

WATCHUNG AVENUE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
GUIDE TO WORSHIP
SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 24, 2020

10:00 AM

"Thus, biblical humility is not being a doormat for an uncaring omnipotent taskmaster ... No, biblical humility is not self-deprecation or a dispensing of our self-esteem. Just the opposite. It is recognition that our worth is to be found in our Maker"
~ Daniel B. Wallace

GODS PEOPLE GATHER

PRELUDE

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

GREETING

A warm welcome is extended to all. Especially those who are worshiping online with Watchung Avenue Presbyterian Church. Your presence enriches us as we celebrate together. May this time of worship, offer you something far brighter than the anxiety and fear that seems to surround us. Let us worship God with love and love for one another through Christ Jesus our ever-living inspiration. Amen!

CALL TO WORSHIP (responsive/responder)

Leader: God has given us everything

People: God has given us new life in Christ.

Leader: God has called us to be one in Christ

People: Jesus calls upon us to love one another as God loves us.

Leader: Jesus laid down his life for us

People: And so we are called to lay down our lives for one another.

Leader: Come, let us worship our God

People: Let us follow Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER (one voice/una voz)

Let us pray: Holy Father, your Son prayed for his disciples that they would be one, as you and he are one. Keep your whole church harmoniously together in faith and love, united by the one Spirit. We ask this through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

OPENING HYMN

#775, I Want Jesus to Walk with Me

THE PREPARATION

CALL TO CONFESSION

We know what we should do, yet do not. We know the words people need to hear but utter the ones that hurt them. Yet, we also know that if we confess our failings to God, we will receive forgiveness and hope. Please join me as we pray together, saying,

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (together/juntos)

God of glory: we are so busy watching the skies for signs of your presence that we forget to look around to see those we can serve in your name. We are so intent on finding just the right way to tell someone off, that we forget the words of reconciliation you have taught to us. We are so convinced we can figure out your schedule that we forget to open ourselves to the presence of your Spirit within us. Mighty source of our lives, forgive us for all that we have done to others. Fill us with the wisdom to resist evil in our lives and strengthen us in that faith which is given to us through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS (responsive/responder)

Leader: Beloved, do not be surprised. Our God is gracious to all, restoring us to new life. We are not overlooked. We are sought after. We are searched for. God does not allow us to go missing or forgotten. God pursues us until we know God's love and grace. Know that you are important, valued and loved. You are forgiven. You are restored. May you find renewal in your spirit.

People: This is the good news, which is for us, and for everyone we will meet in the days to come. Thanks be to God. We are forgiven. Amen.

GLORIA PATRI

#582, Glory to God, Whose Goodness shines on Me

THE HEARING / PROCLAMATION

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION (together/ juntos)

God our helper, by your Holy Spirit, open our minds, that as the Scriptures are read and your Word is proclaimed, we may be led into your truth and taught your will, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON

Acts 1: 6-14

Leader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks Be to God.

NEW TESTAMENT LESSON

1 Peter 4: 12-14; 5: 6-11

Leader: The Word of the Lord

People: Thanks Be to God.

HOMILY

"Lean Upon God"

MOMENT OF SILENT REFLECTION

THE RESPONDING

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (together/juntos)

Let us confess our faith as we say:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE / PASTORAL PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER (together/juntos)

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sinned against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

OFFERING MESSAGE

PRAYER OF DEDICATION (together/ juntos)

God of comfort, your Son prayed for his followers in the world, that they might be one. Use us and what you have given us to serve you and one another. Amen.

CLOSING HYMN

#66, Every Time I Feel the Spirit

BENEDICTION (responsive/responder)

Leader: The hour has come to go into the world,

People: **where our worship of God will continue in every moment of our lives.**

Leader: The hour has come to serve those around us,

People: **to shoulder the burdens of our sisters, to ease the pain of our brothers.**

Leader: The hour has come to glorify God,

People: **with our prayers as well as our praise, with songs as well as acts of service.**

POSTLUDE

***There will be a zoom chat immediately following worship service.**

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ❖ NOTICE: All worship services will be pre-recorded and available on line. For details and to sign in, go to our website home page, **www.wapc.net**.
- ❖ FELLOWSHIP ON LINE: Join us for a **zoom chat "coffee hour"** immediately following worship.
- ❖ MEMORIAL DAY: is tomorrow, Monday, May 25th, and it is the day set aside to remember, acknowledge and honor our veterans.
- ❖ COMMUNION ONLINE: Communion will resume online every first Sunday of every month starting **JUNE 7TH**. Please have your bread and juice ready to participate.
- ❖ OPERATION BACKPACK SPRING DINNER BENEFIT CONCERT POSTPONED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE
- ❖ Any time is a good time to use AMAZON SMILE!! www.smile.amazon.com. Remember, when making purchases on line with Amazon, use this website address & **choose WAPC as your charity**. Amazon will donate .5% of your eligible purchase price to the church. Every little bit helps! And order early, because package deliveries are backed up now that we are all doing a lot more on line.
- ❖ USHER'S SCHEDULE: will resume when we return to the sanctuary.
- ❖ SEEKERS THURSDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY: will resume when the COVID-19 health restrictions are lifted.
- ❖ FISH- Donations collected & taken to Food Bank every Sunday, helping North Plainfield residents in need.
- ❖ OFFICE HOURS: There will be no regular office hours. Our office administrator is working from home and only coming into the office when necessary. Messages left on the voicemail will be answered as soon as possible. *Thank you*

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Lay Reader: We begin this last Sunday in Easter with the story of Jesus' ascension in Acts. Only Luke and Acts (written by the same author) are there stories of Jesus' ascension. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will come upon them, and not to worry about what will happen next. As Jesus ascends into heaven, two angels ask the disciples why they are looking up towards heaven, because Jesus will return the way they saw him go. It is a good reminder for us—all too often, we are waiting for God to do something, looking up in the sky—when God is already among us, already at work in us.

Acts 1:6-14 NRSV

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

¹²Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

Leader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks Be to God

The passages from 1 Peter 4 and 5 reminds us that in our suffering, to lean upon God and to give our burdens over to God, because God cares for us (5:7). We are called to resist evil, and that sometimes in our resisting evil, we struggle. But we can rest in God, for God is always with us. God gives us strength and endurance to persevere.

1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11 NRSV

4 ¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

5 ⁶Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.

⁸Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.

¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the power

Leader: The Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks Be to God

Lean Upon God – 1 Peter 4:12-14; 5:6-11

Let us pray: Bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts that they may be of profit to us and acceptable to thee, our rock, and our redeemer. Amen

I read a story about a man who stumbled onto a subway car, just as the doors were closing. His clothing was rumpled, his necktie was all askew, he had bright red lipstick marks on his cheek and collar.

He reeked of booze and had a bottle of cheap gin sticking out of his jacket pocket. He staggered over and plopped down in the seat next to the priest. After sighing heavily, the man opened a crumpled newspaper and began to read.

A few minutes later the man leaned toward the priest and said, "What causes arthritis?" The priest said, with almost a sneer in his voice, "It is caused by riotous living. Too much drinking and carousing and doing immoral things with immoral women, that's what causes arthritis!" The man pondered that for a second and replied, "Hmmm," then went back to his newspaper.

Feeling a little guilty, the priest leaned toward the man and said, "I'm sorry I was so uncharitable just now. That was not a very Christian way to respond to you and I apologize. How long have you had arthritis?" "Oh," the man said, "I don't have arthritis. I just read that the Pope did."

We are so intent on finding just the right way to tell someone off, that we forget the words of reconciliation you have taught to us. If that statement sounds familiar to you it is because it was part of the words that was said in our Prayer of Confession this morning.

But the best part of confessing is that we are forgiven. The priest in the story reconciled himself by apologizing to the man for being unchristian like. I am sure he really felt remorse when the man told him he was inquiring about arthritis because he read the Pope had it.

Peter, in his first pastoral letter, brings up an issue that has bothered people of faith for thousands of years, and has been a source of debate for many an atheist as well. Every group who believes in a higher being must struggle to answer the question, "Why does God allow suffering in the world?"

Let me give you a little background history to answer that question first. The 1st Epistle of Peter was written from Rome to the Christians throughout Asia Minor (what is now Turkey) at or near the time that Nero was the Roman emperor. Remember Nero – the Emperor who ordered the fires to be set – so that he could rebuild the city the way he wanted it.

The emperor and his people blamed this new religious group (the Christians) for setting the fires. Thus, began one of the worst persecutions of Christians in history. During the next few years, Christians were fed to wild animals for the amusement of Roman citizens. The Romans crucified Christians in unbelievable numbers.

And these Christian believers were even tied into little stands, doused with oil, and set afire so that the emperor's guests would have light for their evenings' entertainment. And while all this was going on, Nero was taking all the money and possessions from Roman Christians and using the money to rebuild the city he had destroyed.

It is out of this world of horrific persecution that Peter wrote, Beloved, don't be astonished at the fiery trial which has come upon you, to test you, as though a strange thing happened to you....If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed; because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you (1 Peter 4:12, 14)

Those to whom Peter had written would certainly be able to relate to suffering criticism for Christ. They had been forced to flee their homes because of their faith in Christ. They lived a life of uncertainty and great difficulty, being rejected by most society. They were pushed to the fringes of society, often impoverished, and ridiculed simply because they had believed in Christ as Lord and Savior.

This begs the question – how is one happy when suffering blame? This all depends on one's perspective and attitude. Peter wanted them to view their struggles through the lens of faith, not through what their eyes could see.

While they suffered greatly in this life for their faith, their suffering and commitment to Christ were not in vain. They endured difficulty, but their eternal destiny was secure in Christ. They had to come to the realization that temporary suffering was a small price to pay in light of eternal life in Christ.

When they viewed their reproach through the perspective of faith, it was easier to endure, and they were even able to rejoice. But, why would God allow such horrible things to happen to God's people?

The Apostle Peter gives us three possible ideas to partially explain human suffering. First, suffering may indeed provide the test by which our faith is strengthened that turns our faith from impure to pure metal.

Second, suffering provides us a way to be more deeply connected to Jesus' suffering, thereby deepening our connection to Him as our Savior.

And third, suffering "in accordance with God's will," provides us an opportunity to truly live out our faith. If we can do it when everything around us seems bleak, we can do it anytime.

In Jan Karon's Mitford series of books, she writes about Fr. Tim, an Episcopal priest in a small town and parish. In her volume titled, In This Mountain, Fr. Tim gets seriously ill and he tells the congregation one Sunday morning that in the middle of the night, as he struggled with his sermon, he finally decided that he had to surrender and try a new attitude. Fr. Tim says,

Our obedience will say, Father, I do not know why You are causing, or allowing this hard thing to happen, but I am going to give thanks in it because You ask me to. I am going to trust You to have a purpose for it that I cannot know and may never know. Bottom line, you are God – and that is good enough for me.

Our text today continues that thought, but Peter takes their responsibilities in a different direction. Most believers in that day dealt with opposition from the world, knowing all too well the difficulties of being a committed Christian during a pagan culture.

Peter does not shy away from the truth, nor does he try to minimize the reality of their lives. He is very straightforward with the church. In fact, instead of trying to alter their focus, Peter dealt candidly with the sufferings they faced. He knew their suffering would likely continue, and he wanted to prepare them to endure even though they faced great opposition.

It is difficult for us to genuinely relate to the plight of the early believers, but these principles remain true. Our world is rapidly changing, and we too must prepare for the difficulties that are sure to come.

While we hate to admit it, the Lord often uses difficulties to strengthen our faith and reliance upon Him. The suffering we endure from time to time is beneficial in our Christian lives.

God allows trials to come into our lives to try our faith and strengthen our resolve. While our nature resists and despises trials, the Lord knows they are beneficial in our lives. Through them we realize our weakness and learn dependence upon the Lord.

The Lord sustains us during trials, while our faith in Him grows. While trials are never enjoyable at the moment, once they are over, they almost always produce stronger Christians who are more mature in the faith. Covid-19 is a trial which has come into our lives; this is just a reality of our Christian journey. As we suffer for our faith in Christ, we are partaking in His sufferings. Consider all that Christ suffered on our behalf.

He was falsely accused, condemned to death, scourged, mocked, rejected, and crucified. All of this was done in submission to the Father's will to provide redemption.

As we embrace the suffering we encounter for the Christ, we are following His example, submitting to the will of God for our lives to serve and honor Him. While suffering is not enjoyable, it is a great honor and privilege to identify with the sufferings of our Lord.

Our rejoicing in trials provides great benefit as we walk with the Lord in this life, and it will produce great joy as we meet the Lord when He returns. The suffering we endure in this life will not compare to the glory that will be revealed when the Lord comes again.

Those who suffer for Christ never suffer alone. Peter assured them, as they faced trials and suffering for Christ, they would receive the Spirit of God and His glory resting upon them.

Peter did not promise the Lord would prevent suffering, but he did reveal the Lord had promised to meet them in their suffering, and provide the provision of His Spirit to guide, guard, comfort, and enable them to endure.

I certainly do not pray for trials and suffering in my life, but there is a presence and provision from the Lord that is only experienced amid those difficulties. In fact, I am convinced we experience the Lord more intimately in those moments than at any other time in our lives.

Trials are not enjoyable, but if we can experience His presence amid them, growing in our faith, being conformed to His image, then we must agree they are beneficial.

I think you will agree this has been a difficult passage to consider. It is easy enough to understand, but difficult to put in practice. As believers we must view our trials considering God's plan and purpose for our lives, while striving to present a positive witness among unbelievers. If you are struggling, lean upon God for guidance and strength to endure! Amen."

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, there is a part of me that wants to have a nice easy, trouble-free existence and yet I know that this life is a training ground to draw me closer to You and to conform me day by day into the likeness of Christ. May I not be surprised at the fiery ordeals that I am called upon to endure, but embrace them so that I may be used in this sin-sick world to comfort others with the same comfort that I receive from You - this I ask in Jesus name, AMEN.

Prayers of the People John 17:1-11

Gracious and loving Creator, in the appearance of Christ you have revealed to all the earth the mystery of your love, spreading your illumination and your abundant promises unto all humanity: O God, Your son remained with His disciples after His resurrection, teaching them to love all people as neighbors.

Hear us now and visit us with that light, as we pray for the needs of all creation, saying: Arise, shine, for the light has come, and the glory of God has risen upon us.

Help us, O Holy One, to manifest the boundless riches of Christ, becoming servants according to the gift of God's grace that was given us by the working of God's power.

Let nations come to your light and rulers to the brightness of your day, O God, that they may rule your people righteously and the poor with justice, to defend the needy among the people, that there may be abundance of peace. Lord hear our prayer.

Let us remember the dearly departed this Memorial Day who made the ultimate sacrifice for the freedoms we enjoy every day, and we think of how they followed in the footsteps of your son, our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Please hold our servicemen and women in your strong arms. Cover them with your sheltering grace and your presence as they stand in the gap for our protection. We also remember the families of our troops.

We ask for your unique blessings to fill their homes, and we pray your peace, provision, and strength will fill their lives. May the members of our armed forces be supplied with courage to face each day and may they trust in the Lord's mighty power to accomplish each task.

Let our military brothers and sisters feel our love and support. In the name of Jesus. God of mercy, disperse the enemies of human happiness and build up all that reflects your beauty, courage and love. Lord hear our prayers.

Almighty God, you who are the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega, we pray for those who suffer with Christ this day and remember before you all who are beset by evil.

May the worldly powers that scorn and afflict and oppress the sick, the poor, and the weak be overturned and may those who are oppressed be set free.

Hear our prayers of thanksgiving, especially for ____.

We remember those who have entered into the mystery of your eternal life, especially Jeff Bunnell____.

We especially pray for all the people and situations that you have put upon our hearts and minds this day. Hear the special prayers that we now offer to you with the words of our lips and the meditations of our hearts. And now let us say the prayer our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to say: Our Father.....

PRAYER LIST

Healing, comforting, and/or supportive prayers for:

- *Peggy Bunnell and the Bunnell family and friends* as they mourn the passing of *Jeff Bunnell*, lifetime North Plainfield resident and long time active WAPC member, on Tuesday, May 19.
- *Gwyn Gronlund's mother, Margaret Herman-Angely*, who is recovering at home after a brief hospital visit.
- *Bob Montieth*, whose symptoms are improving and is being treated at his residence, in Bridgewater.
- Former WAPC members, *Carole and Jerry Rose*, as *Carole's* brain cancer tumors are shrinking from her chemotherapy treatment and *Jerry and his family* in the lost of his sister, *Claire*.
- *Fran & Wayne Young's son, daughter in-law, & grandson, Tim, Yadira, & Bryan Young* recovering at home from COVID-19.
- *Valerie Reid's great nieces, Elizabeth & Grace*, who were born early and are hospitalized.
- *Marilyn Cortright*, recovering at home and continued prayers for her husband, *Tim Cortright*.
- *Amanda Lake* for health concerns.
- *Jim Roselli's sister, Joanne*, currently in a Kansas City hospital.
- *Susan Sendelsky & her sister, Kerry*, members of Pastor Lindsey's former church family, Oak Tree Presbyterian, both fighting cancer.
- *Jane Windbush, Pastor's sister & Stephanie Weaver, Pastor's niece*, who both suffer from Rheumatoid Arthritis.
- *Jackie Slattery & Sean Slattery*, daughter & grandson of *Estelle Kennedy* during a difficult time.
- *Gail Schmeisser*, continuing to be challenged with mobility issues.

Continued prayers for those people at home or in continued care:

- *Grace Landsperger and Estelle and Betsi Kennedy* at home.
- *Gail McKenna*, at 2225 Kirkland Village Circle, Bethlehem, PA 18017.

Prayers of support and thanksgiving for:

- *Jim Roselli*
- *Pastor Madelynne Lindsey*