

Worship for June 6, 2021

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits.

Our hope is in God's Word.

My soul waits for the Lord, more than those who watch for the morning.

Our hope is in God's Word.

Hymn Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation *Glory to God* 394

Prayer of Confession

God of perfect love,

you continually bring forth life.

transforming sadness to joy, and despair to hope.

We are weak, but you are strong.

Our ways are flawed, but your ways are true.

Sometimes we stray from your way. You are always faithful.

Forgive us, redeem us, transform us.

Take away the sin that burdens us,

and restore us to the people you would have us be,

for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Take, O Take Me As I Am *Glory to God* 698

Take, O take me as I am; summon out what I shall be.

Set your seal upon my heart and live in me. *Repeat.*

Declaration of Forgiveness

God seeks us out relentlessly.

With abundant grace and boundless mercy, God seeks us out and calls us by name.

This is the good news:

in Jesus Christ we are loved and forgiven. Be at peace.

Reading from the Psalms Psalm 138 Pew Bible p.

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Revelation 21: 1-6

Morning Message

I've spoken these words at countless funerals. I have leaned on their promises, trusted in their truths. I've reassured loved ones and have had them spoken over the pew that held my own family in our times of grief and loss.

But I don't think I have ever un-packed them in a sermon before.

The first thing I noticed is that the text says, "God makes all things new." It does not say, "God makes all new things. "What's the difference?

Rev. Dr. Janet Hunt offers us an idea about that. She says God does not simply replace all that has been broken, defiled, betrayed, polluted, adulterated, or destroyed. Rather, somehow, God gathers it all up and makes the old new again. God redeems what we thought was beyond the human capacity for hope. Again and again. And Janet says, even though these six verses are speaking to a time in the future, the churchy word is "eschatology," or in the "fullness of time," we can catch a glimpse of their wonder even now.

Recently, Janet paid a visit to the county jail in the state where she lives. Have you ever been to a jail? I've been as close as the courtroom where I witnessed people sentenced to jail, or prison. One was for multiples DUIs. The other was for murder. That's as close as I ever plan to get. It is an odd and desperately serious experience.

Janet went to the jail with a purpose, to see a particular inmate. The inmate was a young woman. She was not a church member. In fact, she had little to no experience with the church or any faith community at all. But, Janet had become acquainted with her and her need for support through one of the church's outreach ministries.

When Janet made arrangements for the visit she was told that she could bring very little to the inmate, but she could bring her a Bible. And so she did.

Janet says when she placed it before her on the table, it was obvious that she didn't know Genesis from Revelation. She gave her a quick overview and then Janet showed her where to find a verse she found helpful, hoping it might bring some comfort to this scared young woman.

The verse was Isaiah 43: "I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.
And through the rivers, they will not overwhelm you."

Janet returned several times and they would discuss Bible passages the woman found interesting or puzzling. She may not have been familiar with the scriptures when they first met, but she was now a devoted student.

Every time Janet visited, they would spend time in prayer. Their time together was increasingly valuable. Meaningful.

This past March she was sentenced and has been moved many miles away to another city. A visit now would involve a day's drive.

A few weeks ago, Janet received a letter, clearly identified as having come from a prison inmate, the woman Janet had befriended. The message filled Janet in on how she was getting along since the move. Janet was truly glad to hear from her. So she sat right down and wrote a response so she could get it into that day's mail.

Soon she received a reply. In part, this is what it said:

"I was very happy to hear from you! Thank you as always for the love and prayers. Sometimes I feel like I can actually feel the prayers from everyone. Especially when I am surrounded by some very trying people. I know that God is with me and is helping me to get through the days. I thank God every day for continuing to help me with love, patience, understanding, and strength. I've prayed not only for my family and friends, but also for the people I don't get along with so well."

She continues:

"There was a lady that stopped me in the bathroom last night and asked me if I ever feel like the "black sheep" of the family because I'm here. My response made her smile and she thanked me. I told her, no, I don't feel that way. I told her to remember that God loves her and gave his life for HER! She agreed. I then asked her to read Isaiah 43:1-4. I also reminded her that she's never alone and she's worth more than she will ever know. I told her what room I'm in and to come find me if she ever needed to talk. This morning I saw her and asked her how she was doing. She is much better. That made my heart happy!"

Now, we all know that this woman's new-found faith doesn't erase her past, her crimes. None of this proves that God is making all things new in the lives of those she offended, including her family. We don't know about their desire or their capacity for forgiveness. That may be asking too much at this point.

But, even so, God is doing something amazing here. Some kind of awesome "newness" forming in her heart that was never there before.

Even in those dreadful circumstances. Even in a place where she is reminded every day of her sins and every day is paying for that with the loss of her liberty, God is indeed already making things new.

Revelation speaks to us of a new heaven and a new earth. Can we even imagine what that might look like? When I first began studying this text, the first images that came to mind were scenes

of the opposite- of destruction- the aftermath of hurricanes, tornadoes, fires- leaving people in a state of profound loss and despair. Even so, we know that wherever God's people are suffering, God is there. God is there with first responders and long-serving workers who come to restore order in the midst of chaos.

God makes things new on a very personal level, too.

We have some pretty great neighbors. We all have daughters so we have had a lot of shared experiences. The daughter of one set of neighbors was eleven when they moved in across the street. She was full of energy, always positive and friendly. She was a natural-born cheerleader. Like the others, she grew up, went to college, moved to a bigger city and holds an important job in the public policy sector. The world was her oyster...until she was diagnosed with cancer. She approached it like she has done everything else in her life: full steam ahead. She's been cancer-free for years now. We danced at her wedding to a fine young man and were delighted when God dropped two little tornadoes into their lives: twins!

God does work in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform.

Words of scripture are faithful and true: tears wrought from disease will be wiped away, but not all tears. Some spring forth in response to joy and become showers of blessing.

God is about to do a new thing in one of our sister churches. Today the Highlawn Church is meeting the person I hope will become their new pastor. They have the opportunity to take a bold step into the future. I believe in the adage, "a rising tide lifts all boats." When one of our churches thrive, it is a blessing to all of us. I urge you to add your prayers to mine this morning for this important decision.

God makes all things new. Who in your life needs to hear those words? Who needs to hear that one day sorrow and suffering and grief will be a memory?

What within yourself does God long to make new?

*Affirmation of Faith

The Apostles' Creed

Glory to God p. 35

*Gloria Patri

Glory to God 581

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

With gratitude for God's faithfulness and with thanksgiving for all that we have received, we bring our gifts to God. All contributions may be left on the Communion table in the plates provided.

Prayer of Dedication

O God, with faith and hope, we offer these gifts. Use them, even as you use us, to accomplish your purposes in Jesus Christ, the head of the church and the Lord of our lives. Amen.

*Blessing

Go forth from this place trusting that God is always with us and for us in every moment of every day. May you know the blessings of grace, love, and companionship through the Triune God. Amen.

*Postlude

Announcements

The session will meet next week following worship.

June Birthdays and Anniversaries

Elder of the Month Kevin Dennison