

Worship for August 29, 2021

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements                      John R. Thomas

\*Call to Worship

Look to the mountains! Look to the hills!

**Love comes to us with joy!**

The world is filled with beauty.

**Flowers appear on the earth, birdsong brightens the day.**

Crops yield their produce in abundance,

**The air is filled with sweetness.**

**The summer of God's love is with us.**

Let the oil of gladness anoint your souls.

Arise and sing for joy!

\*Hymn 14                      For the Beauty of the Earth

Prayer of Confession

**God of justice and righteousness,**

**your call beckons us:**

**to live faithful lives,**

**to turn from wickedness,**

**to walk in your ways.**

**Yet it is easy to turn aside:**

**to speak a thoughtless word,**

**to ignore those in need,**

**to strike out in anger,**

**to forget your ways.**

**Forgive us.**

**Implant your word in our hearts,**

**and cleanse us from all evil.**

**By the power of your love,**

**save us, that we might fully love and serve you. Amen.**

Words of Assurance

God's word has the power to save us.

God has anointed us with gladness,

forgiven and freed us,

to live holy and joyful lives. Alleluia! Amen.

First Reading      Song of Songs 2:8-13

Time With Our Young Disciples

Second Reading      James 1:17-27

Morning Message

The Fifth Grade Choir at an elementary school near us took a short road trip to present their Christmas program at a local nursing home. They were very fifth grade. Confident at the school, the big kids, top dogs, they dominated the playground equipment. Take them out, though, and they were not so confident. Stand them up and have them sing in front of the elderly and infirm, and all kinds of anxiety emerges.

The teacher lined up the students. She cued the recorded accompaniment tape and directed them through several songs, some with a little choreography. They reached the end of the performance. The staff and residents seemed to have been charmed. They enthusiastically applauded.

The parents who had driven that day began to gather the kids in groups and head to their cars. But, not before the teacher called them all together in the lobby and blessed them out for giving a lousy performance. Words were used that should never come out of any teacher's mouth. She was angry. And everyone in eastern Cabell County could surely hear her railing at her students.

The kids were shocked, embarrassed. Some started crying. Most of them walked to the cars with heads hanging.

And, the parents were angry. Not at the kids. They did their best and should have been commended for their efforts. We were angry at the teacher for her outrageous behavior and language. It was demoralizing and abusive in my opinion.

I delivered my group to their classroom and stomped down the hall to the principal's office. I had never done this before but I went straight to his desk and started to describe what had just happened. But, I was so upset I couldn't get the words out and I, too, started to cry.

The principal got up and came around the desk. He took my arm and said, "Let's walk." And so we did. Not a word said between us for awhile.

And then, this wise and gentle man said, “You know, Cinda, this is a special time of year. To some of us, it is sacred. A child is coming who will change the world. He brings the good news of salvation. We are filled with gratitude and love.

But there is a competing spirit that does not want that good news to be shared with the world. That spirit does all kinds of cruel things to ruin the Spirit of Christmas. I see it every year. You just witnessed it. I’m very sorry that the children heard those mean words. I’ll take care of it. You go on home and settle down. When we get upset, the devil wins.”

Many of us struggle with anger. Maybe we are the victims of anger or maybe we are the aggressors. Maybe we have created a toxic environment in order to have control over others.

Some of us may have lived in anger-filled homes or worked in conflicted settings. This fills us with fear and anxiety. It steals our joy and often keeps us trapped in unhealthy relationships and situations.

Just as damaging, maybe we were taught to hide signs of hurt or anger, to deny or bury them. That’s not good either. Do you know what therapists call depression? Anger turned inward.

So, it’s a real problem.

We can’t completely avoid anger. Sometimes it is justified. Jesus got angry. We remember how angry he got when he went into the temple courtyard and overturned the tables of the moneychangers because they were cheating God’s faithful people. Sometimes anger gives us the impetus to act, to address a need, to correct a wrong.

Anger has been described as “When *what is* doesn’t line up with *what ought to be*.”

The world has a lot of big, complicated, generations-deep problems. We can get angry about some of those. I am angry when someone is discriminated against because of their race or gender or age. I am angry when the disabled are ignored. I am angry when little children are neglected and abused. I am angry when my aging relatives are dismissed. And I’m angry when someone endangers others for their own selfish ends.

I’ve heard a lot of angry speeches this past week as the US has begun to withdraw our troops from Afghanistan. I received a text message at 7am Friday about it. Seriously. Facebook was just as bad. It is full of mean-spirited messages that only result in more of the same.

Do you know what happens inside us when we get angry? Anger is a natural response to a perceived threat. It causes your body to release adrenaline, your muscles tighten, and your heart rate, body temperature, and blood pressure rise. That's good if you are being chased by a bear.

But, consider this: in a wildfire, if fire begins at the root level of certain species of trees, the fire burns the tree from the inside out. You can't tell how badly the fire has damaged the tree until you take a whack at it and you see the flames consuming it from within.

Anger can do the same thing to us. If we aren't careful, it can burn us up from the inside out.

The Rev. Dalton Rushing offers a simple test to determine if our anger is righteous and useful or serves no purpose other than burning you up on the inside:

Ask yourself, have you been slow to listen? Slow to speak? Has your anger come about deliberately, with thoughtful consideration? Does your anger have a direction? Does it face outward, toward the needs, defense, or welfare of others? Does your anger prompt you to make life better for all people or does it stop with your own comfort or progress or recognition?

Martin Luther called the Book of James "The Epistle of Straw." He was critical of what some call "works righteousness." He believed James would lead people to think they could earn their way to salvation, which cheapened the grace that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

The Epistle of James is short in length, but long on virtue. It does focus on *doing* as well as *hearing* the word of God. How we behave, react, and respond to the events of our lives gives an important witness to our faith. It gives us the momentum to change "what is" into "what ought to be."

Prayer

Gracious God, teach us the fine art and practice of anger. May our hearts be broken by the things that break yours and direct us to the kind of true devotion that makes us agents of healing and wholeness. Amen.

\*Affirmation of Faith          The Apostles' Creed    Glory to God p. 35

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

Prayer of Dedication

**God of light and beauty, every gift is from you.**

**Even our ability to give is a blessing of your love.**

**We offer what we have and what we are that you may use our gifts  
to give birth to a world of peace and understanding,  
where none are in need,  
and all are drawn into your embrace. Amen.**

\*Hymn 692 Spirit, Open My Heart

\*Blessing

In everything, let us offer our thanks to God.

In our darkness and questioning,

in our relief and rejoicing,

in the assurance that God holds us in love,

that we may cheerfully serve others,

replacing fear with the hope born of Eternal Love. Amen.

\*Postlude

Announcements

Today is ECCHO Sunday. School supplies and underwear are being received at this time, along with our customary contributions of cereal.

We also receive the Centsability Offering today for the relief of hunger in our community.

Rev. Harkless will be away next week. Worship will be led by Jim Musgrave, friend and former pastor.

Rally Day Events:

(use the two announcements from Harold and Kevin)