



Sunday Worship
October 25, 2020
Draw near to God
for God is waiting for you.

CALL TO WORSHIP

In a world that cries out, "Fear me!"

We will listen to Jesus' words, "Don't be afraid!"

In a world that wants us to hate the other...

We will live Jesus' call to, "Love God. Love your neighbor, as you love yourself."

In a world that radicalizes...

We, too, will be radical. Radical with our hospitality. Radical with our hope. Radical with our love.

Then come to this place, ready to be who we are called to be.

Let us gather together and worship God.

OPENING PRAYER

Lord of light and hope, be with us this day as we have gathered to hear your word. Help us open our hearts to the commandments to love, even when loving is difficult. Give us the courage to be people who will commit their whole lives in your service. For we ask this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

HYMN #627 I Love You, Lord (sing through 3Xs)

I love you, Lord, and I lift my voice to worship you; O my soul, rejoice.

Take joy, my King, in what you hear; may it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.

CALL TO CONFESSION

We know the lives we are called to lead which could offer hope, grace, and peace with God. Yet we choose to walk down the wrong roads, to hang out with the wrong folks. Let us confess our lives to God.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty God, you love us, but we have not loved you. You call, but we have not listened. We walk away from neighbors in need, wrapped up in our own concerns. We have gone along with evil, with pride, quarrelling, and divisiveness.

Holy God, help us to face up to ourselves, so that, as you move toward us in mercy, we may repent, turn to you, and receive mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Though our hearts were hardened to the needs of others, God has touched them with God's compassionate care, healing our wounds and giving courage and strength to our souls. Be assured that God's love is poured out for

you and rejoice! Remember: Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, ² all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, ³ the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. ⁴ The Lord said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants’; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.” ⁵ Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord’s command. ⁶ He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. ⁷ Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigor had not abated. ⁸ The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

⁹ Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses.

¹⁰ Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. ¹¹ He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, ¹² and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

HYMN #203 Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love

Refrain: Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love; show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.

1. Kneels at the feet of his friends, silently washes their feet, Master who acts as a slave to them. (*refrain*)
2. Neighbors are wealthy and poor, varied in color and race; neighbors are near us and far away. (*refrain*)
3. These are the ones we should serve; these are the ones we should love; these are the neighbors to us and you. (*refrain*)
4. Loving puts us on our knees, willing to wash others’ feet; this is the way we should live like you. (*refrain*)

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON Matthew 22:34-46

³⁴ When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” ³⁷ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ ‘The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at my right hand,

until I put your enemies under your feet”?”

⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

SERMON The Love Connection

“Love makes the world go ‘round,” or so the song goes. Family therapist Virginia Satir said, “We need four hugs a day for survival. We need eight hugs a day for maintenance. We need twelve hugs a day for growth.” If that is true, love is power. Love creates. A college professor had his sociology class go into the Baltimore slums to get case histories of two hundred young boys. They were asked to write an evaluation of each boy’s

anticipated future. In every case the students wrote, “He hasn’t got a chance.” Twenty-five years later another sociology professor came across the earlier study. He had his students follow up on the project to see what happened to those boys in the previous study. With the exception of twenty boys who had moved away or died, the students learned that 176 of the remaining 180 had achieved more than ordinary success as lawyers, doctors and businessmen. The professor was astounded and decided to pursue the matter further. Fortunately, all the men were in the area and he was able to ask each one, “How do you account for your success?” In each case the reply came with feeling, “There was this teacher...” This teacher was still alive and so the professor sought her out and asked the old but still alert woman what magic formula she had used to pull these boys out of the slums into successful achievement. The teacher’s eyes sparkled and her lips broke into a gentle smile. “It’s really very simple,” she said. “I loved those boys.”

Mother Teresa said, “Spread love everywhere you go; first of all in your own house. Give love to your children, to your wife or husband, to a next door neighbor... Let no one ever come to you without leaving better or happier. Be the living expression of God’s kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting.” In other words – love – love everyone – love your neighbor as yourself. It is from this that we are fueled, fed, created, made alive, that we matter!

Oh really?! Then why is it so hard? Why do we have to be reminded of this again and again? The gospel lesson for today keeps coming up in the lectionary year after year. It is so important that three out of four gospel writers include it in their writing. I have to admit that when I read it I find myself thinking, “This, again?!” Surely by now we must get it. We are to love God and love each other. Yes, yes.” But you know what, we still don’t seem to get it. If we follow the news or social media, it certainly doesn’t seem like there is a whole lot of love out there. It seems like we are doing more of the opposite with the clashes over wearing a mask, clashes over politics and political candidates, clashes over permitting children to return to in-classroom learning and let’s not forget the increase in violent crimes – over 16% nation-wide from last year. Keep in mind, most murders are committed by people who know each other. An article appeared in *Psychology Today* that stated, “Ordinary citizens increasingly reflect a complete lack of human empathy, a view toward others that is willfully insensitive, if not outright contemptuous.”

Sarah and Chris just moved into a new home. They were told by one of their neighbors that they and the folks across the street used to be good friends. Used to. Now they don’t speak. Why? Because the neighbors across the street with whom they had been close friends for sixteen years found out their political party affiliation. Now they don’t even speak. Friendship removed. No more meals shared, parties attended, children playing together, help with projects. No more even nods of acknowledgement. Love taken to the curb with the garbage. So much for love your neighbor.

Maybe you have observed such things for yourself. See, we don’t get it any more than those scribes and Pharisees did 2000 years ago when they posed the question to Jesus, “Which is the greatest commandment.” The Rabbis counted 613 commands given in the law. So which one, they ask Jesus, stands above the rest?

Jesus responds by quoting the *Shema*, the Hebrew word for “hear” or “listen” and it comes from the verse, “*Hear*, O Israel, the Lord your God is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” The *Shema* was traditionally recited by every Jewish child and adult at the start of each day and at the conclusion of each day to remember and acknowledge God and our relationship with God. It seems odd that the teachers of the Law would ask this Rabbi a question that any three year old Jewish child could answer.

Jesus knew that if you don’t love God, you won’t be much inclined to keep *any* commandment. If, however, you do love God, then the rest follows naturally. And just to make the point, he then threw in the second commandment about neighbor-love. Between these two loves, Jesus managed to catch every single commandment you could ever name. Every commandment in the book has something to do with either God or neighbor.

When you love God and others, you have it all. This is to be *the* basis upon which everything else in this world that we do is to be found. But can we? Do we even want to?

According to a startling book, “The Stuff Americans Are Made Of: the Seven Cultural Forces that Define Americans,” by public policy expert Josh Hammond and veteran ad man James Morrison, the answer to the question “do we want to love?” the answer is “No.” According to them, there is no “love force” that fuels the American life. They claim there are seven forces we Americans live by. These are not necessarily bad, but they are what drive us.

Driving Force #1 – American’s Insistence on Choice. This force, according to the authors, is “formative and formidable”—even overwhelming at times. Everywhere we turn, we cannot escape the power of choice. From churches, to fashion fads, to money markets, to political decisions, to wearing masks, to rebellious teenagers who won’t pick up their rooms, there is “choice.” Choice, the authors remind us, is guaranteed in the constitution—in speech, in what is written, in religion, in associations, in owning or not owning a firearm. We value independence. Being told what to do—shoulds and oughts—are not easily swallowed and cultural imperative do not sell. Taking away choice is tyranny.

Driving Force #2 – Pursuit of Impossible Dreams. The genius of Americans has been their capacity to turn their personal, educational, and economic dreams, the seemingly impossible, into the possible. America is the place where the impossible dreams come true. The authors call this force “America’s I.D.” Pursuing dreams is the lifeblood of America. Martin Luther King, Jr., had a dream. Walt Disney had a dream. Alexander Graham Bell, Gloria Steinem, Bessie Coleman, Orville and Wilbur Wright, and Steve Jobs did too. The “Dream Force” not only drives America, it also attracts. It is why so many risk their lives sneaking past border patrols and facing the harsh environment of the desert.

Driving Force #3 – Obsessions with Big and More. America is the land of wide-open spaces—unusually rich with natural resources, and populated by “Paul Bunyons.” We are taken with Big and More, from Big Macs, to megamergers, to megachurches, to huge discount warehouses, to SUVs, to listing the richest people in the country. There are the big skies of Montana, fifty-two-ounce steaks, the Big Apple, and Mega Millions. The More Big and More Force is the most complex of the seven. The dangerous part of it, of course, is that, unchecked, it destroys anything in its path. The insistent desire to be “big” and “number one” justifies any means to get there.

Driving Force #4 – Impatience with Time. Americans are impatient. Can anyone relate? We have the most time-obsessed culture in the history of the world. Who else would ever have claimed “time is money” but Americans? It is actually something we in one voice cry, “Hurry up!” Beneath this pervasive cultural force called “American time” lies the following belief: “If we don’t get it or do it now, somebody else will,” and we don’t like being second. That is why FedEx could only have been invented in America, and *Reader’s Digest* too with its abridged versions of literature. Nothing can wait. Think of the speed of computers, instant messaging, Instagram and all other sorts of social media that get the news out in a nanosecond. “Time,” according to the authors, is a universal force, but in America we have “defined, segmented, standardized, systematized, and segregated it” more than any other culture in the world. For us, time is NOW. We have little interest in the past (its history), and not much interest in the long-range. We think in immediate terms and act accordingly.

Driving Forces #5 & 6 – Acceptance of Mistakes and the Urge to Improvise. These two forces go together and are peculiarly American. We are more taken with doing things than with doing things right. Unconsciously, we don’t do things right the first time, since we “learn from our mistakes.” The authors call this the “Oops Force.” We prefer to “wing it” and go off “half-cocked” because we are motivated by impossible dreams and are in a big hurry to get them done. Mistakes that come about as a result are viewed as opportunities to learn, and they then lead to Force 6, the “Urge to Improvise.” We like to *fix* things. The search for change borders on the

religious. We look for a different way to make things better. We love fixing a situation because then we can do what we are so preoccupied with doing, move on to something else.

Driving Force #7 – Fixation with What’s New. It is everywhere you look. We are in perpetual quest of what is new, new ideas, new strategies, new products, new games, and new paradigms. This force is present in most every society, but in America it has become an obsession. There is a new-and-improved everything. From soap to cars, to technology, to new ways of doing the three R’s (reading writing and ‘rithmetic—there is something in our national culture that wants to be the first to know something, to implement it, or to consume it. Up-to-dateness reigns in the “information age,” which is why Bill Gates and Ted Turner laughed all the way to the bank. We’re now on iPhone 12 which costs \$699! What does it do that you just have to have it? Well, for starters there are FOUR models, not just THREE from which to choose - more choices! Why the fixation with what’s new? We love the freshness, of course, but we also love having all those new choices ¼ of which bring us full circle.

Did you notice, “Love” was nowhere on that list. Surprised? Sad? Again, these seven in and of themselves are probably not bad but are they really what adds fuel to an abundant life? What would you say? What fuels your life, keeps it going, but also gives you life in *abundance*? What would Jesus have said? Well, he was asked that very question by the teachers of the law. The commandments were given for the welfare and benefit of the people. They were and are guidelines for an abundant life. So, which is greatest, the most important? Love. Love God, love each other. It is from love that we derive strength, our empowerment, our life. Love is a command. It is not an option. It doesn’t always come naturally. Love, even when everything else in the world is telling you not to. It’s remembering that neighbors are friends and strangers and those with opposing opinions or looks or language or lifestyle are neighbors. Love does make the world go ‘round. It has a power that can move mountains and ease even the most devastating pain. Love. It takes work as it is not always easy, yet we are to love. Why? Because in the end, when all else fails, when all else has faded away and in the blink of an eye is gone, it is love that will hold us in the palm of God’s hand.

PRAYER

We pray to you, O kind and merciful God that your love for us may animate all we do and that our love may become contagious. Lord, make me an instrument of your love.

- That the Church, the People of God, may never cease to proclaim by its teaching, life and liturgy that love of God and neighbor is the heart of the gospel and that people are God's gift to us. Lord, make me an instrument of your love.

- That people may not lose their hearts in today's economic systems of profit, efficiency, production and competition, but that they may keep giving first place to human relationships of friendship and respect. Lord, make me an instrument of your love.

- That we may have room in our hearts and homes for refugees and strangers that we may learn to share our goods and ourselves with the little people loved by God - the poor and the lonely and those who suffer. Lord, make me an instrument of your love.

- That those who don't know how to forgive, those who have not experienced much happiness in life or whose longings have not been fulfilled may encounter a bit of God's goodness in our attention and care. Lord, make me an instrument of your love.

- That in our Christian communities we may uplift one another rather than tear down, accept each other with trust and affection, forgive one another from the heart and go forward together in hope and love. Lord, make me an instrument of your love.

Gentle God, help us to love you and one another with your measure, that is, without measure, in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

HYMN #828 More Love to Thee, O Christ

1. More love to thee, O Christ, more love to thee! Hear thou the prayer I make on bended knee.
This is my earnest plea: more love, O Christ, to thee; more love to thee, more love to thee!

2. Once earthly joy I craved, sought peace and rest. Now thee alone I seek; give what is best.
This all my prayer shall be: more love, O Christ, to thee; more love to thee, more love to thee!

3. Then shall my latest breath whisper thy praise; this be the parting cry my heart shall raise.
This still its prayer shall be: more love, O Christ, to thee; more love to thee, more love to thee!

BENEDICTION

Go now, with courage in our God. Declare the message of the gospel which God has entrusted to us,
and in wholehearted love for God and for others, share not only the message, but your very self.

And may God be your haven;

May Christ Jesus lead you into love - heart, soul and mind;

And may the Holy Spirit bless the work of your hands and gladden all your days.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Amen.