

Worship for July 9, 2023

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

\*Call to Worship

Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth!

Worship the Lord with gladness!

Come into God's presence with singing!

**For the Lord is a gracious God,  
whose mercy is everlasting,  
and whose faithfulness endures to all generations.**

\*Hymn 634 To God Be the Glory

Prayer of Confession

**Holy and merciful God,  
In your presence we confess our short-comings  
and our offenses against you.**

**You alone know how often we have sinned,  
in wandering from your ways,  
in squandering your gifts,  
in forgetting your love.**

**Have mercy on us, Lord,  
forgive our sins and help us live in your light and walk in your ways.**

Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

I declare to you all, in the name of Jesus Christ, your sins are forgiven. Be at peace.

First Scripture Reading Psalm 145: 8-14

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

Morning Message

Anne Lamott is a gifted writer and I would call her a genius at practical theology. She is not a minister or religion professor in the traditional sense. Yet, the way Anne writes is like venturing into the mighty redwood forest of life...looking up the length of an ancient tree to its distant leafy canopy, inviting us to catch a glimpse of God.

While she has written many books and regularly contributes to periodicals and magazines, makes personal appearances, and is frequently on tour inspiring new writers...she has not always enjoyed success. Far from it.

Here's what she says in a recent blog post:

"Thirty-seven years ago, July 7, 1986, I got clean and sober. It is the great miracle of my existence, from which everything I love about life has sprung.

I had published three books, had a great persona and reputation, and everyone knew and loved me-my soul felt like Swiss cheese, full of holes, toxic and nuts, until I had that first cool refreshing beer of the day, just to get the flies going in one direction.

...I was dirt poor and could not go off somewhere and clean up. And I had run out of any more good ideas, which is what grace looks like sometimes.

But God is such a show-off, and I fell in with some kind people who were sober, who wondered if I might be sick and tired of being sick and tired, and if so, if I needed a ride.

I was broke for the first five years but I had a luscious little boy, and these people I'm telling you about. I was happier than I had ever been. They're the exact same people who will be there for you with rides and cookies and wisdom and loyalty and love that will blow your mind Some of them are here today, and if you reach out to them, they will respond. You never have to hurt like you're hurting now, and you will never again be alone."

Anne was living in the San Francisco Bay area. Walking through town one Sunday morning, pregnant and scared and hungry, she heard the singing of an African American gospel choir coming from an ordinary-looking storefront church. She recognized a few words of their song: Jesus. God. Love. The sounds were so compelling, that she opened the door and slipped in incognito. Or so she thought.

You can't be anonymous in the community of faith. But she tried. She slipped in and out of the church a few times in the weeks that followed. After she attended several times, comfortable with what happened in worship and the faces more familiar, she cracked the door a little on her life. She was immediately embraced. Her yet-to-be-born child was embraced. One woman saved all the dimes she got from week to week and gave those to Anne. She says those dimes saved her from starvation some weeks. It served as food for her body as surely as worship in a

storefront church, hearing and feeling the energy of the gospel choir, being inspired, challenged, forgiven, and loved by the pastor and everyone else.

Once she was worn out and weary, afraid of the future, afraid of childbirth, nearly penniless, and the church opened its arms wide and took Anne in, and she found rest. It transformed her life. Being so grateful for their help, she has stayed faithful to this church, which, I'm happy to report, is Presbyterian USA, under the leadership of a dynamic pastor. With drinking and drugging behind her, she knows she will always hear a message that echoes with a note of grace.

California is a long way to go to find inspiration, but, I may have to figure out a way to tap into that energy, that sense of hope and optimism. The last several weeks have been challenging, if not, downright hard. I have become a little weary. The AC at our house was on its last leg and company was coming. Two of our family members were hospitalized. Ed had eye surgery and I am facing another eye procedure. And, with all of you, we are experiencing a period of loss and grief. Like a hot humid summer with no rain, I could use those showers of blessings they used to sing about at my grandmother's church.

Soon after I spoke those concerns aloud on Friday morning, a prayer that kind of sounded like, "Help!" my phone started ringing and pinging. Offers of help, offers to do whatever it takes to care of things here and at home began pouring in. I was able to see things a little more clearly and figure out the way forward. Showers of blessing had arrived at 167 Iroquois Trail.

And that's the way it is when we are weighed down with concerns, questions, doubts, needs, burdens- and remember to turn to God and to recognize God working through others. Help may not come in the way or in the shape of what we expect, but be assured, God's storehouse is never empty and never closed.

May you find it so for yourselves.

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

\*Hymn 580 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns  
Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings  
Offertory

\*Hymn 607 Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

**Blessed are you, God of all creation.**

**Through your goodness we have these gifts to share.  
Accept and use our offerings and our lives for your glory  
and for the service of your kingdom. Amen.**

\*Hymn 694 Great God of Every Blessing

\*Blessing

Go out remembering all God has done for you.

Break down the walls of hostility

and proclaim peace.

Have compassion for all, including yourself.

And may God be with you wherever you go.

May Christ Jesus heal you and refresh you.

And may the Holy Spirit encircle you and give you strength. Amen.

\*Postlude