

*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 25, 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 on both our church website and the message sent to all who are on our email list.

Today is the Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost. This Sunday is often celebrated as "Reformation/Reconciliation Sunday," in honor of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century and the ongoing work of reconciliation among all the churches in the family of Christ. Let us begin our Service of Worship, with Martin Luther's great hymn of the Reformation, "A Mighty Fortress is our God."

***A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing,
our helper he, against the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.***

***Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name, from age to age the same,
and he must win the battle.***

***And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim, we tremble not for him;***

*his rage we can endure, for low, his doom is sure;
one little word can fell him.*

*That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever.*

Luther based the words for his hymn on the 46th Psalm:

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains
shake in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the
Most High.
God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning
dawns.
The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.
Come behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the
spear; he burns the shields with fire.
Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the
earth.
The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

Our Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures is taken from the Book of Jeremiah, chapter 31, verses 27-34:

*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will sow the house of Israel and the
house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. And just as I have
watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil,
so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the Lord. In those days they shall
no longer say: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on
edge." But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes
shall be set on edge. The days are surely coming says the Lord, when I will make a
new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the
covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them*

out of the land of Egypt – a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sins no more.

Our New Testament Lesson is taken from Paul’s Letter to the Church at Rome, chapter 1, verses 16-18:

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith.” For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

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.)

This is a day designated in Protestant churches as Reformation Sunday, thinking about the Protestant Reformation begun in the 16th Century by Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic priest who protested church practices of his day that he regarded as abusive. Though he posted a list of grievances, Luther is primarily known for his opposition to the practice of selling indulgences – a church practice that consisted essentially of offering forgiveness to believers in exchange for a monetary payment to the church. More broadly, Luther opposed any teaching that seemed to make it possible to obtain salvation through human effort. He and others who became leaders in the Reformation based their teaching about salvation upon scriptural teachings that people may be saved only by trusting God, who alone is righteous. Salvation by faith in the grace of God became a defining belief of the Reformation.

It was not Martin Luther’s original intent to separate from the Catholic Church, but his teachings struck a nerve in an era of political and social ferment. Other religious movements also arose in those days, many of them going beyond Luther in their objections to church teachings and affirmation of Scripture as the sole basis for faith. Despite the spread of biblical knowledge among church members, however, gradually a gulf was

formed between Catholics and Protestants, and then between different branches of the Protestant movement.

It seems odd that neither most Catholics nor most Protestants would take the same exact positions that defined them in the 16th Century. As we commonly say in our denomination, the church is continually reforming: “God is still speaking,” and we live in a time when listening for God’s word in the thoughts and experiences of others seems critical to our spiritual well-being. Even the name of this day on the calendar has been changed in our church from “Reformation Sunday” to “Reformation and Reconciliation Sunday,” and this is as it should be.

Catholics in the 16th Century emphasized Church tradition almost to the neglect of Scripture, and Protestants at that same time talked about a faith built only on the teachings of the Bible, to the neglect of the church’s living tradition. But the rigidity of these faith communities caused them to leave out some of the most important matters of faith – the insights that come from inside us. In the 18th Century, a man named John Wesley, who is commonly credited with starting the Methodist tradition, was able to see this inadequacy. Yes, he said, Scripture and Church tradition are essential sources of the faith; but we can’t understand either one of them unless we apply to them our human gifts of reason and experience, in order to comprehend what they mean for us today. What Wesley seems to have understood is that faith is not a set of teachings or rules passed down from the past. It is a living relationship with God, with one another and with the world in which we live.

“This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” These words from the Prophet Jeremiah speak about a faith that is not based upon external demands or inherited dogmas. Our covenant with God is personal, and the works we are called to do arise out of our awareness of the living example of Jesus and our decision to follow his Way of love, because when we do, we are happy in our souls.

Our Time of Prayer

Come into our hearts, God, and may the truth of your Gospel be seen in our lives as your law of love is implanted within us. Let us not become superficial in our love, but genuine, as those who have been deeply loved, forgiven and made whole, and ready to share what we have received.

Like the psalmist, we look around our world, and we see nations in an uproar and the kingdoms that totter. We wonder if generations of people seeking advantage over others have wrought these troubles of our times, and we pray that we ourselves may find within our

hearts the courage and the grace to make our own small contributions to a world of greater justice and authentic love. God, renew your covenant with us. Implant in our hearts the law of holy compassion, so that the teaching of your great commandment to love you and to love our neighbors as ourselves will not be only words we read and affirm but the source of action in our lives and the basis for commitment to the day of holy peace.

And we 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.

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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.