

Opening Prayer: (inspired by Matthew 11: 28-30)

Jesus Christ, you call us to come to worship

You call us To rest from the things that are troubling us.

You call us To learn what you can teach us of life.

To realize what we can offer to others

And so to return into the world to serve...by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We worship you, Creator God and we give you the praise. Amen.

Amended from a Call to Worship~ posted on the **Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand.** <http://www.presbyterian.org.nz/>

Scripture Reading

Some of you who have been in worship these last couple of weeks may have noticed that I have started talking about Church Unique stuff this summer. And you may be wondering why? Well...Because...The CU people have figured it out! The driving question for CU, back in April of 2019, was, 'What on earth does God want this Trinity Church to do here on the Corner of Carpenter and E St?'

We have explored all the clues and looked at our history and talked until we ran out of words. And prayed sincerely and long for God to reveal to us our Unique and amazing gifts for each other and the world. And the good news is that we've got something figured out. Now we want to share our discovery with you all...one little bit at a time. It's too confusing to talk about the whole thing all at once, so each week I am preaching about one facet of the CU framework.

At some point...there will be an article in the Trinity Times and a presentation to the Church Council and maybe to the Church Conference in the fall—but for now, we'll just take it one thing at a time. Someone called it the breadcrumb presentation...

*So far, in these last couple of weeks, I have talked about the **Value of Nurturing Community** in relation to the Parable of the Sower.*

*The **Strategy of God/Self discovery** was talked about last week in the words of Paul. Looking for the new life, that comes out of the darkness of death. The womb, not the tomb. Today, I'm going to preach about the **Value of Engaging Worship.***

Worship is very, very important to the people of this Church and to God!

That's why it was a big deal to open up the building again on June 21.

That's why we continue to do Face-book Live worship.

That's why we now have a Call in number for people who don't do Facebook, so anyone with a phone can hear Scripture and Preaching.

Maybe all who are gathered this morning understand why Engaging in Worship is so valuable...that's why you are here, right! But for some, it's not so obvious. I think sometimes about the little boy who wrote a letter to God saying:

Dear God. Why is Church on Sunday?

I thought Sunday was suppose to be our day of rest!?!

He was probably thinking about sleeping in...

Let's consider for ourselves, why worship is valuable as I read our Scripture this a.m.... again from Paul's letter to the Romans.

See if you can spot some clues about the value of worshipping God. I am reading from the NRSV...let's listen for the wisdom they offer.

Scripture Reading Romans 8: 26 - 39

...the Spirit helps us in our weakness;
for we do not know how to pray as we ought,
but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.
And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit,
because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.
Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me....

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God,
who are called according to God's purpose.
For those whom God foreknew, God also predestined
to be conformed to the image of God's Son,
in order that Jesus might be the firstborn within a large family.
And those whom God predestined, God also called;
and those whom God called, God also justified;
and those whom God justified, God also glorified.
I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind but now I see.

What then are we to say about these things?
If God is for us, who is against us?
God who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us,
Will God not, with Jesus, also give us everything else?
Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.
Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised,
who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.
Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved....

Who will separate us from the love of Christ?
Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness,
or peril, or sword?
As it is written,
'For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'
How precious did that grace appear, the hour I first believed.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Jesus who loved us.
For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers,
nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,
nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.
*Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come;
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*

Message *Engaging Worship*

Did you hear anything in all of that to explain the Value of Worship? And the value of Engaging in Worship?

Yes, worship is about prayer, as Paul talks about in his letter.

It's about the Holy Spirit intervening on our behalf at a certain time, in a certain place.

Did you hear all those doctrinal terms? Called...Justified...Glorified. Those are the words that show up in the creeds and the teachings of the church which you will only hear during worship or on Christian Radio. Or if your SS class chooses a really academic topic! It's valuable for us to hear those things now and again.

This Scripture reminds us, like a good worship service does, of God's purpose for the world through Jesus Christ and that, yes, there will be hard times...even death. And there will also be good that comes in this life: I call this the Ruth Carlson verse: *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose.* And we come to worship to be assured that something good can come...no matter how big and complicated life becomes. We value worship because in worship, we can pause and ask God to *bless this mess*...and know that God can and will.

Did you hear in this scripture the reminder that we are not alone? God is with us. God's love is now here—like I told the children. Now here and always and forever. And nothing but nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Worship is a precious place to hear that message over and over again because we humans have short memories...are easily distracted and all we like sheep can go astray.

Probably, the thing you will remember the easiest about this Scripture reading this a.m. is the song...*Amazing Grace*...that Jean played as a refrain, as a chorus to the various sections. The value of worship is that when we come together, we get to not only remember but also experience *The Amazing Grace of God for each of us, for all of us because we get lost and we need to be found.* Music sometimes expresses better than words what worship is all about.

I was talking with some Trinity people this week and of all the changes and disruptions in this COVID 19 era...the loss of singing and music in worship weighs heavy on many of us. Jean and I do our best but it's just not the same as singing along with a group of people, in this holy place, familiar words and old time tunes that touch our very souls...so much more deeply than words alone can do.

That's what worship does...it stirs our souls and moves us beyond words into the presence and experience of God. That's what's so valuable about Engaging Worship.

You all probably know that music is important to me and I've been thinking this week that Music is valuable to me in many of the same ways that worship is valuable. Because I find God in both music and worship in a beautiful and sacred way.

I remember going through a rough time a while ago...remember how there were rough times for each of us even before this COVID 19 thing happened? Right? And it wasn't even a particularly catastrophic rough time. I don't remember the details just something about dark winter days and wondering if anything I was doing was useful or productive. You know, that kind of questioning that comes on us sometimes.

And in preparing for worship one week, in that tough time. And in practicing with the Praise Team...remember when Jerry and Jean and I used to play. And in asking God for guidance: It occurred to me that every time I play my violin, I am contributing something beautiful to the world. And that makes God happy. Ever time I sing in my car, or whistle while I do the laundry or fully listen to music on Spotify...Yes, I'm involved with music in any way, I am contributing something beautiful to the world.

And **that** makes God happy.

Because I have no doubt that God loves music **even more than I do**.

Worship is like that too. Any time any of us comes to Worship on Sunday morning, or praises God out in the woods while waiting for a deer. Or sings in the choir. Or ushers or greets or reads scripture. All of those activities contribute something beautiful to the world. Worship is an offering to God...assuring God that we still love God and praise God and trust God. Engaging in Worship is valuable...and beautiful...

My taste in music has evolved over the years. I've always enjoyed a pretty wide variety of music. But for a long time, when it came to Opera...I just didn't get it. It had no appeal for me. I remember sitting in the Chicago Lyric opera house...way up in the nose-bleed section, maybe in high school? Or my early college years...trying to enjoy it but mostly finding it too warm and uncomfortable and truth to tell—as expensive as the tickets probably were, I drifted off and took a little snooze.

But one day, in the summer in Iowa...I was given one free ticket to La Boheme, Puccini. I had to drive more than half an hour to this little gem of a theater in the middle of the corn-fields. Who would have thought that Simpson College would have a summer Opera season. My ticket was for the front row...such a deal and I sat back and hoped I wouldn't fall asleep like I had done in Chicago. And guess what...that production of La Boheme—knocked my socks off. Maybe the beautiful costumes, the drama of a doomed love story, the incredible soaring melodies that to this day give me goosebumps. Maybe it was sitting so close to the stage...I remember telling people the next day that I was so close the singers were spitting in my direction. (Not a pretty picture during COVID 19 but bear with me and enjoy a moment of nostalgia when a little bit of spit was just nasty and not deadly.)

Whatever the reason...I was hooked. Transported. In another time and place for those three acts and I was sold on opera from that day forward. Not that any opera event was ever quite that amazing but some of them have been just as powerfully moving...for different reasons during different seasons of my life. The music, the energy, the story, the excitement...they all come together. In different ways for each person in that audience but in a special way for everyone. A friend of mine and I agreed that even a boring opera was special because taking a nap with all of that music swirling around can work some music magic on our egos and our subconscious.

That's what Worship can be like too! The robes and stoles are nowhere near as fancy as costumes in our Methodist tradition but the power of God is present in worship in all sorts of ways...through the music and the candles and the prayers and the words and the silences and the people in the pews and on Facebook with us.

In worship, the Holy Spirit of God is knocking and nudging and slipping in under the doorways of our busy brains.

In worship, the Holy Spirit is whispering with sighs beyond words to our weary souls. In worship, the presence of the cross, this reminder of Jesus's death and resurrection is an invitation to keep participating in the drama and the ongoing work of God in and for the world.

Worship is so valuable...and even on the dull days when worship puts you to sleep or when your mind wanders far and wide...being present in worship still gives God a chance to hold you and comfort you and strengthen you in ways that you may not even know.

Worship is precious and valuable because it gives us a touch stone...a place to go to reorganize ourselves. To remember who and whose we are. Worship is time for us to catch up to ourselves and to the changes in our lives, our bodies as we grow older. A time to reorient ourselves in Our relationships as the people we love change. A time for us to calm down as Our society adapts to COVID 19.

Even our history is changing in front of our eyes right now...being reviewed and re-interpreted and expanded upon in ways that are sometimes uncomfortable and even hard to believe. And it's in worship that we can be re-centered, recalibrated in the midst of that kind of turmoil because God...praise God...God invented history for heaven's sake. God is our Creator from the very beginning...from before the beginning...and God has intervened in history throughout the ages and God is right here and right now in this history that is being made today all over this country and the world.

I chose the song...Amazing Grace for this morning for many reasons. It's beautiful. It's meaningful. It's historical. Amazing GRace is one of the top 3 songs that people want played at their funerals. I was moved to tears when I heard President Barack Obama singing it at the funeral at Rev. Pinckney, murdered at the Mother Emmanuel Bible study by the self-avowed white supremacist Dylan Roof. It's a powerful song for so many reasons...and it has survived through many centuries even of changes and in how worship is done.

Yes, life keeps changing. However, worship keeps giving us the place where we can go to touch base with the heart and core of who we are—and whose we are: the infinitely precious children of God. Every human being, no matter what color their skin, is made in the image of God and in worship...we affirm our mutual dignity and respect.

So whatever you can remember of Paul's words to the Romans can inform your insight about the power of Engaging Worship. And the song *Amazing Grace*—well, keep on singing it, at home, in the car, in the shower.

It's a powerful song for so many reasons...

And it assures us, like music is supposed to...

It reminds us, like worship is intended to...That grace, God's grace, will indeed, lead us home. Amen.

Prayers for the People

God of freedom and peace,
who sees your children through all circumstances:
help us walk hand in hand with one another,
that together we may overcome all evil forces which attempt to divide us from each other;
in the name of the One whose Body is made of many members, Jesus Christ.

Amen. *Drawing from "We Shall Overcome" Sr. Heather Josselyn-Cranson, OSL*

Benediction Romans 5: 1 – 5 *The Message*

Continue to shout your praise of God, even when hemmed in with troubles,
because we have been assured that in Christ,
troubles can develop passionate patience in us,
and that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue,
keeping us alert for whatever God will do next.
In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged.
Quite the contrary—we can't round up enough containers
to hold everything God generously pours into our lives
through the Holy Spirit! Go in peace....

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