

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
955 Main Street
Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
October 11, 2020

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship

Praise the Lord! O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good;

For the Lord's steadfast love endures forever.

Who can utter the mighty doings of the Lord,
or declare all God's praise?

**Happy are those who observe justice,
who do righteousness at all times.**

Affirmation of Faith A Declaration of Faith, PCUSA, 1985

We are certain that Jesus lives.

**He lives as God with us,
touching all of human life with the presence of God.**

He lives as one of us with God.

**Because he shares our humanity,
He has bound us to himself in love.**

We declare that Jesus is Lord.

**We have an advocate in
the innermost life of God.**

**His resurrection is a decisive victory
over the powers that deform and destroy human life.**

His lordship is hidden.

**The world appears to be
dominated by people and systems that do not acknowledge his rule.**

But his Lordship is real.

It demands our loyalty and sets us free from all the lesser lords who threaten us.

**We maintain that ultimate sovereignty
now belongs to Jesus Christ.**

In every sphere of life,

Jesus is Lord.

He has been from the beginning.

He will be Lord at the end.

Even now he is Lord.

Prayer of Confession

Lord, you see how stubborn we are, how quickly we turn from you toward idols of our own making. We forget your providential care, the countless ways you provide, your gracious response to our cries for help.

We give attention to our own needs and sometimes neglect the needs of others.

We cannot justify our behavior, we can only confess it, repent, and ask again for your mercy. Forgive us, Lord, that we may bear faithful witness, in word and deed, to your love and grace.

Assurance of Pardon

God pours out mercy and grace. God never gives up on us, but frees us to live lives worthy of our calling.

Friends, believe the good news of the gospel. Know you are forgiven and be at peace.

Old Testament Reading

Isaiah 25:1-9

New Testament Lesson

Philippians 4:1-9

The Morning Message

Of all the skills needed to be effective in ministry there is one that does not come easily or naturally to me. A pastor should be a “non-anxious presence.” We can certainly understand why this is important: church folks and even entire congregations can be consumed by anxiety. For good reason. Our lives have been altered in so many ways during this pandemic. But they have been altered before and the world has continued to turn. Still, we worry.

A sign that I am getting bogged down with worry is when I find myself standing in front of my closet looking at tops, pants, dresses- all organized by color-and not being able to pull together an outfit for the day. I can't decide what to wear. It's absurd, but, it's the warning sign that I can't hold any more thoughts, feelings, or concerns in my head.

A fellow pastor says it was during one of those times of extreme worry, he took his family on a hike. He described it as a brisk, early spring morning, the scent of sweet blooms in the air. Beautiful. Perfect. This was during a time that he was convinced he had a terrible disease lurking in his body and the thought was paralyzing for him and exasperating for his wife and family.

As they climbed the trail, he had a “eureka” moment and he blurted out to his wife, “You know, right now, at this very moment, I feel as though I am healthy. I do not think I am dying of anything. I feel certain of it!”

His wife didn't think he could see, but he did see her roll her eyes, as I am also inclined to do. Then she said that was exactly what she had been telling him for weeks, and since it was settled, could they just enjoy the day?

Believe it or not, that was a novel thought- Having enough room in his head to enjoy the moment he was in.

Later his wife sent him an NPR story that explored how going out into nature was good for our mental health. The story described something the Japanese call "sinrin-yoku," or "forest bathing."

The theory goes that when we are obsessing about something, and take to our familiar spaces- a room or an office, the closeness of the physical space traps our thoughts and keeps them with us, and we dwell on them. However, going outside-to the mountains or the beach or even our yards, allows our thoughts to escape into that atmosphere like billowing smoke from a fire.

Sounds good, but, will this really work? Well, it's helpful, but good intentions and wide-open spaces are not the cure-all for pervasive anxiety. Sometimes, it requires professional help and we should be aware of that.

Scripture can help. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "Do not worry about anything, rejoice in the Lord always." We may hear it as "Let go and let God."

Easier said than done. These words are little comfort to those who are burdened with a truck-load of cares.

Someone I love is struggling with the responsibilities of working full-time and providing support for her young child as he takes his first grade year in front of a laptop screen at home. Throw in home maintenance and dog care, all while a single parent, it's pretty hard to rejoice in the Lord. And, she's not alone. According to the Anxiety and Depression Society of America, anxiety affects 40 million adults a year. And that was before Covid 19.

My friend, the hiker, says, this Philippians passage spoke to him differently in this particular moment. Especially verse 8:

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things."

Think about this: Paul wrote these words while in prison-a closed space where he could ruminate for long days about his fate. But, as dreadful as it might be, Paul saw himself as a prisoner for Christ, a high calling, writing to the members of a persecuted church, re-directing their thoughts.

What did Paul know about psychology? We don't know, but we do know that he was on the right track when he encouraged those early Christians to train their minds on the things that give life meaning and purpose.

Thoughts have power. Sometimes when I am about to step up to the pulpit, I feel my pulse race and it's hard to catch my breath. It's an awesome thing to proclaim God's Word to people, even people I know like family. I've been doing this a long time now, about thirty years. I still get stage fright.

So, I do a breathing exercise my doctor taught me: take a deep breath, hold it for ten seconds, exhale for ten seconds. I do this three times and I can feel much more at ease. My pulse slows down. I can breathe. My friend, Susan, practices centering prayer. Other friends practice meditation or yoga to reduce their anxiety and raise their awareness and appreciation for life. If you are not inclined to try any of those practices, then, take a walk. Read the newspaper outside. Drive to work or to Grandma's by a different route. You will notice something new. This creates new pathways in our brains. These things can help train our minds so that we are less likely to fall into the trap of paralyzing thought. We can relate to others better. We can be more fully alive.

Irenaeus was a theologian of the fourth century. His words hold wisdom for today:
"The glory of God is a human being fully alive."

A friend of mine was undergoing treatment for cancer. She was young, with a young family to raise. She had a lot to live for. Even on the hard days, she had a lot to live for. I visited her one day and she took me around her house. She would pull out a drawer and there would be a slip of paper with these words of Paul. She had these verses, like little treasures, all over her house. She had a potentially deadly disease, and it took a lot of strength to cope with it and follow all the medical protocols. There was a lot of yuckiness. So, she was training her mind to think about joy, delight, beauty, and grace, because those things are life-giving, not life-taking.

I offer these thoughts to you in hopes that, in this time of great upheaval, that your senses will perk up, that you may notice what is admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy.

So that you may be a reflection of God's glory...you...fully alive.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Blessing

May the God of endurance and encouragement, grant you to live in such harmony with one another that with one voice we may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Postlude