

Sunday Worship
A Service for Your Use at Home
St Paul United Church of Christ
5312 Old Blue Rock Road
Cincinnati, Ohio 45247
Allen M Fluent, Pastor
October 11, 2020

Because of the pandemic caused by the corona virus, our congregation, along with many others, has decided that we must forego gathered worship services at this time. Each Sunday until we gather again, we will provide worship materials that members and friends can use in our homes in the knowledge that we are not alone, but are celebrating these holy days with our friends and neighbors in the faith. As you use this worship service, I hope you will pause and remember the tune to a familiar hymn as you read the words, and pray as partners in the fellowship of Christ.

If you have access to a computer or cell phone, you may want to open the video recordings of the Sermon and Scripture provided by the pastor and the music for our hymn played by Della Leytze, on both our church website and the message sent to all who are on our email list.

Today is the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost. Today as we begin our Service of Worship, let us listen to the words of the Prophet Isaiah, as he declared the great things God has done. We read from Isaiah 25:1, 3-9:

***O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you, I will praise your name;
for you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.
Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; cities of ruthless nations will fear you.
For you have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress,
a shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.
When the blast of the ruthless was like a winter rainstorm,
the noise of aliens like heat in a dry place,
you subdued the heat with the shade of clouds; the song of the ruthless was stilled.
On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a
feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained
clear.
And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever.***

***Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.
It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.***

Let us join together in our opening hymn. (Those who receive Asour emails will receive a recording of the music played by Della Leytze in our sanctuary.) *Our hymn is "Blessed Assurance."*

***Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory diving!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.***

***Refrain: This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Savior all the day long.***

***Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending, bring from above echoes of mercy, whispers of love. R***

***Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Savior am happy and blest!
Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with his goodness, lost in his love. R***

This morning, as our assurance of God's gracious presence, let us read together the 23rd Psalm. Many of us memorized it when we were young, so you may want to close your eyes and recite it from memory. The printed version here is the most popular of the modern translations, but you may know it in another version:

***The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
he makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside the still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.***

***Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.***

Our Lesson from the New Testament is from St Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter 4, verses 4-11.

Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

The Sermon:

(Note: For those who want to see and hear a video of the complete sermon you can find it on our church website or open the message that you will receive if you have given us your email address.)

If you're like me, this year you may have had some days when you didn't want to know what was going on in the world. I've had friends say to me that they were taking a break from listening to the news. It was just too overwhelming. Some people have put their Facebook messages on hold for a few days or more. They say they just don't want to see and hear the anger, sarcasm and cruelty that is moving across social media these days. "I just look for posts about puppies and kittens and beautiful scenery," someone said to me recently. "I'm not looking at anything else."

By and large, 2020 is a year that many people would be happy to forget. It will be remembered as a time when many of our plans for fun vacations and celebrations with friends and family were upended, when children and grandparents had to learn how to love at a distance, when our isolation from one another caused many to suffer from severe depression and loneliness, when thousands of lives were cut short and the health and well-being of many others was severely compromised. It has been a year also when trust in many

of our basic institutions has been damaged – from the postal service to the election system itself; when social unrest, misunderstanding, and racial antagonisms erupted once again, and when politics in America grew angrier, and even old friends found themselves unable to reconcile their differences.

In such a time, we feel the need for spiritual encouragement. So if you're casting about for something to read that might help you feel encouraged, you might take a look at St Paul's Letter to the Philippians. This letter, written in a day far more troubled than ours, offers a foothold of faith for times like these. Paul writes the epistle to a beloved congregation where the storms on the outside have begun to cause disharmony on the inside as well. But he writes with extraordinary credibility, because of his own committed witness. He himself is in prison, but far from becoming despondent, he prays to find a way to make his imprisonment itself become an occasion for spreading the Gospel.

So what does Paul offer as advice for the members of the Philippian Church who see trouble all around? He urges them first of all to model their own behavior on that of Jesus, remembering particularly how he "emptied himself," taking the form of a servant for the sake of others. He urges them to then be blameless in their own behavior, in the midst of a time when many are behaving badly. He reminds them to seek strength in their calling to follow the teachings of Jesus, and to remember the great worth of belonging to the fellowship of Christ.

Finally, he gives them a way to think about the world that they live in, not from the perspective of the troubles of the day, but from the perspective of the joy that comes from the assurance that God is summoning us to co-create the coming day of peace. He invites them to look deeply into their world for the signs of human goodness that reflect the image of God, because these are the resources for making a better world. "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things," he says. And then he urges his congregation of faithful members to continue doing the works of ministry and faith that they have always done, because of what they have received and heard and seen within the fellowship, because those are the things that bear the fruits of the Realm of God that are growing still, even in an unsettled time.

In this way, Christians are invited to engage the world, not hide from it. But we are not called to make the world's troubles our solitary focus. A healthy awareness of the troubles of this world will include taking time to ask how the circumstances of this present

moment can be used to bring healing to those who are lonely, troubled, or in need, to seek reform where justice seems lacking, and reconciliation where misunderstanding has led to anger. A year like this can awaken some awareness that Christian virtues are not always practiced as faithfully as they should be, but extraordinary faithfulness may be precisely what is needed in a year like this.

In Scripture, the prophetic word is often a word of criticism; but it is always a word of hope. It knows the truth that unsettled times are often the prelude to transformative change – a time to look for the new possibilities God may be creating in our midst, when new ways will be found that we did not see before, and the divine vision will become our new reality.

Our Time of Prayer

As we move from this time of worship and turn our thoughts to our plans for the day and the week before us, let us ask God to make us aware of one another who have gathered in this worship hour. Let us be thankful for one another, for the gifts that are shared among us, and for God's grace that lives within our fellowship in Christ.

We pray for those who are ill, for those who are lonely, for those experiencing the sorrow of loss.

We pray for our nation all this month, as we begin the process of electing governmental leaders. We give thanks for those who seek public office out of sincere desire to serve. May we seek to be informed. May we vote according to our conscience. May the truths of our faith give us guidance.

We pray for all those experiencing fires, hurricanes and floods in our land, and we pray for the wisdom to manage and heal our environment for generations to come.

Let us pray in the words of our Lord Jesus:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Benediction:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.