

Worship for September 11, 2022
Rally Day and 9/11 Remembrance

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship

Matthew 19:14

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

As a congregation, we are called to nurture children and youth, and support families and individuals in faith formation.

We do this through worship, study, fellowship, and service.

Surrounded and supported by the community of faith, we come to know, love, and serve God, receive the grace of Jesus Christ, and grow as the Spirit leads us.

It is with joy and thanksgiving that we pass the Christian faith from one generation to the next.

*Hymn 687 Our God, Our Help in Ages Past Verses 1-4

Prayer

Even while we celebrate the church's ministry this day, we know it marks a day of grief and pain for our nation.

May all of us remember with love and compassion the events of that fateful day.

May we grieve with those who mourn and share memories with those who cannot forget.

May we draw strength from those who bravely responded and gave their lives to save others.

May we stand with strangers who became neighbors that day, and remember their hospitality and generosity.

Above all, loving God, may we remember your faithfulness and learn to trust in your unfailing grace.

Save us from hatred and suspicion and remove any intention in us that would stand in the way of healing and peace.

*Hymn 698 Take, O Take Me As I Am

Assurance of Forgiveness

Friends, hear the good news.

Even when we have been so wounded that we believe we will never heal,
when pain and hurt and anger overwhelm us,
we can be whole.

God's mercies never end. They are new every morning and sure as the sunrise.

Reach out and receive the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Know you are forgiven and be at peace. Amen.

First Reading Psalm

Time With Our Young Disciples

Second Reading Romans 8

Morning Message

I'm no math wiz. I was so good at Algebra that I took it twice. But, even with my limitations, I can figure out that seventy times seven is a lot. Jesus math says that when a brother or sister sins against us, we are to forgive the offense. Not once. Not twice, but seventy-seven times. Whoa. Like I said, that's a lot of times.

Jesus is asked how many times we should forgive and he launches into this parable about the ungrateful servant. Now, I confess to you that I had a hard time getting past the words "slave" and "servant." We have an enlightened understanding of how powerful those terms can be. Racial tension has risen in recent years. We find ourselves in a turbulent time, marked by school-involved violence, political issues heating up, inflation and other economic concerns. The extreme weather conditions we are witnessing has wrought tremendous suffering. So much of our food comes from geographic areas that have been hard hit by either flood or drought or wildfire. Record heat has hit northern California. Have you ever been to San Francisco? I think you can experience all four seasons in one day there, but they all end with sweaters or jackets, no matter the time of year. Until recently.

Sometimes it seems the whole world is filled with dis-equilibrium and angst and uncertainty.

The point Jesus made was that God has witnessed our lives- the good, the bad, and the ugly. But life is not consumed by suffering and hardship. God has lavished mercy upon us, so that we might experience true liberty-freedom from sin. But, he warns us, if we seek forgiveness, then turn around and exact revenge on the next person who wrongs us, we have evidently not turned from sin, and renounced its power over us, or turned toward God at all.

Have you ever thought about what the word “lavish” means? It comes from the verb, to lave, to wash. When I think of God lavishing love and grace on us, I imagine standing beneath a great waterfall with fresh, cool, sparkling water coursing over my head, my shoulders, flowing over me all the way down to my toes, sinking into the lush, fertile earth.

Picture yourself standing under that waterfall. After a run or after mowing the lawn. You’re hot and sweaty. Thirsty. You stand under the cascading water. How does that make you feel? Clean? Light? Joyful? Refreshed? Free of all baggage? Baggage we can call “sin.”

Good. That’s how we should feel. Thanks be to God.

And then disaster occurs. Or we are reminded of something catastrophic. The anniversary of 9/11 rolls around as it does today. And all those heavy emotions return, most notably grief and anger.

What do we do with that? Those feelings are real. They are legitimate.

Let us acknowledge, there are consequences to sin. And the consequences from that fateful day have changed all our lives. Remember the color-coded threat levels? The first time I heard that announced in an airport, while awaiting a flight, I was so filled with fear I was sick.

Soon after, we took a trip to California. Those announcements were made repeatedly, increasing my anxiety, and I’m sure other travelers’ anxiety. Passing

thru security is always a hassle. And then when we did finally board, the passenger to my right was a dark-skinned man with a backpack. There we sat. Shoulder-to-shoulder from San Francisco to Columbus. I could feel my heart rate increase. I had some shortness of breath. My body was reacting to a perceived threat.

I've come to believe fear and anger are fraternal twins. Different... but they are born from the same womb. Sometimes, you can get them confused.

Do you think my seat assignment was an accident? I don't. There have been many times since that I've looked back on that long night in the air, when my fears and anger confronted me.

I tried to sleep, but sleep wouldn't come. So, I prayed. I prayed that the man next to me wasn't a terrorist planning to hijack the plane. I begged for God's protection, for a sense of God's presence and power and peace.

God did comfort me in those hours. We landed without incident and went our separate ways.

All was well. But, was it?

If we applied this parable to the situation, might Jesus have said to me, "You prayed for my protection, my presence, my love. And, you have those things always. What were your prayers for your brother sitting next to you? Is he not worthy of my love and mercy, too?"

When Jesus spoke to the crowd about forgiveness, he wasn't necessarily talking about those little things that may get under our skin but won't ruin our lives. Like, when the garbage collectors don't show up on their scheduled day, or when your Happy Meal comes without the toy, or the newspaper is wet. We can let those things go.

But, what about those things we can't let go? We are all subject to things about which we may have little or no agency. But, we can decide how we will respond. How have we responded to the changes that Covid has brought our way? Remember back in 2020, we looked for the color-coded maps that tracked the number of cases? Remember the daily announcements of Covid-related

hospitalizations and deaths? Even now, are you hoping to receive the latest booster shot that addresses the Omicron variant soon? I am.

We've faced national crises before. We've pulled together. Remember when the members of congress stood on the Capitol steps on September 11, 2001 and sang "God Bless America?"

Friends, I don't want to witness another catastrophic event but it sure would be reassuring to see a display of our national leaders rallying around the country lifting up our common bond, our shared hopes and dreams.

Each year, when that fateful day rolls around, we pause and remember. We light candles, sing patriotic songs, set up art installations like The Healing Fields at Spring Hill Cemetery. We remember lives lost and heroic acts.

Speaking for myself, while I still grieve, the sharp anger and paralyzing fear have diminished over the years. And that is important because the country has to move forward, addressing opportunities and challenges as they come. And they will.

Lots of us like to travel. I can't wait to take our grandchildren to some of our favorite places. But, I don't want to panic every time I board a plane or go to a large crowded event.

So, it's important to face my fears and prejudices about who is seated on the plane next to me, or behind me, or even piloting the plane. Our nation and our neighborhoods are becoming more and more diverse. You may be tired of hearing it, but, so much of the violence we witness seems to be sparked by hatred. If we want peace, then it's absolutely essential that we learn to respect and appreciate the differences in race, culture, religion, orientation and other human conditions.

One of my favorite quotes made by Queen Elizabeth is this: "Peace is the hardest form of leadership."

The Washington National Cathedral is a beacon of peace for many. Since the pandemic began, the cathedral leadership has recorded and broadcast the brief

services of Morning Prayer. I commend them. They have brought me peace in this time.

At the end of one service, there were photos of the beautiful stained glass windows that adorn that awesome place.

One of the windows featured that morning was the Space Window, which is really named the Science and Technology Window. I've stood beneath it a few times and it is breathtaking. Created by Rodney Winslow, the technique used to design and make that window is much different from the other gothic-styled windows in the cathedral. Winslow worked on it for twelve years, tearing up one design plan after another until he was satisfied.

NASA and a number of astronauts consulted on the project. The colors used in the window are especially intense. It is said that every astronaut reports that the colors they see from space are indescribable, otherworldly, like nothing they have ever seen. Crayola doesn't make a shade or hue that captures the beauty seen from high above the earth.

At the center of the window, the focal point, is a white circle. It is very thin and translucent. It is a piece of the moon, over three billion years old, picked up by Neil Armstrong on the Apollo 11 flight in 1969, at the first moon landing. It represents humankind's greatest achievement to date.

Artists like their works to speak for themselves, allowing the viewer to interact with the piece and drawing his or her own meanings from it. When I see that window, I think of all the men and women whose lives have been dedicated to the space program, and to the disciplines of science, their sense of courage and adventure, how they inspired the next generation of exploration. It is set in this massive cathedral, the "house of prayer for all people," and, to me, serves as a sign that God is eternally calling us into God's creative plan as it unfolds from age to age.

And that is what I want to leave you with today. We are in difficult times. But we are not alone. God has not orphaned us. Schhols opened on time here in Cabell

County. I can hear the Cabell Midland Marching Band from my backyard. Tailgating recipes are being shared. I see lots of green signaling loyalty to the Thundering Herd.

We have survived but we are cautious. I still carry masks and wear them. AS the Brits would say, we “keep calm and carry on.” We are the people who, with God’s help, applied our intelligence, imagination, ingenuity, and grit to land a man on the moon and NASA says we will do it again. A woman may land the next spacecraft.

And with God’s help, we will land 2022.

*Hymn 687 Verses 5 and 6

*Affirmation of Faith Apostles’ Creed p. 35

*Hymn 581 Gloria Patri

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

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings
Offertory

*Hymn 606 Doxology

*Prayer of Dedication

As we present our gifts of time, talent and treasure, may we also present our hearts, that they may softened by your love, our tears, that they may water scorched dreams, and our wills, that we may replace brokenness with highways of reconciliation and peace. Amen.

*Hymn 693 Though I May Speak

*Blessing St. Francis of Assisi
Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon,
Where there is doubt, faith,

Where there is despair hope,
Where there is darkness light,
Where there is sadness, joy.

**O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.**

*Postlude