested positive for coronavirus. Sadly, my grandmother, my *babcia*, who was in her 90's succumbed to this awful disease and died alone in a hospital specifically for covid patients. Due to distance, I only saw my grandmother a handful of times in my life, but

my memories are of a kind, loving woman who cared for her family deeply. She was a strong woman filled with faith for God—attending mass every day that she could. As a young girl, she was taken to a work camp during WWII and she raised a family in the midst of the stark realities of communism. She saw much in her life, but her faith was steadfast and her love for her family and her God was abundant.

The other loss was my voice teacher, mentor, and friend, Sandy. Sandy was only in her early 50's and she and her husband have a young son. By the time the cancer was found, it had spread and there was no stopping it. I studied voice with Sandy as a teenager and she and her husband traveled to Texas to attend and sing at David's and my wedding. Sandy not only trained me to be the singer that I am today, but she also was one of the kindest people you would ever meet. She was a fantastic teacher and personally she was always there for you and would take additional time outside of our lessons to check in. She mentored me and pushed me to grow both as a singer and as a person. And she, too, was a woman of deep faith. We also sang in the church choir together and everyone who met her knew of the deep love she had for God.

Both Babcia and Sandy abided in God which doesn't make their deaths any less painful for those who loved them, but it does remind us of the steadfast love of God and the hope of the resurrection. It reminds us that God's love transcends all space and time and is there with us from our first breath to our last and beyond in God's kingdom.

Some moments in our life are just like that—where we lose people we love suddenly and tragically. Or where it seems like everything is going wrong. There is that superstition of triple tragedies. We don't want to pick up the phone in fear that it is more bad news.

All of us have suffered losses during this pandemic. In fact, one could argue that collectively we are all grieving. Whether a loss of community, or livelihood, or meaningful work, or relationships, or the basic things we took for granted like kids going to school, or the ability to gather freely and do the things we love, or the ability to be together as a church. We have all lost something. And many of us have lost loved ones to death. Several beloved church members have died over the course of this past year and many of us have lost others in our lives. And with that we have lost the "normal" ways of saying goodbye or gathering together as a community to remember them and to give thanks to God for their life; to remember that death does NOT have the last word and that NOTHING can separate us from the love of God as found in Christ. Unfortunately, when we suffer losses, especially in a year like this, it is easy for us to feel cut off from our community or perhaps even from God. We may feel like the branches that have been pruned from the vine, gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. We feel isolated and alone, maybe even forgotten.

At the heart of both of our scripture readings today is love and relationship. Our faith, our hope, our trust is in God who wants to be in relationship with all of us, God's beloved creation. We are the branches given life by the vine-grower and sustained by the vine. We are to remain close to Jesus no matter what hardships may come, abiding in God's love. When we are too overcome ourselves, we can look to the interconnectedness of the vines, the community of faith to which we all belong. We are there supporting and holding each other up recognizing that we are all branches on the same vine tended to by an Almighty God that truly cares about each and every one of us.

The branches abide in the vine as we are to abide in Christ. Abiding in Christ sustains us through even the worst storms of life. In Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, he translates it this way: "Live in me, make your home in me as I do in you." Living in Christ, making a home in Christ, paints a picture of peace, love and security. Making a home in Christ gives us a shelter from the raging tempest of life's struggles, sorrows, and hardships.

Our closing hymn today is one of my favorites. It was written by Henry Francis Lyte, an Anglican minister. He wrote it sometime in the mid 1800s. So goes the story that Lyte composed the words to the hymn when he was visiting with a dying friend. As he sat with the dying man, he kept repeating "abide with me." After leaving, he wrote the hymn down and gave a copy to the family. Supposedly, the hymn was sung for the first time at Lyte's funeral, some 27 years later. The hymn has 8 verses, 3 have been omitted in our hymnal. I want to highlight one of the omitted verses:

Thou on my head in early youth didst smile,  
And though rebellious and perverse meanwhile,  
Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee.  
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.

Thou has not left me, oft as I left thee. That will preach. Sometimes we turn away from God, we get angry at God, we cry out to God, we turn our back and we hide. The truth is that God can take it and God does not leave us. Try as we might, we really cannot chop ourselves off of the vine. The vine-grower may come through and prune, cutting away those places of doubt, sorrow, and sin —throwing them away. But in so doing, the fruit begins to grow and with God’s care and love will bloom and flourish.

There are times in our lives where we need to just abide. We need to endure. We need to hold on. Ultimately we need to remain and just be in the presence of God remembering our place on the vine. Abiding in God immerses us in that deep love God has for all of us. Abiding means to love Christ and to allow ourselves to be loved by him. “God is love and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them” As we face hardships in this life and suffer losses that at times seem too great, abide in God, trust in God, remain in God’s presence fully knowing that God will never, ever forsake us. That trust, that belief, should then in turn push us to live lives of love bearing fruit for all the world to see. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH – The Apostles’ Creed

**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*Responding to God’s Word*

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD’S PRAYER

O God, we give you thanks for your Holy Spirit whose work at creation continues in us. Through Christ Jesus you have shown your love for this earth you have made. We pray that all the world may know your power and goodness.

Word of life, reveal the wonder of your world to all people. Show us anew what lives around us, over us, beneath us, within us. Enliven the church with your Spirit, that we may honor your earth with responsible care. Almighty God, uphold our sisters and brothers who endure disasters caused by weather, war, famine, sickness, or greed. Strengthen all who are in peril, especially those we name before you now in silence...

You are our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.

Giver of all good things, bring trust and sympathy to the nations of the world. Let peacemakers reign wherever there is conflict. Give wisdom to leaders and hope to the poor.

Good healer, we pray for all who are in need of comfort. Comfort those who mourn; uphold those who are sick, or holding vigil, or awaiting words of hope, especially those we name silently...

Trusting in your mercy, we commend to you all those we have named and those whose needs are known only to you, in the name of your Son, Christ our Lord who taught us to pray together saying...

**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

*Abide With Me*

#836

BENEDICTION

Abide in God and be at peace. Amen.