

Worship for June 26, 2022

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

\*Call to Worship

We worship the God who inhabits our world and indwells our lives.

We need not look up to find God...

we need only to look around...

within ourselves...

beyond ourselves...

into the eyes of another.

**We need not listen for a distant thunder to find God...**

**we need only to listen to the music of life...the words of children, the questions of the curious, the rhythm of the heartbeat.**

**Let us worship the God who inhabits our world and indwells our lives.**

\*Hymn 39 Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Prayer of Confession

**God, you know us better than we know ourselves.**

**You know our thoughts,**

**our weaknesses,**

**our sins,**

**and you love us still.**

**Forgive us when we don't believe such love is true or possible,**

**when we wonder how you could love us just as we are,**

**When we forget our intricate instruction,**

**that we are fearfully and wonderfully made...in your image!**

**Remove from our minds every thought that keeps us from you.**

**Break down the walls,**

**push aside the pride,**

**and help us trust anew.**

**You know our hearts and you love us still. Amen.**

\*Hymn Take, O Take Me As I Am 698

Assurance of Forgiveness

Nothing is impossible with God.

There is no place you can go,

no end of the earth to which you can run.  
There is nothing on earth or beyond death  
that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.  
You are forgiven and freed to live in God's infinite love, grace, and peace.

Scripture Reading Lamentations 3:23-33

Moments With Our Young Disciples

Scripture Reading Mark 5:21-43  
Morning Message

Sometimes I hit a mental block when preparing for worship and preaching. Because I follow the three-year lectionary cycle, I usually avoid that problem. But, sometimes, things happen that make me doubt my plans. I have occasionally confessed this to my kids, and they are so helpful. "Hymn sing, Mom! Hymn sing!" If only it were that easy.

That's where I found myself this week. Mark introduces us to two beautiful healing stories. They reflect life in Jesus' day, which I can usually work around. But, sometimes, it just hits too close to home and I hesitate to go there.

In our Mark text, Jesus is summoned to the home of Jairus. Jairus is an important man. He has social status. He has status in the religious community. He is wealthy. On this day, his daughter was very sick, close to death. He calls for Jesus to come. But, before Jesus can make his way to her, a woman who had suffered an illness for twelve years, approaches him. This woman has suffered physical and emotional pain. She has been isolated from her loved ones. She could not go about the town or go to the market, or even serve her family, because, in that day, she was considered unclean. To interact with her would render others unclean, too. Twelve years she endured this.

It has never occurred to me to ask this question, but, influenced by current events, it just churns within me. Did women and girls have no right to personal privacy in Jesus' day? How and why and what kind of mechanism was used to keep track of a woman's personal calendar? Why was this a public matter? Would we tolerate it today?

Which was more important- living a full life, filled with family, love, and grace- or being controlled by a system of ritual purity that excluded woman and girls from human interaction for at least one half of every month during their child-bearing years?

There's a gospel song that goes, "Give Me that Old Time Religion, it's good enough for me." I say, "No, thanks!" I, for one, would not want to return to those old-time religious practices.

This woman has lost a lot, but the one thing that can't be taken from her, is her belief and trust in the power of Jesus. If only she could touch a little bit of his robe, just a little bit of Jesus- she would be healed. She could resume her life. But, could Jesus? If she touched Jesus, even the hem of his robe, Jesus would be rendered unclean, too. He would have to submit to the purity rituals.

This woman acted at great risk. She didn't announce herself. Jesus did not seek her out. We don't even know if Jesus was at all aware of her before she touched him. But, Jesus felt the power "go out" from him. When she was identified, she poured out her whole story and Jesus gives her his blessing, saying her faith had made her well. Note: Jesus does not order her to the priests, he did not send her to the ritual baths, and he didn't go there himself.

By the time Jesus has finished his encounter with this woman, report came that the daughter of Jairus had died. Or so they thought. But, Jairus persisted and so did Jesus. Upon entering the place where she lay, Jesus stretched out his hand and simply says, "Talitha cum." "Little girl, or more precisely, "little lamb," get up!" And to the others, he says, "Give her something to eat." Dying bodies have no need for food. Only the living. She would live.

These are dramatic stories. Miraculous stories of the power of Jesus to heal, to restore. In each case, we are to believe that the faith and trust of those in need had affected their healing. OK. But, what about the other millions of faithful believers who have stood in need of a miracle themselves and a miracle did not come? What about their faith? Is it defective?

Of course not. Sometimes Jesus restores the health of the sick. But, sometimes this does not happen. Or, at least, we can't see any of the normal signs of healing. But, that doesn't mean that we can't be made whole, at peace with God, placing ourselves fully into God's care.

Here's where our Matthew text comes thru for us. He urges:

"Come to me, all you who are heavy-burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

A yoke is a device that is applied to two beasts of burden so that they move together- at the same pace and in the same direction. If one stops to drink, it's safe to assume, the other also drinks. If one stops to rest, the other does the same.

This is how close Jesus is to us. We do not carry our burden alone. We are yoked to Jesus who helps us carry that heavy load.

Ed and I have been walking at the mall while this heat wave has visited us. On Friday, we ran into a friend who has suffered greatly over the years. But, here she was, strolling two of her three youngest grandchildren, the first girls born into the family in three generations. She was not suffering. She was glowing. Healing and wholeness come in ways we cannot imagine or predict.

I know you probably hear way too much about my grandchildren, but, they do provide good sermon material. Tad, the younger one, was recently sick. It started out as restlessness and crying in the night. His parents would comfort him and return him to his bed. After a day or two, a fever developed and then an earache. A visit to the doctor was in order. Ear infection, sinus infection, and tonsillitis. Two kinds of antibiotics. And a lot of TLC. Tad still hurts and the medicine upsets his stomach, and he can't go the neighborhood pool, which he loves. But, just being in the presence or the lap of Mommy or Daddy is all the reassurance Tad needs. He feels better the closer he is to them.

I am aware of some of your burdens. I am aware of the burdens some of you carry for others. Mother Teresa used to say, there is always someone to pray for and there's always a front step to sweep. It is always appropriate to seek God's healing and wholeness- for ourselves and all those experiencing brokenness.

When we hear news of tragedy, someone always asks, "Where was God?" God was with his child, no matter the age or condition, and God was the first to shed a tear at the loss of life.

It would be great if we could wake up tomorrow, blissfully unaware of the problems we may run into as the day unfolds, and think, "This might just be the best day ever!"

But, in case it's not, let me offer this prayer for all of us:

Lord, I want to be made well.

I reach for the hem of your garment,  
and there I find those who clothe me with love,  
and deep listening,  
and encouragement,  
and wisdom,  
and gentle correction,  
just as you would.

I ask for your hands on me  
and I get hugs,  
and emails,  
and texts with GIFs,  
and prayers said on my behalf,

as if they had come directly from you.  
Though others take me by the hand  
and feed me spiritual and physical food  
that revives my soul and body.  
out of the abundance of the health you offer.  
May I share your peace widely. Laura Stephens-Reed

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

\*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Gifts of Tithe and Offering

Offertory

\*Hymn 606 Doxology

\*Prayer of Dedication

\*Hymn 443 There Is a Redeemer

\*Blessing

Go now, with your hope set on Jesus Christ.

Let the Spirit guide you.

Let your righteousness shine like the sun until darkness and light are one.

And wherever you go,

whether you scale the highest heavens or plunge to the depths,

may God's presence be known to you,

may Christ Jesus welcome you into his embrace,

and may the Spirit assure you that you are loved.

\*Postlude

Announcements

Today is ECCHO and Cents-ability Sunday. Contributions are received for the relief of hunger in our community.

The session meets following worship today in the fellowship hall. Newly-elected members are encouraged to attend.

First Presbyterian Church invites our children to participate in VBS this week. The hours are 6-8:45 pm, today through Thursday. Please contact Cinda Harkless if interested. 304.634.5831.

Birthdays and Anniversaries