



October 15, 2020

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Are you like me in that you are tired of the politics, tired of the pandemic, tired of the violence, tired of the hate, tired of the worries and just plain tired? Have you ever wondered if God is tired of it all as well? I mean, God sent us Jesus and showed us by his own actions about love, tolerance, mercy, justice, forgiveness and hope, yet, we still don't seem to get it. Jesus taught us what is important and yet we still hold on to those things Jesus said we are to let go.

I just heard a documentary that stated there are an estimated 40 million Habitable planets just in our Milky Way galaxy. With all the mess

With all the mess going on here, do you wonder if God has thrown up God's holy hands and decided to give more attention to one of these?

Repeatedly scripture tells us that God may get frustrated, even angry with us, but God's love is steadfast and that God will never ever leave us. That is the theme of this week's worship service. If you are able, please join us on Sunday for worship at 10:00 either in person at our outdoor service or in your own home by using Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/127591875> Meeting ID: 127 591 875 or by phone: 301-715-8592 or 253-215-8782.

Even during this pandemic, there are things going on at the church. Please note the announcements below.

May God bless you and keep you.

Pastor Su



Sunday Worship

October 18, 2020

*Draw near to God
for God is waiting for you.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

The earth has its kings, but God is ruler of all.

Praise God above all, the giver of life!

The mountains may tremble, the oceans may roar,

but God's presence is more powerful than the earth itself.

Come into God's presence, for God is among us now.

O God, show us your glory; we seek your ways.

Come to the Rock, the God of life, for God is present now.

OPENING PRAYER

Mighty God, you spoke to your people in the pillar of cloud as they walked together in the wilderness.

Speak to us through your Word today that we may hear you calling us out of the wilderness places in our lives and into new places you have promised to show us. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

HYMN #385 All People That on Earth Do Dwell

1. All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;
him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell. Come ye before him and rejoice.

2. Know that the Lord is God indeed; without our aid he did us make;
we are his folk; he doth us feed, and for his sheep he doth us take.

3. O enter then his gates with praise; approach with joy his courts unto;
praise, laud, and bless his name always, for it is seemly so to do.

CALL TO CONFESSION

This is a moment given by God to confess our sins against each other, all that God has created, and God. Let us take this moment to account for the ways in which we have not embodied what it means to be created in the image of God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of mercy, we place our trust in tangible things—things we can see and touch—and question whether you are really there. Forgive us, Holy One, when we fail to recognize that you are always nearby, patiently waiting for us to recognize your presence and your glory. Help us when we lose our way, and forgive us when we forget to whom we truly belong. Lover of justice, open our eyes to see you; open our ears to hear you; open our hearts to love you; and open our hands to serve you. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

When we cry to God, looking for favor in God's sight, God answers: "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." In the power of the Spirit and in the name of Jesus, we are forgiven! We will rest in God's mercy because Jesus died for me. Jesus forgives me. Jesus loves me. Jesus is good to me. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON 1 Timothy 4:3-18 *from The Message*

³⁻⁵ You're going to find that there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food—catchy opinions that tickle their fancy. They'll turn their backs on truth and chase mirages. But *you*—keep your eye on what you're doing; accept the hard times along with the good; keep the Message alive; do a thorough job as God's servant.

⁶⁻⁸ You take over. I'm about to die, my life an offering on God's altar. This is the only race worth running. I've run hard right to the finish, believed all the way. All that's left now is the shouting—God's applause! Depend on it, he's an honest judge. He'll do right not only by me, but by everyone eager for his coming.

⁹⁻¹³ Get here as fast as you can. Demas, chasing fads, went off to Thessalonica and left me here. Crescens is in Galatia province, Titus in Dalmatia. Luke is the only one here with me. Bring Mark with you; he'll be my right-hand man since I'm sending Tychicus to Ephesus. Bring the winter coat I left in Troas with Carpus; also the books and parchment notebooks.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ Watch out for Alexander the coppersmith. Fiercely opposed to our Message, he caused no end of trouble. God will give him what he's got coming.

¹⁶⁻¹⁸ At my preliminary hearing no one stood by me. They all ran like scared rabbits. But it doesn't matter—the Master stood by me and helped me spread the Message loud and clear to those who had never heard it. I was snatched from the jaws of the lion! God's looking after me, keeping me safe in the kingdom of heaven. All praise to him, praise forever! Oh, yes!

HYMN #824 Near to the Heart of God

1. There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God,
a place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.

Refrain: O Jesus, blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God,
hold us, who wait before thee, near to the heart of God.

2. There is a place of comfort sweet, near to the heart of God,
a place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God. (*Refrain*)

3. There is a place of full release, near to the heart of God,
a place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God. (*Refrain*)

SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON Exodus 33:12-23 *from The Message*

¹²⁻¹³ Moses said to God, "Look, you tell me, 'Lead this people,' but you don't let me know whom you're going to send with me. You tell me, 'I know you well and you are special to me.' If I am so special to you, let me in on your plans. That way, I will continue being special to you. Don't forget, this is *your* people, your responsibility."

¹⁴ God said, "My presence will go with you. I'll see the journey to the end."

¹⁵⁻¹⁶ Moses said, "If your presence doesn't take the lead here, call this trip off right now. How else will it be known that you're with me in this, with me and your people? Are you traveling with us or not? How else will we know that we're special, I and your people, among all other people on this planet Earth?"

¹⁷ God said to Moses: "All right. Just as you say; this also I will do, for I know you well and you are special to me. I know you by name."

¹⁸ Moses said, "Please. Let me see your Glory."

¹⁹ God said, "I will make my Goodness pass right in front of you; I'll call out the name, God, right before you. I'll treat well whomever I want to treat well and I'll be kind to whomever I want to be kind."

²⁰ God continued, "But you may not see my face. No one can see me and live."

²¹⁻²³ God said, "Look, here is a place right beside me. Put yourself on this rock. When my Glory passes by, I'll put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with my hand until I've passed by. Then I'll take my hand away and you'll see my back. But you won't see my face."

SERMON

What would you say has been most difficult for you during these past seven-plus months of the pandemic? Would you say it was not being able to find needed supplies, food or some other crazy item you never thought could lapse into the scarcity category? Was it missing that vacation you planned and waited all year to take? Was it not being able to experience a milestone moment in your life like graduation, the birth of a grandchild, a wedding or a funeral? Was it not being able to attend recreational activities like ballgames, concerts or dining inside a restaurant? Was it having your hair grow well beyond your tolerance level? Was it the postponement of needed surgery, therapy or visiting a loved one who had gone through such procedures? Was it having to be both wage earner and classroom teacher for your child? What would you say has been most difficult for you during this pandemic?

For many, what has been most difficult is the isolation, not being able to be in-person with loved ones and friends, office and school mates. Yes, we have been in our social pods, as it is now being called. Our pods include those few we either live with or are very close to. Most of our usual connections just haven't been there. Oh, yes, there is social media. We've been able to email, text, twitter, Zoom, Facebook and even made old fashioned phone calls. This has allowed for the instant gratification of communication. It's in our human DNA to desire such connections.

Back in 2010 the movie "The Social Network" was released. It chronicled the development of Facebook and its instant explosion of popularity. That connecting medium's success wasn't overnight, it was within minutes. Why? Because of our innate desire to be in relationship with others.

In today's scripture reading, that desire for connection goes to the ultimate in relationships, that with God. Prior to this lesson the people of Israel -- irked and confused by Moses' long absence, felt abandoned and shamelessly constructed the infamous Golden Calf, a "god" they could connect with or at least see. With understandable anger, the Lord told them that from here on out they were on their own. "Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey," God thundered down from the mist-shrouded heights of Sinai, "but I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people." This is a horror to end all horrors, not to be taken lightly or even taken at all!

It certainly hadn't been a walk through park paradise up to this point. Their leader, Moses, was a poorly spoken murderer. Remember he killed an Egyptian slave master for his abuse of a Hebrew slave. Yet this ill-equipped spokesperson went into the enemy camp to face the most powerful ruler in the then known world -- Pharaoh, demanding for his slave-force to be released from their captivity and allowed to leave the country. Finally released and managing to stay just a step ahead of the finest fighting force that were armed with the latest in weaponry, the rag tag motley crew of ex-slaves were stopped in their tracks by, of all things, nature -- the Red Sea, or the Sea of Reeds -- the accurate translation of the original Hebrew. Next they ran out of food, ran out of water, and ran out of patience. Still, God provided. God let them know they were not alone in all of this. God parted the waters. God provided manna. God brought water out of a rock. A cloud followed them to let them know that God was with them.

Seeing through all of the signs that God was with them and by the power of that presence, they went on. But then, perhaps it was the stress, or the uncertainty, or the anxiety, something got to them. They went off the deep end and committed the fateful crime of constructing and putting their hopes in and setting up a relationship with a "thing" -- a golden statue. How they loved their gold! And the top blew off the Holy Barometer of tolerance as God proclaimed, "I'm out of here." Moses realized it doesn't get worse than this. This was the unthinkable. This would be the definition of "hell," the absence of God.

Israel was at a cross-road. The stakes were as high as they get, and Moses knew it. To be abandoned by God under the best of circumstances was intolerable but when they needed God most in their natal stage of their identity as God's people, this time of uncertainty and extreme stress was ultimate in despair.

Have you ever experienced that feeling of abandonment when God doesn't seem to be anywhere near? 2020 has been a difficult year for most of us as we keep hearing about more and more bad and frightening situations. Have you ever felt God has left you when illness struck you or someone you love and you cried out to God, asking for help? Maybe it was a situation at work or school that was just too hard to take; maybe there was conflict and you couldn't cope and so you prayed for God to deliver you from that situation, but you heard nothing.

What do you do when God is silent? When you are suffering and God just doesn't seem to care. God seems to be on vacation or avoiding you or is angry with you or worse still - maybe he is just a figment of our imagination. Do you ever feel like that?

A pre-kindergarten teacher found an exciting new thing for her Sunday School class. The teacher wrote a song about popcorn, taught it to the children, and had them crouch down on the floor to sing it. At appropriate points in the song, all the children would "pop up." The teacher soon had them "popping" all over the classroom.

One day, the popcorn song was in full swing, when the teacher noticed one child remained crouching on the floor while the other children "popped" all over the room. "Why can't you pop like the other children?" The little child replied, "I'm burning in the bottom of the pan."

While the world goes merrily along around us, we can be burning in the bottom of the pan as the heat is up. Where is God when this is all going on? Where is God when we need God the most?

Moses knew that without God accompanying the Israelites, they would be like popcorn burning in the bottom of the pan. How could they go on? So, once again, Moses went before God to plead on the people's behalf. Moses wanted intentions to be spelled out. Frankly, if God was going no further, then Israel need not even bother to pack. There simply was nowhere for God's people to go from there, because without God in their midst, there was no people of God. Trying to reach the Promised Land as orphans would be as futile as climbing stairs of sand!

"The decision to withdraw is, in fact, the decision of your people's fate," Moses argues. "Merely sending an angelic escort to accompany Israel has very little meaning, if you are unwilling to claim these people as children again." Without you, God, there is no us, no connection, no relationship. Surprisingly, or not, Moses won his case. "I will do the very thing that you have asked," the Almighty finally whispers from the whirling cloud, "for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." We are connected. Ahh. Disaster again diverted.

But the story doesn't end there. Moses -- in a startling display ofchutzpah -- surprisingly decided to up the ante and requested "Show me your glory, I pray." To do so is reassurance of God's presence -- it's a "just to be sure" kind of request. It's like the young woman in a counseling session pleading "Show me a sign, a neon sign, anything, God" when she wanted to know God's will in an agonizing decision.

We want unambiguous signs, but, for better or worse, today's appearances of God are more subtle. All too often we look for the Glory of God and it is really hard to find. Have you ever asked, or been asked, "Where is God?" and found it hard to answer, like when confronted by the parents of a teenage son, killed in an automobile accident because someone slid off a bar stool one moment and cross a crowded intersection the next. Or the under-employed or unemployed father who has to bring his daughter home from college in her junior year because he can't pay the tuition and his wife was just diagnosed with breast cancer. Or a pandemic claims over 200,000 lives in this country alone and we aren't out of the woods/desert yet. Where is God? How we need to know God is there especially when we feel as if life is falling apart.

Years ago there was a Frontline television documentary “Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero,” an angry man who lost many friends on 9/11 expressed rage toward God. “I don’t have problems with the Son,” he says, “but I have real problems with the Father. This denouncement of the first person of the Trinity is evidence that there is still, as there was for the Israelites, an unbridgeable abyss between God and humanity. Even though God has revealed himself fully in Jesus Christ, there is the sense in which God remains hidden and that is intolerable.

We long to see God. We long to connect, for if and when we do, it helps make sense of the senseless. It assures us that something greater than we are is in charge, has our back, hasn’t let go, is ready to grab our hand and pull us up.

Often when we need to see God most, God can be difficult to find and we are in danger of losing that connection. “Show me your glory,” Moses prayed. Moses and us need some assurances. Granted, there are occasions when we are shown signs of the Divine Presence: the peace we encounter, for example, in an early morning walk on some secluded beach as the waves quietly stitch a ribbon of shells into the sand, or the overwhelming awe we feel holding a newborn child. Times like these are a chorus of praise proclaiming the glory of God. God is so clearly present.

Of course, the problem with such moments is that they are just that: moments -- often few and far between. Even for the eyes of faith, the world can seem out of focus and filled with ambiguity. Wonder and beauty are in abundant supply, to be sure. However, there are also the ravages of COVID 19, cancer, Alzheimer's, hurricanes and injustice. It is in these times that we cry with Moses, “Show me your glory, God.” And God’s response, “You shall see my back,” replies God, “but my face shall not be seen.”

It probably wasn't the answer Moses wanted to hear. And for that matter, we might be a little disappointed with it as well -- especially in those times when we need to see the Almighty most. But I think it's a mistake to regard the veiled glory of God as somehow representing God who is hiding from us. In fact, if you ask me, the most significant lesson Moses learned there at the foot of Mount Sinai was that God actually did and does desire to be with us and walk in our midst -- only on God's terms, not ours; and in a manner, seeking to find us, not the other way around.

What God finally does permit to pass before Moses is God's goodness, not God's glory -- a description rather than a disclosure of the Divine Presence. It's almost as if the Almighty had said: "I will reveal to you what I am, not how I look." And isn't that how we see God. Isn't that what keeps us connected with God? Don't we see what God is, God the verb, God in action, God being God especially from the backside, after God has passed by and we look back and see that God has passed through this way?

A pastor by the name of Robert Crilley wrote about an experience when he was in high school. “Every senior was required to do a community service project. His assignment was in a clothing locker in downtown Detroit. It wasn't his first choice. He was already starting to feel the Spirit's gentle nudging toward ministry, and so he decided he could use the experience as a way of encountering God at work in the world. Every Wednesday he made his way to the small Episcopal Church which ran the clothing locker -- always hoping that he would see the Gods glory, but never being quite sure where to look.”

One cold, bone-chilling day in February he pulled into the parking lot. Already a line of people had formed at the door. Barely getting himself organized, in came an old guy carrying an armload of clothes. ‘These are all donated from my church,’ he said, ‘Where do you want them?’ ‘Just put them over there for now,’ Crilley replied, pointing to a table against the wall. ‘I've got a whole van load!’ ‘Well, I'd offer to help,’ Crilley said, ‘but you see the line at the door.’ ‘Don't worry about it. I can manage.’ He smiled and trotted back up the stairs. Then the first “customer” in and explained quietly that he needed a pair of shoes. The shoes he was wearing weren't fit to play fetch with a dog. They were cracked and worn. In fact, he had taken a piece of twine and wrapped it around them just to keep the shoes intact. After learning that the man wore size 10,

Crilley went on the hunt but sadly, no size 10s. ‘But people bring in clothes all the time. You see this man unloading his van. It happens almost every morning. I’m sure if you come back tomorrow ...,’ Crilley explained. ‘But I need shoes today,. Mister, it’s awfully cold outside,’ he pleaded. ‘I realize that, but I’m not a cobbler. I mean, I can’t make shoes for you.’”

“Well, about this time, the elderly gentleman who had donated the clothes came over. Crilley hadn’t been paying much attention to him, but evidently he had been paying attention to the exchange. ‘Did I overhear that you wear size ten shoes?’ he asked. Startled by the interruption, the man nodded meekly. ‘Well, I wear size ten,’ the older gentleman said. ‘Here, I’ll trade you.’ He slipped off his shoes and set them on the counter. ‘You may have to break them in a bit,’ he explained, ‘they’re new!’ Having finished unloading the van, he wished us both a nice day, and walked out onto the cold, bitter pavement of that February morning, wearing those old, cracked shoes -- gift-wrapped with twine.”

“Looking back, I now realize that something of God’s glory passed before me that day -- veiled in the love which is constantly walking in our midst, seeking always to find us, ever working to stay connected.”

When God passed before Moses, his presence was assured and Moses then had the power to go on. When we are blessed by God passing before us, aren’t we assured that yes, God is present with us and we too can go on. Amen.

HYMN #177 I Will Come to You

1. “I will come to you in the silence; I will lift you from all your fear.
You will hear my voice; I claim you as my choice. Be still and know I am here.”

2. “I am hope for all who are hopeless; I am eyes for all who long to see.
In the shadows of the night, I will be your light. Come and rest in me.”

Refrain: Do not be afraid, I am with you. I have called you each by name.
Come and follow me, I will bring you home; I love you and you are mine.”

3. “I am strength for all the despairing, healing for the ones who dwell in shame.
All the blind will see; the lame will all run free, and all will know my name.” (*Refrain*)

4. “I am the Word that leads all to freedom; I am the peace the world cannot give.
I will call your name, embracing all your pain. Stand up, now walk and live!” (*Refrain*)

PRAYER

Our hearts are filled, O Lord, with your joy and peace. You have placed your imprint on us and challenged us to be your people in thought, word and deed. In gratitude we come to you this day, bringing shouts of joy as well as cries of sorrow. We are concerned about so many of our friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ, who are afflicted with illness of many kinds, who mourn, who feel lost and alone and wonder where you are. We raise their names before you in prayer that your healing love may be poured on them. (*Here prayers of concern may be offered*)

Lord, we know that you hear and respond to our prayers for these dear ones. Likewise, gracious God, we shout with joy at the many blessings that have been poured into our lives and into the lives of our family and friends. Our hearts rejoice at the delight they feel. Help us to understand that these blessings our your wondrous gifts of joy for each one of us. We lift the names and situations which reveal to us your loving presence with us. (*Here prayers of joy can be lifted*)

We thank you for all these blessings. Help us to bring words of healing and hope to all we meet, for it is in Jesus’ name that we pray. Amen.

HYMN #846 Fight the Good Fight

1. Fight the good fight with all thy might. Christ is thy strength and Christ thy right.
Lay hold on life, and it shall be thy joy and crown eternally.
2. Run the straight race through God's good grace; lift up thine eyes, and seek Christ's face.
Life with its way before us lies; Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.
3. Cast care aside; lean on thy guide. God's boundless mercy will provide.
Trust, and thy trusting soul shall prove Christ is its life, and Christ its love.
4. Fain not nor fear: God's arms are near. God changeth not, and thou art dear.
Only believe, and thou shalt see that Christ is all in all to thee.

BENEDICTION

Go now to be with God's people. Carry hope to the fearful and worried; share light with those in the shadows. Go to share Jesus' justice. Bring strength to those who falter; walk with those weakened by the world. Go with the Spirit into your neighborhoods. Embrace the forgotten; work to set the oppressed free. May the blessings of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you always. Amen.