

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
955 Main St.
Barboursville, WV 25504
August 23, 2020

Prelude

Announcements

Update on the air conditioning situation: It is anticipated that work will begin mid-October to replace the heating and air conditioning in the sanctuary. Heating and air conditioning will also be installed in the fellowship hall. These improvements will help to make our time of worship, fellowship, and other activities more comfortable. Inquiries are underway to re-locate our worship service to another facility while we are awaiting the project's completion. Thank you for your patience in these efforts.

Call to Worship

O God, we come into your courts with thanksgiving and praise!

We come in celebration and song.

We come in gratitude for our inheritance.

We come as those who have received blessing upon blessing.

Hymn This Is My Father's World

Text: Maltbie D. Babcock, 1901; Music: Franklin L. Sheppard, 1915

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears,
all nature sings and 'round me rings the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world, I rest me in the thought,
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas, his hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world, O, let me ne'er forget,
that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world, the battle is not done.
Jesus who died shall be satisfied, and earth and heaven be one.

Prayer of the Day

Gracious God,
your people are suffering.
Where there is woundedness,
help us bring healing.
Where there is discouragement,
help us offer comfort and support.

Where there is dismay or mourning,
help us bring the power of new life and new opportunities.
Hear us, O God,
for you are our help and hope.
In the name of the Great Physician, we pray. Amen.

Scripture Reading John 5:1-9

The Morning Message

We took a brief road trip last week to deliver a piano to our daughter in Raleigh. It's the same route we take to the beach. And every time we travel that way we come to a place where a road sign directs travelers going north and travelers going south to take the same route.

It's a bit of a family joke. I can still hear my dad, on every single one of those drives between home and Myrtle Beach, ask, "Now, how in the bleep can you go north and south at the same time?"

Indeed, how can something be true and false at the same time? It doesn't make sense.

The conundrum Dad raised is called a "dialetheism." Dialetheism is a concept born in the field of logic. It refers to a statement that is simultaneously true and false. I learned this word from my friend, Phillip Gulley, Quaker pastor and author. Now, I've always heard you have to use a word ten times before it is yours. So, here goes.

Phillip Gulley says he has recently been thinking of this word, dialetheism, as it applies to a phrase we all use from time to time: "There's nothing I can do." It can be true and false, depending on the circumstances.

"There is nothing I can do." I've said that. I attribute it to the Appalachian tendency toward fatalism, but apparently it applies to Hoosiers, too. Gulley is from Indiana.

"There's nothing I can do" is a profoundly wise and true statement. Think how much happier we would be, Gulley says, if we could remember those five words. We might quit tilting at windmills or fighting other lost causes, in our futile attempts to control that which is beyond our control.

Gulley's father has recently died, and he has been experiencing depression, feeling physically and emotionally wrung out. He says he hasn't been interested in much of anything. The world just seems to be all gray and boring.

I've been there. Maybe you have, too. The way it shows up in my life is that I sleep a lot and eat ice cream right out of the carton. But, seriously, when I'm in this state, I get nothing done. Every task seems overwhelming.

Gulley says he thought his malaise came from taking care of his dad in those last months of his life. Any of us who have been caregivers can testify to how exhausting a job that is. But, what he discovered was it was coming from an even deeper and more complicated place. For twenty long years, he had been trying to fix his father's alcoholism. And the effort had left him exhausted and defeated.

Have you ever tried to fix someone who didn't want to be fixed? Have you ever tried to save a marriage the couple didn't want to save? I've blundered into that one. Have you ever tried to teach someone who wouldn't be taught? Or help them break a habit?

I was talking about this recently with a church member who is a nurse. It shows up in both of our professions. She says her colleagues have a name for those seeking help but refusing to follow directions that would resolve their problems. They are called, "help-rejecting complainers."

That pretty much says it all.

Don't you hate it when someone you love lives a paltry, pitiful life? You have tried to help but at some point, you have to admit, there's nothing you can do to change the situation? It is an awful, depressing thing, to realize you care more about the outcome of a problem than the person caught in the problem.

In the Gospel of John, there's this story of a man who had been ill for nearly 40 years, sitting by a pool of water known for its healing powers. When Jesus came by there and saw the man, he didn't move to heal him right away. Instead, he said to the man, "You have been sitting here for as long as I can remember. Are you sure you want to be healed?"

We wonder about that, too, don't we? Don't we all know someone who is quite content to remain broken, or angry, or alone, or...fill in the blank.

But, if you devote your life to fixing people who don't want to be fixed, your life will be as miserable as theirs. You'll be sitting right there beside the pool with them. It's sad to say, but, sometimes you just have to admit, "There's nothing I can do."

That said, "There's nothing I can do" can also be a false statement. Scripture calls us to pray for others. And so we do. Do our prayers always result in the outcome we want? No. But, we can't really evaluate our prayers based on what we want or expect. The important thing is that we lift

our friends and loved ones before God, asking God to work in their lives that they might find peace and fulfillment. As a result, our own sense of empathy deepens, and we find ourselves better aligned with the will and ways of Jesus...regardless of the response of the one in need.

Gulley says that there are times when we can do something in the face of threatening circumstances. And he speaks of a man named August Landmesser. He worked in a shipyard in Hamburg, Germany, when in 1936, Adolf Hitler came to christen a warship.

All the workers were gathered, thousands of them, lined up in rows to salute Hitler upon his arrival. One man stood with his arms folded across his chest. August Landmesser. Why would he dare to go against the orders of his superiors? Why risk his own freedom and maybe his own life?

Because August Landmesser was in love with and planned to marry a young Jewish woman. Scripture reminds that "perfect love casts out fear." Gulley says he recently ran across a photo of this brave young man, arms crossed, a scowl on his face. He was only one man standing in contrast to a big compliant crowd. It would have been easier, even advisable, for him to conclude, "This is terrible. I hate what's happening here. But, there's nothing I can do." And, stand up straight and salute along with the others, many of whom shared his opinion.

But, instead, he summoned up his courage and said, "There is something I can do. I can express my moral disgust with this cruel regime." And that's what he did.

Most of us will never face a moment of decision like this. Thank God. But, we all have moments when we must simultaneously accept the inevitable and work to change the outcome of a problem.

Here's where I think we are facing this reality today:

School will soon begin in our community. The school culture has a major impact on the life of this and every community. It is very much the hub of life and activity. It gives a community its identity. What we value in life is often formed by school teachers and coaches and administrators. Citizens invest a tremendous amount of money and expectation in our schools. We look to our schools to produce the future's leaders and problem-solvers.

There is a great deal of anxiety associated with this year's return to school because of the complicating factor of the pandemic.

So, let's think about it as a dialtheism:

Covid 19 will change the school experience. There is nothing we can do about it. This is a true statement.

Covid 19 will change the school experience. There is nothing we can do about it. This is a false statement.

Here's how it's false:

We can live it out with meaning and purpose, growing in knowledge, wisdom, character, and grace. Our creativity and ingenuity may be stretched. Our sense of empathy may grow. Our commitment to a common goal may strengthen community spirit.

The response is really up to each of us. Even those of us without children or other family members in the system. All of us are community members and people of faith. Let's use the gifts of faith, hope, and love to support, to advocate, to act when and where needed. I believe we will have plenty of opportunity.

And remember, sometimes you really can go north and south at the same time.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Lord God, of heaven and earth, with gladness we praise you,
for your create and sustain all things.

For making us in your image, to love one another and to care for your creation,
we give thanks.

For the gift of Your Son, who redeems and teaches us according to your will,
we give thanks.

By your Holy Spirit, empower us to show your love to others.

We pray for the needs of the world:

for the church and those who lead it,

for the earth that we may care for it,

for those who govern the nations of the world,

for those who serve others as teachers, healers, and caregivers,

for the poor, the homeless, the sick, the hungry,

for those who mourn, and for the lonely,

for the oppressed of every nation,

for those who suffer for the cause of Christ,

for all who need help, especially those who reject the efforts of others,

for those in our family of faith who have needs of body, mind, or circumstance,

for ourselves, that we may love you with more devotion each day.

We pray as Jesus taught us, saying,
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.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory forever. Amen.

Blessing

By our words and deeds, we show God's presence in our lives.
So, go now, and take God's gifts into the world,
remembering the needy, in body, mind, or spirit,
and be God's healing balm in all you do. Amen.

Postlude