

Home Service for May 26, 2024

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

With strength and power, the Father comes to us. With arms stretched wide, the Son calls to us. With sighs too deep for words, the Spirit heals us. Thanks be to God, Mother and Father of us all.

Call to Worship:

God, sometimes we show up to worship ready to encounter your presence. Sometimes we catch glimpses of you at home, work, or school; in a smile, in a gentle breeze, in the joy of being together. We know you are always with us. But God, we hesitate to encounter you in all of your glory, afraid to be overwhelmed by your love and holiness. And yet, we know you are always with us in the fullness of your glory. Ready our hearts today to encounter more of your glory, your love, holiness, and glory that is always present with us. We come today to enter the dance of the all-consuming presence of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

God of majesty and power, how awesome you are to us! The mountains tremble, the seas roar at the sound of your name! Yet you have chosen to come to us in love and tenderness. You have called us to be people who will act in ways of peace and justice in your world. Open our hearts and our spirits, Lord, to hear your word, and having heard, to act in ministries of hope and peace for all your earth. These things we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.

Prayer of Confession:

We are so like Nicodemus, Lord. We come to you, hiding in the shadows of our own fears and terrors. We want you to give us peace and hope in our hearts. We want to know that everything will be all right; that the world will cease to be a place of terror and war. We want to be born again in a spirit of hope. But when we come it is for our own sake, and not to learn what you would have us be and do in this world. Forgive our selfishness, Lord. Calm our fears and heal our spirits. Let us truly listen to you so that we may be witnesses to your peace and justice which you seek for the world. Saturate us with your light and wisdom. Empower us to be

those who bring peace, which is not only an absence of war, but peace which promotes an attitude of love. Clear away the clutter in our lives and place us on paths of service to you. In Jesus' Name, we pray. AMEN.

Words of Assurance:

God's love of the world is so great that God sent Jesus that we may truly live lives of peace and hope. Listen with your hearts as well as your ears. God's love is poured out for you that you may have new life in service and witness. Praise be to God.

Read Psalm 29

Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendor of his^[a] holiness.
³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.
⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is majestic.
⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
⁶ He makes Lebanon leap like a calf,
Sirion^[b] like a young wild ox.
⁷ The voice of the LORD strikes
with flashes of lightning.
⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;
the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.
⁹ The voice of the LORD twists the oaks^[c]
and strips the forests bare.
And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"
¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD is enthroned as King forever.
¹¹ The LORD gives strength to his people;
the LORD blesses his people with peace.

Prayers of the People:

We are struggling, Lord. You know how difficult it is for us to hear the news of violence and warfare and to see dear lives lost in battle and strife. We long for your peace to flood the world. We cry out for your presence. We wonder if you hear our cries. How small is our faith! From the very beginnings of time, you have poured your love into the world. People have made decisions about how to respond to that love. Some have chosen to act in ways of peace, justice and mercy, loving ministries of kindness and compassion. Some have chosen to impose their will on others, never acknowledging the rights and lives of those they oppress. Sometimes, we, by our attitudes as well as actions, have acted in ways of oppression. But you forgive and heal us. You call us to be your witnesses of peace to the world. We do not need to crawl to you during the night of our fears for healing. You have given us new life in Jesus Christ, who taught us about your love. Through Christ we are adopted as your heirs, your beloved children. You have given us opportunities to bring hope and peace to others. Let us seize these opportunities for ministries of hope. Encourage our hearts. As part of our faith in You we have brought forth names aloud and in our hearts of those who need your presence and healing along with praises for what You do for us each day. Strengthen our spirits and our commitment to serve you. In Jesus' Name, we pray. AMEN.

Lord's Prayer

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵“Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

⁶Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 8:12-17

Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.^[a] And by him we cry, “*Abba*,^[b] Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

³Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.^[a]”

⁴“How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit^[b] gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying,

‘You^[c] must be born again.’ ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”^[d]

⁹“How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

¹⁰ “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? ¹¹ Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. ¹² I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.^[e] ¹⁴ Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,^[f] ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”^[g]

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Message

In life, it is not uncommon to be left out. To not be part of the “in” crowd, to be on outside of what is going on. This experience of being left out can happen at any time of life, but personally as a teacher I saw it happen to so many kids. So I am going to challenge your memories this morning and ask you to think back when you were in school. Can you remember someone who had a hard life growing up. Things were never easy for them or maybe you were that child. They may have had problems with their fine motor skills or their cognitive abilities. Maybe they had to wear special footwear or economically their clothes were not as nice or “in” as other students’. Was it hard for that person to make friends and to fit-in? It was common for that person to be left out of games at recess, not invited to birthday parties, and to be picked on as well. That person you are thinking about knew what it was like to be left out. They knew what it was like to feel alone, forgotten, and unloved by others. Those are never easy things to feel, or to experience. Let us say the name of that child is Johnny. Well, as we look at Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, we see a message that is for all people. You aren’t left out of it, and neither is absolutely anyone, including our Johnny. Jesus includes us all in the points that He makes.

So, the Apostle John starts by introducing us to Nicodemus. Nicodemus is a Pharisee, and he is an important one at that. He is a ruler of the Jews, and He sees and views Jesus as a special teacher. Nicodemus tells Jesus that Jesus must have come from God because no one could do the signs and miracles that He is doing unless God was with Him. Jesus tells him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anothén he cannot see the kingdom of God.” The word anothén is very important in understanding this text. Most versions of the Bible have changed the word anothén to again. What we need to know is that the Greek word anothén can mean two different things. It can mean born again, but it also can mean born from

above. The word means both. And Nicodemus gets it wrong for he seems to understand it as meaning born again, for he tells Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” He doesn’t seem to understand what Jesus is saying here. Nicodemus thinks that a literal, physical rebirth is necessary to see and enter into God’s Kingdom. He thinks it is necessary to be saved. However, he is not sure of how one can be born again when one becomes old. So Jesus clarifies what He means. He teaches us about human beings, and our true origin. He tells us about being born from above. Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’” Jesus doesn’t leave anyone out here. When He says, “You must be born again,” the you is plural! Not just Nicodemus, or the disciples, or the Gentiles need to be born from above. Everyone needs to be born from above if they are to enter God’s kingdom. Why is that? Remember Jesus stated that “flesh gives birth to flesh.”

We cannot go to God or please God. We all begin in exactly the same place. We all need to be completely changed and born from above. We all need to be born from water and the Spirit. Absolutely no one is left out! Jesus points us to our baptism with His Words. Titus 3:5 says, “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” Baptism is where we are born of water and the Spirit. Baptism gives us new birth, and it renews us. It gives us new life, forgiveness, and the Holy Spirit. It makes us a new person and new creation. Our mind, heart, and will are directed toward God and what pleases Him. It gives us entrance into His kingdom through faith. And this is all God’s work.

Being birthed is a passive experience. It was true for your physical birth and conception, and it is the same for your spiritual one. Being born from above is something that we cannot do, nor do we have any part in. No one can will themselves into heaven. This rebirth is God’s work and gift. Jesus tells Nicodemus that He is not making this up. The Old Testament Scriptures bear witness to these truths. We all need to be born from above. We are all included in this.

Jesus tells him a second thing that we are all included in. Jesus says, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.” Jesus compares His upcoming death on the cross and its benefits with the lifting up of the bronze serpent in the desert. Remember that in the desert, the people complained against Moses and God. And they complained about food and drink. So God sent fiery

serpents among the people that bit them, and many died from the snake bites. The people plead to Moses to pray for them, and he did. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and to set it on a pole, so that whoever looks upon it will live.

Jesus says that the same will happen with Him. All who look upon the crucified Lord in faith will be saved from sin, death, and the devil. They will live eternally. This promise is for whoever believes in Him. It is for all people. It is a universal, timeless, and a personal promise. No one is left out of it. This promise is not just for some, and not others, but for all who believe. It is for Nicodemus, the disciples, our Johnny, for you, and for me. It is for all people, regardless of race, culture, or sex. It is for the dumb, smart, rich, poor, healthy, sick, prisoners, pure, young, and old. All who look upon Jesus in faith will be saved from sin and death. Eternal life is and will be theirs. But how can Jesus make such a great promise?

Our text says, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.” Can you remember the first time that you really and I mean really heard the story of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Were you amazed and shocked at what you had heard. When you really heard that Jesus died and rose for you, did you say, “Who, me? He did that for me?” Jesus answered, “Yes, for you!” And He did it for you, for everyone! He did it for all people. He did it for the whole world! No one, I repeat no one, is left out. God gave His prized possession, His Son for all of us, and He did it out of love.

His love was more than a feeling, it was an action. It wasn’t a dream, but an intentional plan. He didn’t give His Son because of anything that we did, would do, or one day become. It was because we needed it. It was a self-serving love, but a sacrificial one. Jesus was given to death for us because we needed to be saved from sin and brought back to God. This was the only thing that could do it, and He didn’t bat an eye. Through faith in Christ, we escape condemnation, and have eternal life. This salvation is for all people that believe in Christ. No one is left out.

No one is excluded from God’s immense love that was shown to us in Jesus Christ. No one is excluded from Christ’s promise of eternal life. It is for all, and that includes you and me. IN JESUS’ NAME, AMEN.

Benediction:

Go now in the blessed presence of the Triune God who cleanses you, calls you, and empowers you to be messengers of God’s love in this world even as you are surrounded by God’s all-consuming presence wherever you go. Amen.