

THE SERVICE OF THE WORSHIP OF GOD
World Communion Sunday (October 4, 2020)
Transylvania Presbytery

Worship Leaders:

Rev. Dr. Lisa Culpepper
Mrs. Barbara Maxwell, pianist
Mrs. Mona Dukes, soloist and liturgist
Mrs. Lauren C. Cohn, liturgist
Rev. Dr. Kathy Riley, liturgist

With:

NYC Virtual Choir and Orchestra, Adam and Matt Podd, arrangers and Producers

Featuring... Grace Chorale of Brooklyn

<https://www.gracechorale.org/>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCyq-...>

First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn

<https://fpc.church/>

A portion of this liturgy was written by Matt Gaventa, the Pastor of Amherst Presbyterian Church in Amherst, Virginia, and the chaplain at Sweet Briar College.

WELCOME

Hello, my name is Lisa Culpepper, a minister member of Transylvania Presbytery. All are welcome to join us for the next few minutes of worship. You may light a candle if you wish, which symbolizes the light of Christ among us. Today is World Communion Sunday (World Communion Sunday originated by Rev. Hugh Thompson Kerr. Beloved pastor of Shadeyside Presbyterian church in Pittsburgh, PA in 1933. In Time this observance became gift to the global ecumenical church as a symbol of Christian unity and faith in Christ. Today you are invited to join brothers and sisters around the world at the Lord's Table. You may want to go ahead and gather some bread and something to drink in preparation for this time in our service.

How can I keep from singing?

*While though the tempest loudly roars,
I know the truth, it liveth.
And though the darkness 'round me close,
Songs in the night it giveth.
No storm can shake my inmost calm,
While to that rock I'm clinging.
Since love is lord of heaven and earth
How can I keep from singing?*

*I lift my eyes, the cloud grows thin
I see the blue above it
And day by day this pathway smooths,
Since first I learned to love it.
No storm can shake my inmost calm,
I hear its music ringing,
It sounds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?*

CALL TO CONFESSION

Lauren C. Cohn

When we confess our sins, we release the burdens that weigh heavy upon us; and we open our hearts to the reconciling and healing grace of God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lauren C. Cohn

Almighty God, mother of mercy, father of grace: You have called us to one table, but we have pursued our own course. You have promised us the abundance of all creation, but in our greed, and in our envy, the world goes without. You have promised us the bread of life itself, but in our pride, and in our arrogance, the world goes hungry. You have promised us the waters of peace and justice, but in our violence, and in our discord, the world goes thirsty. And now we are famished, too, Lord. Have mercy on us. Forgive us, again. Transform us, at this table, and for this table, and send us from this table as servants of your righteousness, by the power of your Son, our Lord. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Lisa Culpepper

Even when our cups run dry, God's grace overflows. Even when our plates are empty, God's generosity overflows. And even when our hearts feel barren, God's love overflows. Friends, you

have been called and claimed by the God of all things, and by the abundance of God's grace, and by the power of God's love, your sins have been forgiven. Go in peace. Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Lauren C. Cohn

Gracious God, as we open up your word this day, open up our hearts - that listening, we may hear; that hearing, we may believe; and that believing, we may obey your word to us. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.

FIRST LESSON

Matthew 21:33-46

Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes"?' Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.' When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

SECOND LESSON

Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall

labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

SERMON

A Song For the Road

Rev. Dr. Lisa Culpepper

I remember it like it was yesterday; in fact, it still makes my stomach quiver. Imagine being 12 years old, sitting at a sprawling conference table of 21 men. Their suits and ties spoke of serious professionalism. Sitting in a chair too big for my small frame, I felt the anxiety that comes with being outnumbered in a room full of church elders and their 21 pairs of piercing eyes. I was tense with knee knocking fear as I didn't know which of the 196 questions of the larger catechism I would be called upon to answer, but I felt certain it would include number 98, which reads, "Wherein is the moral law summarily comprehended?"..., and that examination was perhaps the first time I was called upon to recite and explain the 10 commandments... and probably the last time. This primal code of Judeo-Christian ethics (or BIG 10 as they are called) is not a topic generally discussed over coffee and donuts (unless, of course, it is a politicized conversation). The Big Ten...they are something that everybody knows, and yet everybody doesn't know. We know that they are the rule of moral living, however a recent survey revealed that more Americans can more readily recite the ingredients of a big mac than can name all 10 of these commandments. But even if we can't recite them verbatim and in consecutive order, we know the gist of them, that they teach us right from wrong; that they are a reminder of what a perfect world would look like and also a reminder of our continual failure to keep them. To be quite honest, if Exodus 20 were not included as a lectionary text for today, I probably would not have chosen to preach on this passage. At a time when we are praying to be delivered from the throes of a life threatening pandemic; desperate to be saved from wild fires that are ravaging in the West; a time in which another devastating hurricane has ravaged the gulf and racial tension has risen to a historic high, why preach on a set of ancient moral rules? Don't we need a message of comfort in the current state of affairs? Perhaps Exodus 20 is before us today because these 10 words or Decalogue are the trajectory that is needed to save us from the mess that we find ourselves in. When God selected and spoke these 10 words, they were a forward thrust to freedom and deliverance of once enslaved people. These were words that helped God's people understand who this unseen "I AM" really was; to know God's character of fidelity, love, life, abundance and truth. With these words, Israel was to discover how to live as children of God, *free* people... rather than slaves to Egypt's pharaoh. As a prelude to his list of 10, God made

sure his listening audience knew who it was who was speaking to them. “I am not the Egyptian god who enslaved you, I am the God who *delivered* you from slavery; I am the saving God, the freeing God. And these 10 words will lead you into a life of freedom. You are now free to worship me; rather than worship the idols that enslaved you. With these words, you know me by my name, a name worthy of honor and respect; with these words, I give you a Sabbath, rather than relentless enslavement to work, you are free to rest from work and trust in my provision for you. To you my children, I give parental guidance and wisdom that is worthy of your respect and gratitude; I give you life, not death; I give you truth, not deception; with these words there is love and fidelity in marriage, rather than hurt and betrayal; with these words you can give, not take, and remain content through my generous provision. This, my children is how you live in freedom!” These are 10 beautiful words, aren’t they? And yet, throughout Israel’s history, the nation proved over and over again that it was impossible to keep all the rules. In fact, the rules that were established to order the community, began to separate the community of God into those who kept the law perfectly and those who disobeyed the law. My friends, our failure to keep these 10 words comes as no surprise to God. God spoke these 10 words not as an end of his story, but as an introduction, leading to the One final Word, Jesus Christ. In Jesus, the word of God became flesh and blood so that we could see and experience rather than memorize and recite the faithful, life-giving character of God. And what Christ came to give is an invitation, not to *lower* the standard of the law but to put it all together in terms of relationships; relationships not based upon the rules of the law, but of love for God and neighbor. Christ has summed up those 10 words into one word, and that word is “love.” Because of COVID, many of our well established social rules and customs have been forced to change. Graduations, proms, even weddings have had to be postponed. Katherine was one of the many brides who had to call off her wedding. Unfortunately, she had made a hefty down payment to a fancy and expensive catering hall. She had paid \$5800.00 that upon cancelation only ¼ could only be refunded. So instead of losing the money, Katherine decided to keep the reservation and host the party anyway. Plans remained much the same, except for the guest list. Instead of her friends and business colleagues, she invited the homeless. Dressed in jeans and tee shirts, folks streamed in from shelters and half way houses. For many the meal was their only hot meal for the month. During the festivities, Katherine was approached by a guest fingering an unlighted cigarette. He began to explain what the party meant to him. “When you’re homeless,” he said, “it is hard to maintain some sense of pride and dignity. At something like this, you can. “You did a wonderful thing,” he said, “you made us feel like people again.” Kathleen may have broken the rules of etiquette, but she fulfilled the rule of love for God and love for people. Children of God, these are challenging times in which the church is seeking ways to fulfill our love for God and for people. We are called upon to change our patterns of worship, gathering physically together, studying and serving together. We are called upon to be a bit creative in our love for God and neighbor. I guess you could say that now we are the church, deployed. We are not in our buildings with each other, we are in the streets, and neighborhoods of our city our homes. How are we to be the family of God in our changing circumstances? How are we to

fulfill the law of love? This past Easter morning, a good friend of mine had an idea. Like many of us, she was heart-broken not to be at her church. On this high holy day, she missed the joy of fellowship and corporate worship, and her weekly commitment to accompany the congregation's singing on the piano. Yet, this adjustment to change sparked an idea in her heart and mind. Because she was not able to provide music at her church on this Easter morning, she searched for a new way to love God and neighbor. On that morning, she invited her neighbors to come sit on her lawn. They responded and came, one after another they came, finding a place on her lawn. When everyone was settled, Barbara flung open her window and began to play. On that Easter morning, worshipful music filled the air and the hearts of her neighbors. In a new way, the presence of the risen Christ was among them. Children of God, we are not in our church buildings with each other. We are the church deployed God has sent us out...into the streets, and neighborhoods of our city and our world. This where Christ is present...and has called to join him...and it only takes one word. Amen

HYMN (Glory to God, #737)

Barbara Maxwell

Lord Jesus You Shall Be My Song (vs. 1, 3)

*Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey;
I'll tell everybody about you wherever I go:
you alone are our life and our peace and our love.
Lord Jesus, you shall be my song as I journey.*

*As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant,
to carry your cross and to share all your burdens and tears.
For you saved me by giving your body and blood.
As long as I live, Jesus, make me your servant.*

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (adapted from the Belhar Confession)

Lisa Culpepper

We believe in one holy, universal Christian church,
the unity of the communion of saints of the entire human family.
And we believe that this unity of the people of God
must be manifest and active,
in that we love one another;
that we give ourselves willingly and joyfully to one another,
that we are share one baptism together,
that we eat of one bread and drink of one cup together
that we confess one name, one Lord, for one cause, with one hope,
which is the height and the breadth and the depth

and the love of Christ, forever and ever. Amen.

CALL FOR OFFERING

Kathy Riley

We approach the table today but we don't approach it alone. We approach it on this World Communion Sunday with Christians around the world, in congregations large and small, speaking every language and one language. Truly, God has blessed us with the rich, varied, and abundant gifts of creation. From God's abundance, let us also give abundantly.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Kathy Riley

Gracious God, you create more than we could ever hope to return. You share more than we could ever hope to deserve. And yet, we pray, accept these humble gifts. May they honor and glorify you in all creation, and may they empower us for the work of witness and service, for the sake of justice, and for the sake of peace, now and forever. Amen.

HYMN OF PREPARATION (Glory to God, #507)

Barbara Maxwell & Mona Dukes

As you listen to this hymn [or as you read its lyrics], gather your bread and drink if you have not done so, and prepare your heart to receive the sacrament.

Come to the Table of Grace

*Come to the table of grace. Come to the table of grace.
This is God's table; it's not. yours or mine.
Come to the table of grace.*

*Come to the table of peace. Come to the table of peace.
This is God's table; it's not. yours or mine.
Come to the table of peace.*

*Come to the table of love. Come to the table of love.
This is God's table; it's not. yours or mine.
Come to the table of love.*

*Come to the table of hope. Come to the table of hope.
This is God's table; it's not. yours or mine.
Come to the table of hope.*

Come to the table of joy. Come to the table of joy.

*This is God's table; it's not yours or mine.
Come to the table of joy.*

LORD'S SUPPER

Lisa Culpepper

This is the Lord's Table; today it is set with a variety of breads that represent the culture of Christians around the world, the peoples of the Middle East, Asia, Europe, South America and North America. This is a feast for the people of God. According to Luke's gospel, on the evening of his resurrection, Jesus blessed and broke bread with his disciples. But it wasn't until he broke that bread that they recognized him. They were at the table together. I pray that you will recognize the Lord, Jesus Christ, in a new way today at his table. That you would experience his grace just the way that you need it. On the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread, and he blessed it, and broke it, saying, "This is my body, which is broken for you. Every time you eat this bread, do this in remembrance of me." And then he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant, sealed in my blood for the forgiveness of sins. Every time you drink this, do so in remembrance of me." Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord, Jesus Christ, until he comes again. Would you pray with me, please?

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us, and upon these gifts of bread and wine, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ. By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, that we may be one with all who share this feast united in ministry in every place. As the bread is Christ's body for us, send us out to be the body of Christ in the world. Hear us now, as we pray, together, the prayer that you taught your disciples. **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.**

[Holds up bread and breaks it]

This is the body of Christ that was broken for the forgiveness of your sins.

[Holds up cup and pitcher and pours it]

And this is the blood of Christ that was shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

*At this time you are invited to share in the feast of communion,
knowing that your siblings in Christ across the presbytery and around the world
are sharing it with you.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SUPPER

Gracious God, we offer our thanks, for the whole communion of saint's witness to this feast, and for the ministry of churches around the world who gather with us today. By this broken bread may we each be restored for the work yet to come. By this shared cup may we each be claimed for the proclamation of your Kingdom. At this shared table may we be united as children of your promise, children of your word, dying and made new again, sent boldly together into the world as servants of your peace. Amen.

HYMN OF DEDICATION (Glory to God, #318)

Barbara Maxwell

In Christ There Is No East or West (vs. 1,3)

*In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.*

*Join hands, companions in the faith,
whate'er your race may be!
Who loves and serves the one in him,
throughout the whole wide earth.*

CHARGE AND BENEDICTION

Lisa Culpepper

You were called to this table. You were fed at this table. You were united at this table.

Now, you are sent from this table into all the world.

Go therefore into the world, with courage.

Set a place for all who hunger. Fill the cup of all who thirst.

And as you go, may the Spirit of power and love attend you,

may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ uphold you,

and may the great faithfulness of our God sustain you, now and forever.

Amen.

CHORAL RESPONSE

NYC Virtual Choir and Orchestra

How Can I keep from Singing (reprise)
(Arrangement by Adam & and Matt Podd)