

Sunday Devotion

May 24, 2020

*Find a quiet place by
yourself or with another and
come to God.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

Sing to the Lord a new song, a song of hope and rejoicing!
Praise God for wonderful acts of mercy and kindness!
God has remembered God's faithful ones.
God has poured blessing upon blessing upon us!
Praise the Lord, all the earth. Shout your praise!
Rejoice, for God is truly with us.

OPENING PRAYER

We, who so often take the wonders of creation for granted, welcome the opportunity to make a joyful noise before you, O God. We come today to worship and to praise you, glad that we live in this country filled with such diverse and beautiful examples of your creation. Yet, joyful noises are not easy for everyone to make, as we come from differing situations and lifestyles. Some are burdened down with the stresses of daily living and all that involves; some wearied from tasks of serving others; some worried over the state of the world and where that is all leading. Speak to us all, O God, in the stillness of this time and remind us of Jesus' willingness to take our burdens upon himself and to learn from him - to experience his gentleness and steadfast love for all. Jesus also offers us his joy so that our joy might be complete. Confident in these promises, we offer this time of worship to you, O God, praying that it may reflect our praise and thanksgiving for the gifts of creation and for all that Jesus has done for us. This we pray in his name. Amen.

HYMN Crown Him with Many Crowns



1 Crown him with man - y crowns, the Lamb up - on his throne; hark,
2 Crown him the Lord of love; be - hold his hands and side, rich
3 Crown him the Lord of peace, whose power a scep - ter sways from
4 Crown him the Lord of years, the po - ten - tate of time; cre -



how the heaven-ly an - them drowns all mu - sic but its own! A -
wounds, yet vi - si - ble a - bove, in beau - ty glo - ri - fied: no
pole to pole, that wars may cease, ab - sorbed in prayer and praise. His
a - tor of the rol - ling spheres, in - ef - fa - bly sub - lime. All



wake, my soul, and sing of him who died for thee, and
an - gel in the sky can ful - ly bear that sight, but
reign shall know no end; and round his pierc - ed feet fair
hail, Re - deem - er, hail! For thou hast died for me; thy



hail him as thy match-less King through all e - ter - ni - ty.
down - ward bends his burn - ing eye at mys - ter - ies so bright.
flowers of par - a - dise ex - tend their fra - grance ev - er sweet.
praise shall nev - er, nev - er fail through - out e - ter - ni - ty.

PRAYER OF BROKENESS

Holy God, we acknowledge that we are not what you have called us to be. We have not stood by our faith, shared our hope, or reached out with love. We have done unkind and shameful deeds, and we have left undone deeds that could have made a difference in the lives of those around us. We have failed to speak and act for peace and justice in our world. Have mercy upon our repentance. Forgive our sin and change our lives. We pray in the name of Jesus our Savior. Amen.

WORDS OF BLESSING

God has remembered God's steadfast love to all the people. We are healed and called to again be God's beloved children and witnesses. Receive that healing love and share the good news with all you meet, that God is love and in God there is no darkness or fear because Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON Genesis 9:8-15

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹²God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON John 15:9-17

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

MEDITATION

Do you like to hear the sound of rain? Recently there has been a new device that gives you 15 seconds of peace by listening to and watching rain. It is becoming wildly popular as people are seeking peace in the midst of currently very unsettled lives. Even a 15 second escape is enough to reduce the heebie-jeebies. Many can use some relief from distress right now.

There is something soothing about the sound of rain under most circumstances. Not so much for the people who live in Midland Michigan and not so much for those living during the time of Noah.

If I were to ask you to tell me about the story in Genesis we just heard which, is commonly called “Noah and the Ark,” you would probably respond by saying, “Oh yes, I know that story. It's all about how Noah built the ark, the animals came onboard two by two and it rained for 40 days and night.” That is the simplified version we tell our children. But there is more to this familiar story that can help us apply some meaning to the world we are currently living in especially on this Memorial Day weekend.

The story of Noah and the Ark actually begins in the first chapter of Genesis when God created the world in all its beauty and called it good. God then created humans to act as stewards of both creation and its relationships telling those caretakers to maintain creation with its unity and shalom – peace.

Generations come and go by the time we reach Genesis 6 when God looked upon the earth to review the progress. God was appalled by the state of the earth. It was corrupt and full of violence because of the people and their egotistical behavior. This was far from God's original design. So God decided to wash humankind right out of God's proverbial hair and do a reboot to start over. God then chose Noah and his family to act as the new Adam in the new 2.0 improved earth. After the Ark was built, all creation minus humans – except for Noah and family – were loaded onto the boat. And then it rained and rained and rained. Forty days and nights worth, enough for God to wash the world of its filthy corruption and begin anew.

When the flood was over, God addressed the family. They were reminded of God's ways. God told them that they may take the life of animals, but human life was sacred. The Creator of Life then promised never again to destroy life as he had just done, no matter how sinfully awful people might become.

To seal this promise, God said, "I will set my bow in the cloud." Some Bible versions use the word "rainbow," but the original Hebrew word is "bow" referring to a weapon, as in bow and arrow. The Hebrews believed that a rainbow was literally God's bow, a divine weapon. With it God could shoot lightning arrows. Such was the belief in the Ancient Near East of the manner of gods.

Now the weapon was set aside, laid down, as God's wrath has died down. Now the bow was permanently set in the cloud where it could not be used. This story we call "Noah's Ark" is actually a story we could call, "God Makes a Promise for a New and Improved World."

I remind you of this ancient story today because it was the vision that prompted the beginnings of Memorial Day observances. In Columbus Mississippi on April 26, 1866, the Confederate women put flowers on both the Confederate and the Union soldiers' graves. In that act, those women, like God, took a good look at the world and their former lives. They remembered the pain, the violence, the disunity of the world as they decorated their loved ones' and others' graves. They made a promise then and there for a new and improved world where hatred and violence would cease. They, too, had a sign of their promise – flowers on the graves of former enemies.

Here we are, 154 years later, and we find ourselves preparing to celebrate "Memorial Day." I dare say that this year's celebration will look like no other. There won't be the same large crowd picnic gatherings, parades, or the Indianapolis 500 car race. O, Home Depot may be crowded with folks wanting to get supplies for those home-improvement projects, but by my observations that won't be much different than any other day we have had lately. There may still be bargain shoppers heading out to "Box Stores" looking for Memorial Day sales. What else are you going to do? Is it me, or have there been less sale ads this year? I don't miss them, but I do miss what they represent. Not the "stuff," just the "life as usual."

Although different, it will still be a day for remembering – remembering those whose lives were lost, those who fought, those who made a promise with their lives for a new and improved world. On this Memorial Day, after we have thought about the "why" of this day and remembered the promise for a new and improved world, we will take a look around and see where we are. The news will be reported, as it is every day. You can count on there being stories about virtual celebrations and honoring of heroes by very different means. No doubt the coronavirus will take center stage with at least one story of large gatherings that violated the CDC guidelines and social distancing orders.

I wonder if there will be any news story similar to the one that was reported on back in 1988. So long ago and yet it has haunted a woman by the name of Joanna Adams. She recalled, "People were fighting. Some wore gas masks; others wore masks of a different sort. Faces were drawn and distorted with rage. Both kinds of masks were frightening. It was a noisy, smoky scene. You could see bodies curled up on the sidewalk along the street, like babies taking an afternoon nap, as if they were sleeping through the melee going on around them without a care. But they were not sleeping, of course. Had they been tear-gassed? Were they wounded? Who could tell? It looked as if though their bodies had instinctively assumed the position of the womb – when their mothers had, in gentle nights before their birth, dreamed great dreams for the child that was to be born and who was now lying on the sidewalk. Nearby was a red umbrella. I saw it lying there. I saw the red umbrella while I salted the water in a pot in which I was going to cook rice on the stove in our house on Vidal Blvd., before supper. I saw it on the evening news, the red umbrella that had been left lying in the street in Seoul, South

Korea, on a day when there were riots, in Seoul. As I saw the red umbrella out of the corner of my eye, I wondered to myself, “Who left home this morning not worrying about a riot, but wondering whether or not it would rain: a child on her way to school? A mother on her way to the library, perhaps to return a book? A grandfather on his way to the grocery store? The news correspondent reporting from Seoul didn’t mention the red umbrella that was lying in the street. I’m sure he didn’t see it. He spoke only of the riot itself...and there was a commercial and I got supper on the table, and that was that.”

It’s amazing, isn’t it, that we have gotten to the point where we cook our supper, eat, drink iced tea, while television, the internet, radio and, yes, newspapers tell us about all matter of awful things. Yes, we are glued for a while. Personally, I can handle about 18 minutes of news. That’s how long it takes in the morning to get to the weather report and after that, I’m done. I read the headline news from the New York Times online app. But still, I watch, sometimes with tears streaming down my face, witnessing scenes of horror and all sorts of violence. But then, life goes on. The emotions subside until the next story that will grip me for a moment until it fades as well.

That ability to let go is a defense mechanism, I will grant you. But, maybe on this Memorial Day weekend we should hold on to the pain of the world for just a little while and remember those men and women with their flowers and remember our own men and women who sacrificed for peace. This weekend isn’t just about remembering, however, it is also about honoring our heroes. This year, I think we should also include our expanded definition of that category. Yes, let us remember and honor our military, those heroes who put aside their own welfare, even their own lives for the sake of the wellbeing of others. But, this year, this extraordinary year, let’s also include others who have made similar sacrifices on the battlefield of COVID-19. Let’s remember and honor those who have cast off their own weariness, fatigue, and fear to face possible death to both care and provide for others. You know the list – doctors and nurses, orderlies, healthcare providers in medical deserts, ambulance drivers, police and firefighters, those who grow, prepare, sell and deliver food, clean the workplaces and provide transportation and delivery of essential products, bankers and gas station attendants, scientists working long grueling hours to find a vaccine.

How can we remember and honor all of these. Maybe we don’t discount their efforts by our awful behavior but instead join with them to work toward a new and improved world, the harmonious, peaceful world that God promised where not only is God’s bow permanently set in the cloud, but our own bows and weapons of hostility and division, whatever they might be, are placed aside. Let us be peacemakers. Even as I say this, we need to understand what that means. Peace is not what we make. If it were up to us, more often than not, we’d make war; we make divisions among people, pointing our fingers, playing the blame game, placing value only on those we identify as worthy and usually that means those in our own tribe who look and act just like us.

We create hostility. God creates peace and indeed has already made it. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus saying that “Jesus is our peace.” Jesus broke down the dividing walls of hostility. This has been won for us in his atoning death and resurrection. Now we, followers of Jesus, need to live it. We need to be a fellowship, which actually realizes the peace and justice of Jesus Christ.

What would that look like? Maybe it starts with love, the kind of love Jesus commanded from his followers when he said on the night before his death, “A new commandment I give to you, that you are to love one another. This kind of love is agape love which is selfless love, putting the welfare and needs of others above your own, not as a slave would do by force, but as a friend who freely chooses. This kind of love isn’t always easy, but this kind of love loves even when it is hard to do so.

So this Memorial Day weekend, how can we remember and honor those we identify as “heroes?” I’d like to suggest that we begin by not devaluing their sacrifice by committing the very offenses they fought against. As they sought to insure a better and harmonious world of freedom and peace, let us do the same. When frustrations about our situation including restrictions mount how about channeling that into overwhelming kindness even if we don’t get it in return? You’ve heard the slogan, “We’re in this together.” Well, how about we get out of our self-centered bubble and really be in this together through sharing, allowing someone else to go first, and for heaven’s sake, wearing your mask? How about putting a lid on anger by listening to the needs and concerns of others? And when we have been offended by another, how about forgiveness instead of

retaliation? How about seeing different as just that and not as “less than?” When we don’t love our neighbor, when we harm in any way others, we discount our heroes, our soldiers, our essential workers, even Jesus and the new and improved world they have gave their lives for, past and present.

This weekend, as you engage in your holiday festivities, take time to engage in remembering and honoring. Reflect on the world today. Pray for our world. Think about how you will be a part of the fellowship that is to reflect peace to a world filled with hostility? Like the bow in the cloud and the flowers on the graves, may the cross of Christ be your sign that will proclaim to the world a new understanding. Amen.

PRAYER

Almighty God, you are our strength and our shield. We give you thanks for the men and women of our armed forces, past and present, and especially for those who have died while serving. May their sacrifices serve the cause of peace, and may our nation be ever grateful for their service. With your wisdom and strength guide our military's leaders, and give to all people a desire for justice and peace.

We pray for the different “battles” in which we find ourselves. We pray for the battle against COVID-19; for those warriors who are doctors and nurses fighting to restore health to those who have been stricken and for the scientists who seek to find a cure. We pray for our leaders who are making decisions that provide for the needs of those they serve including physical, financial and emotional needs.

We pray for other health battles where people bodies are stricken with other illnesses.

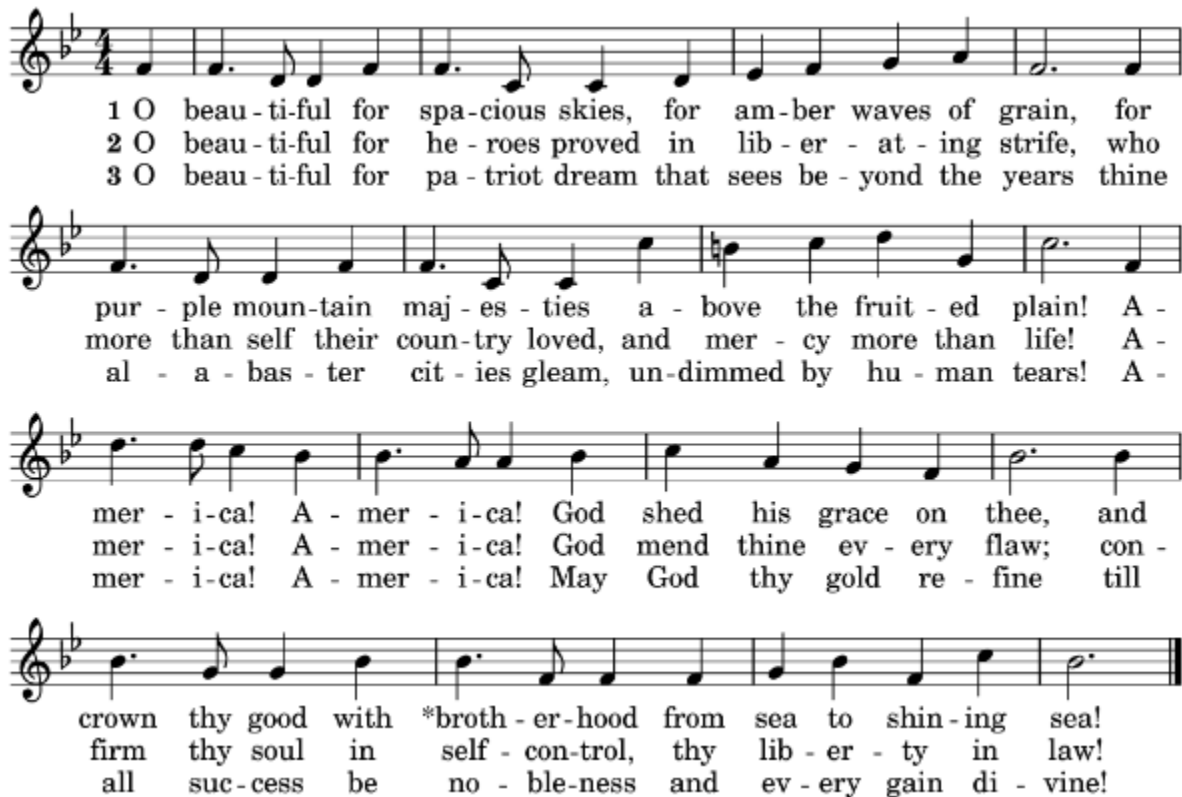
We pray for battles being waged in people’s homes, parents struggling with their children, each other and family members.

We pray for the battles against hunger...addiction...mental illness...poverty.

Help all these, we pray, who need your peace, your shalom. Help us to be your peacemakers. Give us this day the strength and courage to transform the compassion of our hearts into acts of peace, mercy, and justice.

Empower us to live out the caring presence of the merciful and generous persons we claim to be. We ask all this in the name of Jesus who came among us to show us the way. Amen.

HYMN America the Beautiful



1 O beau-ti-ful for spa-cious skies, for am-ber waves of grain, for
2 O beau-ti-ful for he-ros proved in lib-er-at-ing strife, who
3 O beau-ti-ful for pa-triot dream that sees be-yond the years thine
pur-ple moun-tain maj-es-ties a-bove the fruit-ed plain! A-
more than self their coun-try loved, and mer-cy more than life! A-
al-a-bas-ter cit-ies gleam, un-dimmed by hu-man tears! A-
mer-i-ca! A-mer-i-ca! God shed his grace on thee, and
mer-i-ca! A-mer-i-ca! God mend thine ev-ery flaw; con-
mer-i-ca! A-mer-i-ca! May God thy gold re-fine till
crown thy good with *broth-er-hood from sea to shin-ing sea!
firm thy soul in self-con-trol, thy lib-er-ty in law!
all suc-cess be no-ble-ness and ev-ery gain di-vine!

BENEDICTION based on Ephesians 4:1-6

I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

With all humility and gentleness,

with patience, bearing with one another in love;

make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one Spirit,

just as you were called to be the one hope of your calling,

one Lord,

one faith,

one baptism,

one God and Father of all,

who is above all and through all and in all.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, be with you and remain with you
now and forever. Amen.