

Sunday Devotion

June 7, 2020

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

CALL TO WORSHIP

We gather to worship God,
 who creates us and loves us;
 who gifts us with diversity and makes us for community;
 who gives Jesus Christ to show us how to live;
 who inspires children, youth, young adults, and people of all ages,
 to seek justice, share power, and live together in love and equality;
 who invites us to join the struggle for wholeness and wellbeing for all,
 and whose presence, grace, and love sustain us in our living.

We gather to worship God.
 To God be all glory, honor, and praise!

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, we come this morning seeking to abide in your presence. Open our minds to your spirit of wisdom, that we may know how to live as your people. Open our hearts to your spirit of truth, that we may love all your people with a love that speaks of justice, kindness, and radical grace. May this time of worship be authentic and pleasing to you. Amen.

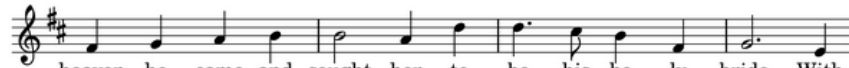
HYMN The Church's One Foundation



1 The chur-ch's one foun-da-tion is Je - sus Christ her Lord. She
 2 E - lect from ev - ery na-tion, yet one o'er all the earth, her
 3 Though with a scorn-ful won-der this world sees her op-pressed, by
 4 Mid toil and trib - u - la-tion, and tu - mult of her war, she
 5 Yet she on earth has un - ion with God, the Three in One, and



is his new cre - a - tion by wa - ter and the word. From
 char - ter of sal - va - tion: one Lord, one faith, one birth. One
 schis - ms rent a - sun - der, by her - e - sies dis - tressed, yet
 waits the con - sum - ma - tion of peace for - ev - er - more: till
 mys - tic sweet com - mu - nion with those whose rest is won: O



heaven he came and sought her to be his ho - ly bride. With
 ho - ly name she bless - es, par - takes one ho - ly food, and
 saints their watch are keep - ing; their cry goes up: "How long?" And
 with the vi - sion glo - rious her long - ing eyes are blest, and
 hap - py ones and ho - ly! Lord, give us grace that we, like



his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.
 to one hope she press - es, with ev - ery grace en - dued.
 soon the night of weep - ing shall be the morn of song.
 the great church vic - to - rious shall be the church at rest.
 them, the meek and low - ly, may live e - ter - nal - ly.

PRAYER OF BROKENESS

Far too often, O God, we desire to look wise in the eyes of the world. We have not spoken truth with our hearts. We have said and done hurtful things to our friends. We have forgotten our true identity, wandering into ways that are not yours. We have lost the path of true worship, focusing on form and words rather than deeds. We have forgotten what true discipleship is. And because of this, you have a quarrel with us. Forgive us and help us live into becoming the people you have created and called us to be: people of justice and love and truth and humility, and yes, even foolishness. May we be fools for Christ, embracing our true identity, even in the face of the world's scorn and derision.

WORDS OF BLESSING

God has called us and blesses us when we live God's ways and not the world's. God's love embraces us even when we fall short of what God desires for our lives and actions. Know that the God of blessing loves and forgives us with a fierce tenderness. And in so knowing, may our lives and souls be transformed because Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Micah 6:1-8

Hear what the Lord says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

² Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord,
and you enduring foundations of the earth;
for the Lord has a controversy with his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

³ "O my people, what have I done to you?
In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

⁴ For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

⁵ O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord."

⁶ "With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON Matthew 25:31-46

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was

thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?’³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?’³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family you did it to me.’⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels;⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink,⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

MEDITATION

She was scared. “Keep your head down,” she thought to herself. “Don’t look around. Just keep walking.” It was only three miles between her house and her destination, but it seemed more like three hundred. Better for her to make this trek than the other way around. Her mom wouldn’t want this visitor. Was it fear? She had to admit, that probably wasn’t the case. More like shame although she really had nothing to feel shameful about.

Why did that English teacher have to make that assignment? Each student had to pair up with another to create a presentation on the book the class just read. She was in the gifted class. There were only two others in the class that looked like her. That’s a higher number than was usually the case. Usually she was the single chocolate chip in the Tollhouse cookie. Everyone was to choose their own partner – one other, not two. Of course the other two “chips” were boys and they would stick together. Who to choose? Who would choose her?

Most of her classmates didn’t even talk to her. That’s ok. She didn’t want to talk to them, either. There’s that girl who sits in front of her in class. Seats were assigned alphabetically so she didn’t have a choice. The girl in front didn’t have to talk to her, but she did. They were lab partners in biology. All things combined, it didn’t take much thought for the two of them to partner up. But go to her house? Walk through that neighborhood? They each lived on opposite sides of the high school and the regions couldn’t be more different. One was middle class and the other was much further down on the economic spectrum. Both were homogenous but at opposite ends of the color wheel.

Relief came when she entered my house. She knew she was safe there. Yes, that’s right. I was the partner and the year was 1972. The racial tension in the city of Pittsburgh was still very high. I didn’t know how Validia, my classmate, my very dear friend, felt coming to my house. My mom and I drove her home. She was reluctant at first to accept the offer but either because she didn’t want to go through the stress of the three mile hike back through my neighborhood or because it was the end of the day and she was tired, she finally agreed. It was the first and only time I saw where she lived. I never knew how she felt coming to my house that day until many years later when she told me. I was shocked because I never thought of my neighborhood as unsafe. At that time we never locked our doors. I was known to walk around with another friend from down the street in the middle of a summer night without any fear. Validia felt danger walking there in the afternoon.

When I first thought about telling you this story, I was afraid I would come across as some “better-than” person because I wasn’t. I vividly remember a conversation Validia and I had when she asked me if I would consider dating a member of the high school basketball team who was black. Now Validia was dating someone who was white and not without raising eyebrows. Of course, openly kissing in the school hallway didn’t help. When she asked, she told me she would understand if I said no. As much as I wished I had her

courage, I didn't and I have felt guilty about it ever since. I never did find out who the boy was. It didn't matter. What did matter was that I felt I let her down.

That was 1972. Times have changed? Well, obviously, not really. Years have passed, but the racism that existed back then still exists today. For months now we have been talking about nothing but the coronavirus pandemic. How tragic that what has taken its place has been the exposure of a different pandemic - racism.

Racism is not new. It has existed throughout the ages. It existed when Jesus walked this earth. Citizens of Nazareth and Samaria, and every Gentile were all looked down upon by the Jews. Romans treated everyone who wasn't Roman as inferior and of no real value.

It was into that world that the Son of God entered and he addressed discrimination head on. Through his life and teachings, Jesus demonstrated that God isn't about separation, but inclusion and unity. God wasn't and isn't for one group and not another. Jesus made it possible for anyone to be included in the people and promises of God. Jesus, a Nazarene, ate with sinners, healed Jewish lepers and Roman soldier's children. Jesus offered living water to a Samaritan woman and restoration to a tax collector. Jesus showed that not only can something good come out of Nazareth but that good comes out of and is everywhere. For God so loved the WORLD that he gave his only Son. That good news doesn't just mean that we're brought near to God. It also means we're brought near to the people we once considered so different from ourselves. *God isn't about separation but about inclusion.*

All the way back in the beginning scripture tells us that God made humankind – male and female – *in God's image*. In the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy 10:18-19, Moses tells the Israelites as they were about to enter a foreign country where people would look, speak and act different than themselves, “The Lord defends the rights of orphans and widows. He cares for foreigners and gives them food and clothing. And YOU should also care for them, because you were foreigners in Egypt.”

Paul states in his letter to the Galatians 3:28 that through Christ “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. God is a reconciling God. The Gospel is, at its core, a message of reconciliation through love.

Fast forward one year from the visit Validia made to my house. I was on a high school retreat. The theme of that retreat was “God is love.” We spent all day Saturday studying scripture, listening to stories and watching movies with that theme. I remember none of it – just that central message, God is love.

That night was free time. Being the immature teens that we were, we flirted with one another by the boys playing practical jokes on the girls and the girls retaliating with practical jokes played on the boys. It got out of hand and we ended up very angry with one another, arguing loudly saying very hurtful things. Our youth leader intervened. Furious and fed up, he started walking out of the camp and back to town, but then he stopped, turned around, came back and sat us down. After reading us the riot act, he said that he came back because he remembered Jesus telling his followers that they are to forgive each other 70X7 times and that he had to do the same. So he forgave us and now we had to do likewise with each other. There were tearful apologies and hugs.

After this all died down, I went for a walk by myself to consider all these things – the forgiveness and, more importantly, the love that is behind that forgiveness – God's love that is bigger than all of our anger and hate, that is reconciling and accepting of even us hormonal immature teenagers – and...me. Me, the girl who was just as messed up and guilty as the rest. Me, the girl who was always told in subtle ways that I wasn't as good as everyone else – my clothes weren't as nice; my house was poorly kept; my parents weren't highly regarded in the community. But in the eyes of God, none of that mattered. I was created in the image of God. Jesus died for me. Jesus loves me. Jesus forgives me. Jesus is good to me. Me, and the whole pile of other “me's.”

With that revelation, I felt the Spirit lay upon me a call, an urgency, to tell the whole world just how great this loving God is – not just for me, but for everyone. For God so loved the world. I'm in that world God

loves, so are you and so is everyone. As Paul said to the Corinthians, “Some of us are Jews, and others are Gentiles. Some of us are slaves, and others are free.” Some of us have lighter skin and others darker. Some of us live on the left side of Peabody High School, others on the right. Some of us have low wage paying jobs, others of us earn six figures. Does God see color? Does God see differences? You bet God does. But what God doesn’t see is “better than” or “lesser than.” All of us are loved just the same. No perceived differences can ever change that.

So why do we see differently than God? Jesus said we are to love one another – not some, not this one but not that one. This is the vision and plan for God’s kingdom. It always was and it always will be. This is the purpose God is working out.

John’s first letter 4:21 states, “We love because God loved us first. But if we say we love God and don’t love each other, we are liars. We cannot see God. So how can we love God, if we don’t love the people we can see? The commandment that God has given us is: ‘Love God and love each other!’”

This is God’s message to me, to you, to Validia, to the protestors around this country and around this world as well as to our leaders. So how do we love? What does the Lord require of us? The Old Testament prophet Micah sums it up in one verse “What does the Lord require of you? Seek justice; love kindness; walk humbly with your God.”

Seek justice. Love kindness. Walk humbly with God. Earlier this week, this country was a powder keg as a result of the death of George Floyd. Truth is, it’s been a powder keg for some time. Things seemed to calm down after the turbulent 50s and 60s, but racism didn’t go away. It just wasn’t headline news. With the killing due to racism that has been in the news for a bunch of years now, it’s come out in the open again. Oh we’ve ignored it. But eight minutes and forty-six seconds staring us in the face is hard to ignore. Now we can’t help but look at ourselves and I suggest we take an honest look and see just how well we are measuring up to what the Bible actually teaches us.

Diane Moffett, President and Executive Director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency said, ““I know that many of you are angry and frustrated. I feel that way, too. It is a righteous and holy anger that sees injustice and knows that it is wrong. I invite us to let our righteous anger fuel our commitment to be faithful witnesses to Jesus Christ, who loved the world and gave his life in serving others. I invite us to ‘get in where we fit in’ in our communities and do what we can to help our nation heal. I invite us to make sure we vote in this year’s election. And remember: local elections are just as important as the presidential election. It is the mayor, police chief and politicians who help create the vision of the beloved community in your city or not. Church, it is time to be Matthew 25 people and let the cry of Amos roar from our pulpits and pour into our streets: ‘Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream’ (Amos 5:24).”

PRAYER

Compassionate God, we pray for vulnerable people all over this world, people without power who live in places of terror and violence, fear and oppression. Protect them, God. We feel so powerless ourselves to help them. Encourage and empower us to work for peace and freedom from fear in our own contexts.

God of grace, we pray for those whose lives have been turned upside down by various disasters: tornados, floods, fire and drought-driven famine. Bring courage and hope to them. Through their pain, may they remain connected to you in prayer.

We pray for those who say there is no God. May we through the living of our own lives demonstrate the joy and peace of a Spirit-centered existence.

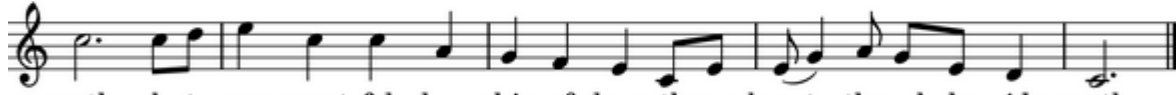
God of community, we pray for our own congregation. May we be a source of hope for our neighborhood. Help us to discern needs and work to fulfill them. Strengthen and unify our congregation and show us how we can be the disciples you envision us to be. Return the sick to health and well-being and relieve the suffering of those who have lost loved ones, are unable to find meaningful employment and fear the challenges of old age.

Guide us, Great Shepherd, into your paths of right relationships. In Jesus' name we pray; Amen.

HYMN



1 In Christ there is no east or west, in him no south or
2 In Christ shall true hearts ev - ery - where their high com - mu - nion
3 Join hands, dis - ci - ples of the faith, what - e'er your race may
4 In Christ now meet both east and west; in him meet south and



north, but one great fel - low - ship of love through - out the whole wide earth.
find; his ser - vice is the gold - en cord close - bind - ing hu - man - kind.
be. All chil - dren of the liv - ing God are sure - ly kin to me.
north. All Christ - ly souls are one in him through - out the whole wide earth.

BENEDICTION

Created and called to be faithful stewards, we are sent forth by our God.

Take all that is good to places of brokenness, all that is beautiful to those who live in despair.

Called and commissioned to be faithful disciples, we are sent forth by Jesus to every place he would lead us, to every person who will bless us.

Called and filled with the very breath of peace, we are sent forth by the Spirit, God's grace.

Join the Spirit in bring life where there is fear, offer love where hate seeks to take hold.

And may the peace of Creator's imagination, the peace of the Savior's grace's the peace of the Spirit's hope, and the deep, deep peace of God in Community, Holy in One, be with you this day and for always. Amen.