

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
955 Main St.
PO Box 222 (mailing address)
Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
February 7, 2021
Souper Bowl of Caring Sunday

Prelude

Call to Worship from Psalm 147

How good it is to sing praises to our God.
For God is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.
God heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds.
God is our Lord, and abundant in power.
God's understanding is beyond measure.

Hymn God, You Give Us Recreation

Text: Carolyn Winfrey Gillette
Music: Traditional Dutch melody:
There's a Wideness in God's Mercy

God, you give us recreation, rest and play when work is through.
Game and sport and celebration, times that challenge and renew.
In the days we spend together, in the feasts that we prepare,
in the times of joy and laughter, may we know your loving care.
Yet, O Lord, we see you crying for the ones who know no rest.
For your children, hungry, dying, for the homeless and oppressed.
May we, as your sons and daughters, share with open heart and hand,
'til your justice flows like waters to the poor throughout the land.
Bless, O Christ, our gifts of caring, for we know without a doubt:
soup and bread are meant for sharing, hands are made for reaching out.
Even in our times of playing, may we keep the vision clear:
keep us serving, loving, praying, welcoming your kingdom here.

Prayer of Confession

Isaiah exclaims, "Have you not seen? Have you not heard? "The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. God does not faint or grow weary," but comes to us to renew our strength and restore us to right relationship with God and others.

O God. Our creator, sustainer and redeemer, we confess our feelings of anxiety and uncertainty brought on by the pandemic and other events and challenges of these days. We look for help, but, sometimes it seems you are far away. Remind us that you are most present to us in our time of need. Restore in us a sense of your comfort and care. Renew our strength so that we might mount up with wings like eagles to carry out each day's purpose. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

The God who fashioned the stars and the moon has come close to each of us with mercy and love. Hear the good news of the gospel: We are forgiven and freed to run and not be weary, to walk and not faint. Know you are forgiven and be at peace.

Old Testament Reading **Isaiah 40:21-31**

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,
and spreads them like a tent to live in;
who brings princes to naught,
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.
Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,
when he blows upon them, and they wither,
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.
To whom then will you compare me,
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.
Lift up your eyes on high and see:
Who created these?
He who brings out their host and numbers them,
calling them all by name;
because he is great in strength,
mighty in power,
not one is missing.
Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
'My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God'?
Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Jesus Heals Many at Simon's House

29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

32 That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

A Preaching Tour in Galilee

35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' ³⁸He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons

The Morning message *"Have you not known? Have you not heard?"*

I always get a tingle up my arms when I hear those questions. It's like a cosmic, "Where have you been? Have you been living under a rock?"

Isaiah 40 begins what Bible scholars call Second Isaiah. This passage has been described as a pre-trial narrative containing a strong defense of God. This section precedes the "trial" of the next eight chapters of Isaiah, where humanity is "tried" as in a courtroom. In this pre-trial narrative, God is presented as the one who needs no introduction.

God is the master designer, creator of all that is, whose power and authority have no limits. The one who is the very definition of benevolence, who reaches out to the weak, faint, and powerless to renew and strengthen. Surely, we all know this. Surely, we can all bear witness to God's glory.

Someone I love is a lawyer. Early in her career she appeared with a client before a judge. The nature of the proceedings and the reputation of the court left her stumbling for words. The judge swiftly chastised her, "Young lady, are you an attorney?" Then represent your client!"

If you were to stand before the court, if you were to testify to the mighty acts of God, what would you say?

When this text appears in the lectionary, I always think of my friend, whose hyper-active adolescent son was to appear before the session with his confirmation class. This was the moment of truth, the hour when they could be questioned on what they had learned about church history and theology, the moment when someone would surely ask if you have to be baptized to get into heaven and why Presbyterians don't normally applaud in worship.

Unconvinced that his son was ready for this inquisition, he took the boy to a nearby stadium and walked up and down, back and forth, all afternoon, quizzing him.

That night, washed and combed and dressed in their go-to-meeting clothes, the class was assembled before the session. One by one, the elders asked a question of the young people. With each question, my friend grew more nervous.

Finally, it was his son's turn. An elder of many years service looked at the boy and asked, "Young man, can Jesus do anything?"

It required only a one-word answer. "Yes."
Examination passed.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Those who wait upon the Lord shall be filled with strength. They will stand before stern judges and not be reduced to tears. They will be given uncommon endurance, even surpassing the fitness of young athletes. They will succeed in their work even when their mom or dad doubts them.

In our gospel text, we are witnesses to the power Jesus wields over sickness and death. Fevers were common in Galilee. The Greek translation of the text indicates that the sick woman was seriously ill. She was near death. When Jesus ministered to her, she was healed immediately. That's a common theme in Mark: things happen immediately.

And after she was healed, she got up out of her bed and began to serve the people gathered in her home. Apparently, she didn't need six weeks to recuperate like I did following major surgery. She didn't benefit from the gift of nourishing food lovingly made by friends and family. If we would look around the house, we wouldn't see a bouquet of flowers picked from her neighbor's garden.

No. She resumed her role and responsibilities right away- cooking, cleaning, serving.

I'm not advocating that any of us jump up out of a sick bed to make dinner for a crowd. Because I think that misses the point.

God gives and gives and gives and does not grow tired or weary. One good deed, one life redeemed, one relationship restored gathers steam. Strength builds upon strength. And, if we want to understand that kind of strength, we will find it by waiting upon the Lord. That can be translated into waiting upon or serving or taking care of God's world and God's people. Peter's

mother-in-law regained her strength in performing household tasks in service to Jesus and her family.

Oftentimes, we explain or rationalize healing stories in the Bible by qualifying them. We say things like disease was misunderstood, that the science that informs us today did not exist, so that is why these stories appear so dramatic. A simple medication, like penicillin, would come along in time and save millions of lives. Healing would eventually come by way of human invention and the stories of miraculous healing would cease.

But, the fact remains that Jesus was a healer and that was one reason people were drawn to him. Fast-forward two millennia, and healing may well come by other means, rendering the witness of scripture a relic.

Or, does it?

Twelve months ago, we heard reports of a disease that was about to sweep over the whole world. Little was known about it, but, it seemed no one was immune. First world or the two-thirds world. No difference. The disease may be of little consequence or it could lead to a horrible death.

Soon, there would be panicky trips to grocery stores to stock up on food and supplies. Paper products were rationed. Schools and churches and restaurants closed. Vacations were cancelled and playgrounds were roped off. We all donned masks. We washed our hands til the skin was chapped and sore.

Life was turned upside-down. For once, I think Americans understood what it was like to be as vulnerable as our brothers and sisters in the world's most impoverished places. It was a time of humility. We needed a dose of humility. It was a reckoning of sorts.

Conversation soon turned to finding a way to control the virus. We heard that scientists were working around the clock to develop a vaccine. There were starts and stops and angst and anxiety and accusations and all manner of shameful words and deeds in these many months.

Every evening we watched the news for a progress report. We had hope, like the rest of the world. Sadly, we witnessed the devastating effects of Covid, people who wouldn't benefit from the vaccine, but whose experience with the disease would advance our understanding.

Plagues and diseases and famines were commonplace in Bible times. Disease was understood and often thought to be the result of anti-social or sinful behavior. People lived in fear of sickness and death. Sometimes they turned to folk remedies. These may or not be very effective and they could be harmful.

So, Jesus comes along and he heals this woman and the demon-possessed man and lepers and the lame. And what are we to make of them? Some say these accounts are metaphors to demonstrate the power and majesty of God.

Hmm...

On Thursday, I took my mother for her second Covid shot. We went to the Saint Mary's education campus and were directed along the drive-through process. It was well-organized and efficient. On that cold, cold day, those who waited on the public were pleasant. I would go so far as to say they were cheerful. They were finding some pleasure in waiting upon the public. That went a long way to calm nerves. At least, in my mother's case, I believe the gentle nature of the nurse who administered the shot reduced her pain.

As I inched my car through this set-up, one of a hundred cars in the lot, I thought of the paralyzed man that was lowered through the roof of a crowded house to be healed by Jesus. As I looked at the people in those vehicles, some of whom displayed obvious signs of poor health, like the oxygen my mother was using, I remembered Jesus telling long-suffering people to take up their mats and walk. Immediately upon receiving her shot, my mother turned to me and said she hoped how soon I would be eligible to receive mine. And I remembered that Jesus was once compelled by the love of a father to raise his twelve-year-old daughter from the dead.

The healing presence and power of Jesus is not a metaphor. It is not a relic. It is just as real and effective as it was in Galilee so many years ago, even if it's delivered by a masked nurse leaning into my car with a syringe full of life.

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

God gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

...those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles,

they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Terri C. Pilarski, 2009

Holy and gracious God,

we give thanks for all the blessings of this life.

Help us to hear when you call,

And see where you lead.

May we respond to your prophets when they appear.

Loving God, fill those who suffer, struggle, or live in fear, with your peace.

Comfort those who weep, the broken, the shattered, the lost, with your hope.

God of our desire, bless us that we may be a blessing to those we meet.

We pray as Jesus taught us, saying, Our Father...Amen.

Charge and blessing for Souper Bowl Sunday

Lord, even as we enjoy the Super Bowl football game,

help us to be mindful of those

without a bowl of soup to eat.

Go out now to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

Postlude