

Sunday – August 30, 2020

Lectionary readings

Exodus 3:1- 15 Moses encounters the burning bush

Psalms 105: 1-6, 23-26, 45c (VU 828-829 parts one and three) Remembering Jacob and Moses

Romans 12: 9-21 Let love be genuine; overcome evil with good

Matthew 16:21-28 Take up the cross and follow me

Welcome: Words of introduction and lighting of the Christ Candle.

Hymn: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling * (VU 333)

Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.

Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver; let us all thy grace receive;
suddenly return and never, never more thy temples leave.

Thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee,
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Call to Gather:

God calls us to love one another.

We rejoice in God's grace.

God gathers us that we might offer our worship and praise.

Wherever we may be, we are gathered together in God's presence.

Come, let us worship our gracious God.

We worship God with love, thanksgiving, and praise!

Opening Prayer:

Creator God, as our combined summer services draw to a close keep us mindful of your Spirit encircling us all with your love. Bless us with your sustaining presence as we continue the work of ministry together within our various communities of faith. Give us the daring resolve to follow the Christ wherever we are call to go. Amen.

Scripture Readings: Romans 12: 9-21 and Matthew 16: 21-28

Message: Rooted in love

More than ever this summer, I have appreciated family gatherings - even while socially distancing on our deck. It won't surprise you that everyone has a cell phone out. Hearing different notification sounds I'm constantly asking, "Was that for me?" "Am I needed?" "Am I being called?" We think of a calling mostly as vocation - medicine, teaching, farming, order of ministry, whatever is our life's work that we do with a measure of passion - but maybe it is simply a series of 'paying attention' moments every day, every week, every year, noticing and responding in obedience. What are we called to do? Show up. Not give up. Share the Good News of God's forgiving love. Help others. Ease human suffering where you can. Offer hope. (Someone said there are basically two issues for the church: gratitude and obedience)

St. Paul calls on the Christian community to put its faith into action: exercising love, rejoicing in hope, and overcoming evil with good. In Genesis "good" defines creation at its fashioning. Paul writes that the church's calling, in its witness, is to make sure, so far as we are humanly able, to continue the "good" work of creation. And when we approach our own limits we can rely on God's grace.

Tom Long: "To give one's life away in the name of Christ is to be given all that makes life free, holy and good." We are called to journey in God's way. And the tough road of discipleship is not for the faint of heart. It is good that we have the stories and examples through scripture of so many pioneers in the faith. We are reminded in

the stories of covenants between God and God's people - of a purposeful God - working to draw people into a faithful, socially responsive and responsible community of care.

Anthropologist Wade Davis in Rolling Stone.com August 6th 2020 writes a glaring indictment of American empire: "The measure of wealth in a civilized nation is not the currency accumulated by the lucky few, but rather the strength and resonance of social relations and the bonds of reciprocity that connect all people in common purpose."

The socio-political climate of our time might lead us to believe it's every individual for oneself; that there are no higher values than personal freedom and the opportunities to create wealth; that it's of no consequence when those personal goals come at the expense of neighbour and community. For so many, 2020 is the year of discouragement. One meme on social media showed a child going down a playground slide, the bottom several feet was a box grater! Covid 19 has brought some of our worst behaviors into the glaring light, and confronted us with our deepest fears and prejudices. We are longing for a better world. A just world would include an affordable, effective vaccine, available to all who need it. And economies that do not leave people wanting. At least that's my hope. And yet some folks I know personally, and others through social media, have vastly different outlooks. They seem to lack compassion or empathy or concern for others. I'm tempted to "unfriend" them. But Jesus calls me to a better way.

Jesus, and other prophets before him, concluded that the summary of the law was to love God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself. Is that a lofty, unattainable ideal? Or is it a faith orientation? If we are rooted in God's love then we naturally give our whole lives to ushering in God's reign. We grow into that identity as God's people, keeping in mind that we are not God's only people. Caring for others is taught in many religions, the Golden Rule their highest standard. When thinking

about what deserves our deepest commitment, someone said about religion that - "only those that tend to human suffering are worthy".

I'm grateful that we do this discipleship together. We develop our capacity to learn and to grow in faith together, in community, in congregations, in working together for the common good. And worship is one of the places where our moral standards are shaped. We take comfort that our future is in the hands of a loving God. Jesus points us toward a worthy commitment, concerns bigger than our own households, and our own personal safety.

He knits us into a community where we can rely on one another. I like the understanding that we are here to give people hope, so that they do not lose hope.

2020 is a year when we have needed a lot of hope, perhaps not realizing how much we have depended on each other. These times of physical distancing are reminding us that we can still depend on each other because we have been shaped together for God's purposes in the world. No matter what changes, that does not change.

Eugene Peterson, in *The Message*, writes: "Love from the center of who you are...discover beauty in everyone." Perhaps those two lines are at the heart of the list of instructions to the church in Rome, because loving from the center of who we are, and finding beauty in every single one of God's children, would lead us to be generous and hospitable, forgiving and peaceful, humble and kind. Once again, Paul's "better way" contrasts with the world that surrounds him and his readers. The New Living Translation says: "Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them."

Paul's words are hard to live by, but then that was the point about grace, wasn't it?

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*) "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace

without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate. Costly grace is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him. Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ."

The congregation in Rome was experiencing some problems, some conflict and challenges, in their life together, yet they were rooted in love.

We have something in common with them as we strive to be loving communities of hospitality and grace. Our life together is also a witness to the world. We're not just about caring for each other in the life of the church, but also about turning our attention and our love on the world that God loves, too. It's not easy to repay evil with good, to offer a blessing as a response to insult or injury. We are being called to take the high road.

As a young girl, when asking my mother if I had to help with dishes or some other chore, she would say, "let your conscience be your guide." And that would get me, every time. According to Peter W. Marty, *The Christian Century*, Aug. 30, 2017 Conscience is not so much an inner voice as it is the ability to think and act with outside help. Conscience means "knowing together." In worship our moral compass is recalibrated - with the help of others.

Margaret Mead, 20th century anthropologist. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed (people) can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

I'm grateful for our faith communities, and the support that is offered as we help each other to keep on the faithful path, as we encourage one another and lift one another's spirits. And may we continue to hear our calling as whole-hearted commitment to whatever God may ask of us. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Offering Prayer:

We offer our gifts, O God, and our varied ministries, that we may work together to fulfill your purposes in creation. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer



Come, all who are broken-hearted, all who are oppressed, all who are afraid, all who hunger and thirst, all who rejoice, all who celebrate, all who are healing, all whom the world counts as last and least. Come, you are all welcome here. God created a wide world of welcome, filled with good things, with food and drink for all beings. God nurtured a wide world of welcome, and provides a table of welcome for the universe: a loaf of bread, a loaf of life, a loaf of compassion - a loaf to strengthen, nourish and sanctify. A cup of water, a cup of sacrifice, a cup of covenant - a cup to renew, refresh and make whole. As we gather at the table, we proclaim our praise and thanksgiving for God's great love and mercy.

Gracious God, hear us as we lift up our loved ones and our concerns in prayer.

We pray for the church and its varied ministries, its communities of faith and its leaders - especially today Phelps UC, Hillview Pioneer Memorial New Liskeard, Trout Creek UC.

We pray for our own faith communities who share in summer worship. May each person, and their loved ones, enjoy a summer that brings refreshment and renewal. We pray for the safety and wellbeing of all, especially those named in prayer, and those named only in our hearts, and those whose concerns are known only to You, gracious God. Keep us faithful until we gather once more.

We pray for the world, neighbours and strangers, for all who struggle to make ends meet, all who suffer illness and its effects on body and soul, all who are lonely, all who need safe drinking water and refreshing rains to grow crops. We pray for our scientists in every field of endeavour, and for those who tend to our safety and wellbeing in fields of medicine, government, community service.

We pray for people in places of power, that in their decision-making they would exercise holy manners, and offer leadership that is just and fair to all people.

We pray for ourselves, in our times of growing weary, in our times of uncertainty about the future. Keep us ever mindful of your presence with us in all life's circumstances.

Bless us, and hear us as we pray the prayer of Jesus.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: "Take Up Your Cross"* (VU 561)

Take up your cross, the Saviour said, if you would my disciples be;
take up your cross with willing heart, and humbly follow after me.

Take up your cross; let not its weight
fill your weak spirit with alarm,
Christ's strength shall bear your spirit up
and brace your heart, and nerve your arm.

Take up your cross, heed not the shame,
nor let your foolish pride rebel;
your Saviour once accepted death upon a cross, on Calvary's hill.

Take up your cross, and follow Christ,
think not till death to lay it down;
for only those who bear the cross may hope to wear the glorious crown.

Benediction:

Go to serve God with grace and strength. Go confidently and unafraid.
And may the God who created you in love, the Christ who redeems you,
and the Spirit who is our helper - go with you, wherever your journey
may lead. Amen.

Choral Response: Let Us Praise the God of Truth * (VU 237)

Let us praise the God of truth, let us praise the God of peace,
let us praise the God of love. Amen. Hallelujah, Hallelujah,
Hallelujah, Amen.

(*hymns in the public domain)