



# *Sunday Worship*

## *September 27, 2020*

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

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

*Leader: God has given us this beautiful earth and all that grows and runs upon it.*

**People: Thanks be to God.**

*Leader: God has given us breath to live and spirit to sing.*

**People: Thanks be to God.**

*Leader: God has gathered us into community of care and worship.*

**People: Let us worship God with love, thanksgiving and praise.**

### **OPENING PRAYER** (unison)

**To you, O God, we lift up our hearts. To you we offer our praise and prayer, our worship and thanksgiving, even our very lives. Make your ways known to us. Show us the path on which we should walk. Lead us in your truth and teach us. For you alone are the God who saves, the God in whom we trust; and the One on whom we wait. Amen.**

### *HYMN #267* Come, Christians, Join to Sing

1. Come, Christians, join to sing: Alleluia! Amen!

Loud praise to Christ our King: Alleluia! Amen!

Let all, with heart and voice, before his throne rejoice;  
praise is his gracious choice: Alleluia! Amen!

2. Come, lift your hearts on high: Alleluia! Amen!

Let praises fill the sky: Alleluia! Amen!

He is our guide and friend; to us he'll condescend;  
his love shall never end: Alleluia! Amen!

3. Praise yet our Christ again: Alleluia! Amen!

Life shall not end the strain: Alleluia! Amen!

On heaven's blissful shore his goodness we'll adore  
singing forevermore: Alleluia! Amen!

### **CALL TO CONFESSION**

The Boy Scouts have what is known as the Scout Law: "A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent." These principles are found first in scripture. From the very beginning this has been God's intention for how we are to live together with God and each other. As much as we might try, we don't always live up to these ethics. Let us therefore come before God recognizing our failures trusting that God, who is ever loving and forgiving, will cleanse us from our unrighteousness.

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION AND BROKENESS**

Loving God, we confess that we, at times, have been selfish, ambitious, or conceited. We have thought that we ourselves are better than others and have looked primarily to our own interests. Help us, O God, to see the world through your eyes. Comfort us, O God, when guilt or fear prevents us from looking beyond our own self-interest. Humble us, O God, that our minds might be more like Jesus, in whose name we pray. Amen.

## WORDS OF BLESSING AND ASSURANCE

Hear the promise of scripture: God is at work in us, enabling us to live a more faithful life. Remember this good news: Jesus died for me. Jesus forgives me. Jesus loves me. Jesus is good to me. Amen.

### FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON Philippians 2:1-13 (from *The Message*)

<sup>1-4</sup> If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you *care*— then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

<sup>5-8</sup> Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human!* Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

<sup>9-11</sup> Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.

### SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON Exodus 17:1-7

<sup>1-2</sup> Directed by God, the whole company of Israel moved on by stages from the Wilderness of Sin. They set camp at Rephidim. And there wasn't a drop of water for the people to drink. The people took Moses to task: "Give us water to drink." But Moses said, "Why pester me? Why are you testing God?"

<sup>3</sup> But the people were thirsty for water there. They complained to Moses, "Why did you take us from Egypt and drag us out here with our children and animals to die of thirst?"

<sup>4</sup> Moses cried out in prayer to God, "What can I do with these people? Any minute now they'll kill me!"

<sup>5-6</sup> God said to Moses, "Go on out ahead of the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel. Take the staff you used to strike the Nile. And go. I'm going to be present before you there on the rock at Horeb. You are to strike the rock. Water will gush out of it and the people will drink."

<sup>6-7</sup> Moses did what he said, with the elders of Israel right there watching. He named the place Massah (Testing-Place) and Meribah (Quarreling) because of the quarreling of the Israelites and because of their testing of God when they said, "Is God here with us, or not?"

### SERMON "Beyond Bad Days"

Give me an example of a bad day. (Use smile signs if you think this is a bad day) When having a bad day, have you stopped to wonder where God is at that moment? It doesn't seem like God can possibly be near, or if God is there then God is a cruel God who is either on vacation in some tropical island resort or who is so aloof and unfeeling that God cannot either bother to hear your sobs or else God needs a new battery for the holy hearing aide. At that moment God seems like an uncaring parent. It's like when one of my grandchildren gets hurt or is frustrated – usually about the actions of either their sibling or cousin. I may ignore it if, in my assessment of the situation, it doesn't seem that bad. But to my grandchild, it's tragic and so they sob all the louder in order to get my attention. Their insides are like a nuclear reactor experiencing a melt down and the radiation level has escalated to the point where there is an involuntary explosion.

Have you ever had such "bad day" feelings? Depending on the amount of sleep you got last night, you might be having one of those kind of days right about now. Or are there other things troubling you today? Many of us

feel that our world is having a bad day – or is it more like a bad month or even year? With the cries of “help me!” on our lips, we are poised for rescue.

Such was a similar situation for the nation of Israel. In today’s lesson from Exodus, the Israelites are having a hard time of it in those grim surroundings. Sure, they’ve escaped enslavement at the hands of the Egyptians, but now it seems like they have jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire as they are captives in a different way, captive to the environment around them with little opportunity for escape.

Boy Scouts – you have a motto, what is it? (“Be Prepared.”) Scouts would know just what they would need to have with them in order to survive the harshness of a barren land. Scouts, can you tell me some of the things you might need? (They would need shelter, flash light, light-weight clothing, a head covering, protective footwear, food and especially water.)

Remember, the Israelites had little time to prepare for their journey through the desert and they certainly didn’t expect it to take forty years! When provisions are sparse, it isn’t surprising that they would look back to the “good old days” when they at least had food, water and a roof over their heads. In the wilderness, what did they have? Nothing.

When things aren’t going well, what is often our response? Well, I don’t know about you, but I complain. There’s a story about complaining that goes like this: A monk joined a monastery and took a vow of silence. After the first 10 years his superior called him in and asked, “Do you have anything to say?” The monk replied, “Food bad.” After another 10 years the monk again had opportunity to voice his thoughts. He said, “Bed hard.” Another 10 years went by and again he was called in before his superior. When asked if he had anything to say, he responded, “I quit.” “It doesn’t surprise me a bit,” responded his superior. “You’ve done nothing but complain ever since you got here.”

Those Israelites didn’t wait in silence for years in order to complain. Complaints came quickly on their journey. Having nothing in that wilderness, they complained to Moses, their leader. If God brought them out there, God needed to fix their hunger problems for them. And God *did* by providing manna. Food was miraculously given, enough for everyone to be more than satisfied. Now all would be well. Or would it?

It reminds me of the story of a tourist who went fishing off Melbourne Beach in Florida when his boat capsized. He could swim, but his fear of alligators kept him clinging to the overturned craft. Spotting an old man standing on the shore, the tourist shouted, “Are there any gators around here?!” “Naw,” the man hollered back, “they haven’t been around for years!” Feeling safe, the tourist started swimming leisurely toward the shore. About halfway there he asked the guy, “How’d you get rid of the gators?” “We didn’t do anything,” the old man responded. “The sharks got them.”

This world is full of perils. If it’s not gators, it’s sharks. If it’s not sickness, it’s failure. If it’s not failure, it’s aging. There is nowhere we can run – nowhere we can hide – not to our parents, our Scout Master, our spouse, our teacher, our older sibling or even our boss. Bad days, perils, happen. It’s true for us and it was true for Israel. They were once again left wanting. They may have food, but now they need water. Would their suffering ever end? And so the whining, the complaining, begins – again.

An unknown author once said, “The only thing complaining does is convince others that you are not in control.” Not being in control, the Israelites went to the one they thought was in control, their leader, Moses. Leaders are supposed to keep things running smoothly and so long as that is happening to everyone’s satisfaction, all is well. But when it is not, well...

Rabbi and comic Robert Alper tells about a synagogue that uses voicemail. Alper phoned and heard this message: “Welcome to the Temple Beth Shalom (that’s “House of Peace,” by the way). Press 1 if you would like membership information. For our worship schedule, press 2. To complain *to* the Rabbi, press 3. To complain *about* the Rabbi, press 4, 5 or 6.” If Moses had such a service, voicemail boxes 4, 5 and 6 at this point would have been full to over-flowing!

Moses, in his position of authority, whether he liked it or not, was the complaint department. Why? Because, he was the direct link to God, or so they thought.

There is an ancient Hungarian proverb that says, "If someone calls you a horse, laugh at him. If a second person calls you a horse, think about it. If a third person calls you a horse, maybe you should go buy a saddle." This is the third occasion when the Israelites doubted whether Moses had any pull with God. "Doesn't God supply you with power? Why did you save us just to kill us in the wilderness?"

On this occasion of panic and whining, Moses is affected. This time Moses is done in by the complaints and buys a saddle. He proves himself human and he panics *also*. What kind of day do you think he is having? He is having a very bad day and wants to run away, hide, escape and turn his back on all of this. Can you blame him? At every turn some obstacle is in the way, some disaster strikes. When it does, who gets blamed? Of course, the one who is supposed to be closest to God, God's right hand man. He is the one out in front leading the way, leading the rag-tag tired caravan that blindly goes where they are told.

Can't you just hear Moses conversing with God? "God, I never wanted to be a leader. I tried to tell you. But nooo. You had to have it your way. Tell me, why did you put me through all that trouble with Pharaoh just to have my people bring me out into the desert and stone me? Why did you put me through one trial only to slap me down with another?"

Is that Moses talking, or is it us? Seems like many of us have had similar one-way conversations with God. One-way, because you start to wonder if God is even there, even cares, even hears at all. It's that bad.

BUT, God was there in the wilderness and heard Moses' cries and responded. Gently he instructed Moses – get your support, your leaders. I think God was a Boy Scout. He knows that the success of every troop, every patrol is a team effort. God instructs Moses to get his team together, a team that will stand with Moses when he goes before the people. Yes, everyone will have their assignment and Moses' assignment at that moment was to take his rod, the one he used to part the waters that separated the sea when God saved them from Egyptian army and strike the rock. God was with Moses then, and God was with them in that moment of despair.

There was something missing in that wilderness wandering – trust. If you look in the dictionary for the word "faith," you will find the primary definition is "reliance or trust." Insecurity cannot breed faith any more than hunger can breed happiness. It was never God's intention to leave the Israelites stranded in the wilderness any more than it is a Scout Master's intention to leave a troop to go it alone on a camping trip. Whether they asked or not, I'm sure God would have given them water anyway. God never intended for them to die. God would provide what they really needed when they really needed it and in that moment it wasn't so much water as it was reassurance, the assurance that God was there to protect and provide.

A Bahamian priest tells the story of a two-story house that caught fire. The family – father, mother, and several children – was on their way out of the burning building when, suddenly, the smallest boy became terrified, tore away from his mother, and ran back upstairs. His father, outside, shouted to the boy, "Jump son, jump! I will catch you!" The boy cried back to his father, "But daddy, I can't see you!" "I know," his father called, "I know, but I can see *you!*"

God can see God people's fears, struggles and the perils that surround them, on bad and good days. And God doesn't leave them to face it alone. God is in the midst of the harshness of the desert and the harsh realities of life. God brings water out of the rock, not merely to satisfy thirsty people, but to build trust in people who have forgotten how to rely on anyone except slave masters. They needed to rediscover how to trust God.

Just as God has not left the Israelites, so God has not left us in our wilderness with our own needs. We may not be able to see God, but God sees us. It doesn't mean we will be spared from thirst, or our own form of a burning building or **bad day**. It does mean that by God's mercy, God is there with us even in these painful places and will give us what we need. Maybe not what we want, but what we need so that our **bad days** can be followed by **good days**.

### *PRAYER OF INTERCESSION*

God, you are a God of compassion and love. Time after time we have experienced your care and provision. Time after time you've answered our prayers and met our needs—often in ways we could never have dreamed possible. We praise you for your faithful love toward us.

Because we have known your love, we come to you with confidence, offering our prayers for the world that you love. We see so much pain and suffering, so much violence and poverty and despair. It's easy to feel overwhelmed by the needs around us. But we continue to bring our prayers to you in faith, because we know that nothing is impossible for you. You are the God who rained down bread from heaven, and made water flow from a rock in the desert; the God who resurrected Jesus Christ from the dead, and who brings new life and hope to all who believe. For you, all things are possible. Hear our prayers.

We pray for those suffering the effects of recent natural disasters: the fires in the west, the storms and flooding in the Gulf region and elsewhere.

We pray for people who suffer without food, without water, without shelter, without hope. We pray for the regions of our world caught up in violence and threats of violence. We pray for those who live with serious illness, those with chronic pain, those without access to proper medical care, those for whom treatment is no longer an option.

Merciful God, you sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to show us a different way to live—the way of deep humility and obedience. You've called us to love one another, and to work together with one heart and mind, balancing our needs with the needs of those around us. Give us courage to follow faithfully, and with integrity—with actions that bear witness to the words we speak, and worship that overflows into our daily tasks and relationships—so that our lives will bring glory and honor to you, our Redeemer and Lord. Amen.

### *HYMN #834 Precious Lord, Take My Hand*

1. Precious Lord, take my hand; lead me on, help me stand;  
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.  
Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light;  
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

2. When my way grows drear, precious Lord, linger near;  
when my life is almost gone,  
hear my cry, hear my call, hold my hand lest I fall;  
take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

### *BENEDICTION*

As you leave this place, remember—the Spirit of God is already at work within you, giving you both the desire and the strength to do what pleases him. So go from this time of worship with joy to love and serve God and one another. And may the blessing of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit be among you and within you. Amen.