

## Worship June 14, 2020

### Welcome

I welcome you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
From the comfort of our homes we gather to worship.  
Whether through printed word, or through the gift of technology  
we are a community.  
Here we seek connection to the Divine.  
Come, let us worship God,  
shown to us through the risen Christ.

### Opening Prayer

Join me in prayer

O Lord, our God, we gather together to give you thanks and praise your greatness. We praise your mighty works to the whole world. We praise you for your wonderful deeds. Your power is limitless, your wisdom is unparalleled, your grace is overwhelming, your love is never failing. You promised that you will never leave or forsake us. Let us worship you in spirit and truth. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

**Hymn** UMH 369

Blessed Assurance verses 1 & 3

### Children's Message

Ben Ziegler

### Scripture

Romans 5: 1-8 (The Message)

Hi, I am Betty Segelstrom

Please pray with me, *into your spacious heart and loving hands, dear God, I place my fears, my what ifs, my spinning world and mind. Comfort me with the Truth: no fear is too big for the Great One who is always with me. I am never alone. Calming God: bring courage. Tender Spirit: breathe peace. Gentle Jesus: be close. Amen.*

In Romans 5, the Apostle Paul begins a classic description of Christian living with a powerful statement of assurance. He begins by assuring us that God saved us while we were “not right with Him”. The Theme of this scripture is not easy to title because Paul mentions so many different topics:

Peace with God/reconciliation

Access to grace

Hope in the glory of God and for final salvation, and

Joy in suffering and God's love for us

Paul reminds us of what God has done for us through the death of Christ.

**5**<sup>1-2</sup> By entering through faith into what God has always wanted to do for us—set us right with him, make us fit for him—we have it all together with God because of our Master Jesus. And that's not all: We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand—out in the wide-open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.

**3-5** There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we're hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how 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!

**6-8** Christ arrives right on time to make this happen. He didn't, and doesn't, wait for us to get ready. He presented himself for this sacrificial death when we were far too weak and rebellious to do anything to get ourselves ready. And even if we hadn't been so weak, we wouldn't have known what to do anyway. We can understand someone dying for a person

worth dying for, and we can understand how someone good and noble could inspire us to selfless sacrifice. But God put his love on the line for us by offering his Son in sacrificial death while we were of no use whatever to him.

The word of the Lord is wisdom

**May we live as a people both good and wise.**

### **Meditation**

Prayer...

**Hope** is the belief that circumstances will get better. It's not a wish for things to get better -- it's the actual belief, the knowledge that things will get better, no matter how big or small.

For me every week is different, of course some things stay the same like sermon preparation, phone calls to make and to answer, reports to write, meetings to attend, and the list goes on.

This week has been an especially challenging week. In addition to all the usual tasks, I had two unexpected encounters with people that had unique and significant needs. Each encounter required hours of personal contact. Each story was gut wrenching. Each person deserved to be listened to and assisted as I could.

Each person was at the moment and for different reasons, homeless. Each person had no funds, no local acquaintances, no transportation and as I encountered them – no hope.

Each person had lost hope in authorities and in finding anyone to help them. Each person was hungry and thirsty. Two women that had lost hope.

Our culture often defines hope as merely a fanciful wish or a casual desire:

- “I hope tomorrow is a better day.”
- “I hope to go to Disney World next year.”
- “I hope the MN Twins start playing soon.”

These two women also expressed hope

- “I hope I can get my belongings back”
- “I hope the white supremacists aren't around here”
- “I hope I can stay off Meth”
- “I hope Lakes and Pines calls back”

Hope - a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.

“**Hope**” is commonly used to mean a wish : its strength is the strength of the person's desire. But in the **Bible hope** is the confident expectation of what **God** has promised and its strength is in His faithfulness.

Clearly, what is hoped for may may not come to pass. The hope of Christians, however, is more than a desire or a wish. It's an unshakable confidence in God — even when circumstances give us every reason to doubt.

G.K. Chesterton an English writer, philosopher, lay theologian, and literary and art critic noted that hope only has any real meaning when things are hopeless. He wrote “As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is a mere flattery or platitude,” “It is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength.”

Hope is not just wishful thinking; it's a critical component of our faith.

Hope in the Lord gives us strength. Our culture teaches us to have self-confidence, but Christians are to place their confidence in the Lord.

When we hope in Him, we find the confidence and strength to face any challenge that comes our way.

Notice I didn't say we wouldn't have challenges, we will, but instead we have the strength to face whatever comes our way.

Hope in the Lord teaches us patience. Patience, that thing many of us say we need more of.

Without the hope we have in Christ we are left to solve our own problems. But when we face an impossible or hopeless situation, we must learn to wait patiently on the Lord. We do not need to be anxious or worried. We can find peace in God's unfailing love for us.

Hope in the Lord brings encouragement. You know that feeling you get at the end of a long week? The anticipation of the weekend lifts your spirits. Now think about stretching that weekend out for eternity. We can find encouragement and joy in life's struggles because we know we will live forever with Jesus.

Because of Jesus, we have hope both for this life and for eternity.

- Hope is an unshakable confidence in God, despite one's circumstances.
- Hope is essential to a Christian's faith.
- Hope gives strength, teaches patience, and brings encouragement.

A UM pastor from Houston, Texas writes that he saw the movie Pearl Harbor. I haven't seen the movie because I'm not much of a movie watcher. The following is what he said.

While we were in Houston the weekend before Annual Conference, Cindy, Christopher and I went with Cindy's parents to see the new movie Pearl Harbor. I know that it is just a movie. I am quite certain that things on December 7, 1941 didn't happen just like they happened in the movie. Movies are entertainment and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was very real.

In most any movie everyone has his or her favorite part. Pearl Harbor was no exception. To me it was rather obvious that the writers wanted our favorite part to be towards the end when the two heroes of the movie, played by Ben Affleck and Josh Harnett, are involved in the American retaliation with a bombing run over Tokyo. It was a moment when the good guys strike back.

While that part of the movie was good, it was not my favorite part. The part I liked best was not particularly entertaining, but it really spoke to me. Being a former Navy guy that spent several years aboard ship, the bombs landing on all of the ships with all of the loss of life and damage was very powerful. It hit close to home. Then, in the middle of all of this carnage is a priest, standing in waist deep water with dead bodies floating all around him. He was pronouncing last rites on the dead. Then this voice in the background says three words. If you weren't paying attention it would be very easy to miss, he says "Where was God?" For me, it was one of the most powerful, heart wrenching movie scenes I have come across in a very long time.

It is a good question isn't it?

It really is a very good question, however. Where was God during the attack on Pearl Harbor? For that matter, where was God when people were enslaved, or where was God during the discrimination we have seen for the entire life of our country? Where is God when it takes four law enforcement officers to check on a black person that has fallen on a street in Hinkley when what she called for was an ambulance? Where is God as a 31-year-old woman or an 85-year-old man dies from the COVID-19 virus? Where was God when my friend Thuan had to have a tracheotomy because he had been on the ventilator for so long his lungs were shot? Where is God whenever tragedy strikes our lives? Where is God when injustice continues for 400 years? Where is God whenever we must deal with pain and devastation? Where is God?

This isn't really a new question to me. I have heard it many times before.

I have heard it, though perhaps not in those exact words, in many visits in homes, hospitals, and nursing homes.

I think that there is really another question that is at the root of this question. As I have observed it there are two possibilities, though there may be others as well.

- For many the real question is, why has God abandoned me at the very moment when I need Him most.
- The second root question I have observed is, if God is alive and real, and God really loves and cares for His children, how can He possibly let this happen?

Did you catch the end of that question? "How could God possibly let this happen?" The statement suggests that perhaps there is no God at all, and even if there is, God doesn't care about us. God doesn't care about the people of this world.

Nothing could be further from the truth. But it seems to me that this is just what the world around us would like to have us believe.

- Where was God?
- God wasn't there.
- God doesn't care.
- We point our fingers at God.
- We blame God for all that is wrong around us.
- Then we forget, God gives us the ability to make decisions and choose our path in life.

Where was God at Pearl Harbor is the same as asking why did God let the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor. This question removes human choice from the equation. Could God have stopped the attack? Does God have that kind of power? Without question the answer is yes. Does God use that kind of power? Here the answer is no. God gives us, the human creature the ability to think and to choose. That does not mean that God isn't there. It doesn't mean that God is not at work in the situation.

Somehow, too many of us have gotten it into our minds that when something bad happens in our lives that God isn't there. In every negative situation that comes into our lives, if we are willing to look, God is there. God is at work.

We cannot assume that just because bad things happen in our lives and in the world around us that God isn't there. God is there. If we look, we will see evidence of God's hand around us. We can see that God is working in people's lives, even in the worst situations possible.

The Apostle Paul tells us in scripture that we should expect this. As I read these verses from the letter to the Romans I see a lesson that is primarily about faith and hope. But, it seems to me that we need the entire lesson to make that faith and hope real and alive. All too often folks get the where is God attitude. Too many of us have it in our minds that when we come to faith in Jesus Christ that nothing bad will happen in our lives again. The plain and simple fact is, nothing could be further from the truth. It isn't reality.

Paul knew that. Paul knew what suffering really was. Paul knew that even people of faith suffer. Perhaps it would be better if I said that Paul knew that especially people of faith suffer, and to Paul that suffering was not such a bad thing. He says, "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." If anyone was ever qualified to make such a statement it was Paul.

God the Father and creator gave us free will, this ability to choose.

God the Son came into the world to be one of us. He suffered and died for us.

God the Holy Spirit is an ongoing part of our lives. The Holy Spirit leads us and directs us. And, the Holy Spirit comforts us when these times of crisis intrude on our lives. The Holy Spirit is God's presence in our lives in all times, places, and situations.

When I look back on my life, it is easy for me to see that I don't know what real suffering is. I have experienced very little of any real suffering. I have always had a roof over my head and plenty of food to eat. I have almost always had a good job. I am very blessed to have been called into ministry

I don't think I know what it is like to have real suffering as a part of my life. I haven't experienced it.

Still, others around me have. Through them I have seen it. I know God was working in the lives of the two woman I encountered this week. In each of these and many other varied situations, I know that God is there, working to bring healing and wholeness in that time and place. God was there to comfort and strengthen and bring hope.

I can imagine how the imagine of the priest standing in the waist deep water asking where is God was pretty powerful.

Paul's words of faith and hope to the Romans are as true today as they were so many years ago. When we are feeling as though we stand in waste deep water and things seem to be getting worse, God is still there and working in the situation.

During our times of difficulty, during our times of suffering, the same is true for us. In times of difficulty we need strength and endurance. In times of suffering we need hope. And thanks be to God, that those are the very times that God who is always present in our lives does His very best work. In good times and in bad, God is with us to strengthen our lives and our faith. God is with us in every situation to heal our lives, to strengthen our faith, and place hope in our hearts. Thanks be to God. Put your hope in God. Remember to be kind. And stay healthy.

### **Pastoral Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

Teach us your wisdom, O Lord,  
that we may live wisely, not foolishly.  
Open our minds to understand our place in the world,  
that we may be proper stewards and caretakers  
of this beautiful earth.  
May your love and wisdom flow through us,  
into this world of hatred and mistrust,  
that we may sow the seeds of peace.  
Illumine our hearts to the path of truth, Holy Spirit,  
that we may celebrate the ways that lead to life. Amen.

And now in the words Jesus taught His disciples, we too pray...

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name  
Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses,  
As we forgive those who trespass 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

**Hymn** UMH 393

Spirit of the Living God (sing through twice)

### **Offering and Prayer of Dedication**

Every night a father tucked his daughter into bed, and they would repeat their familiar routine. The little girl would say, "I love you" and her dad would say, "I love you first." One night, however, the little girl interjected a change. After hearing her father say, "I love you first," she proclaimed, "I love you always!" And that became their new routine. The little girl has grown and is now a young wife and mother, but daughter and father continue to share these words. The exchange continues to affirm their love and connection. One will say, "I love you first" and then wait to hear the response, "I love you always."

As wonderful a gift as the love between a parent and child, how much greater and more perfect is the love between God the Creator and those claimed as God's children? This is the image of the God we have come to worship today. A God whose love reaches back into all our yesterdays and stretches into all our tomorrows. A God who always loves and forgives, who is always there to guide us when we are lost, to strengthen us when we are tired, and who overwhelms

our hearts with love and grace. Today we both acknowledge and praise the One who loves us first and who will love us always.

Years ago a widow gave her last two coins as an offering to God. Many still wonder what motivated such a sacrificial gift. Surely, she did not expect to have her name engraved on a wall or have the street in front of the Temple named in her honor. She clearly did not anticipate her gift would be lifted up as an example for others to follow centuries later. So what motivated her gift? Maybe she was motivated by a heart-felt desire to declare her life had been blessed by a God who had always met her needs. Blessed by a God who loved her first and always. The widow's sacrificial offering was the very best way she knew to express that she loved God first. She would love God always.

Today, many see the offering as a way for the church to collect money to pay bills and fund ministries. Yet at its very core, the offering is so much more. The offering is the time we are invited to proclaim, through faith, that we love God first. We love Him more than our jobs, our assets, our possessions, our hobbies, and even our families.

The offering is the time we proclaim our trust in God, above all else, as we move into an unknown future.

It is in giving we stay connected to what is really important in life and not allow materialism to define who we are; and it is in giving that we gain a deeper understanding of the depth of sacrificial love God has for us. It is in giving that we grow in our own personal journey as a follower of Jesus. It is in giving we say to God and to the world those simple, yet life-defining words: "I love you first, and I will love you always."

### **Prayer of Dedication**

Great God of Heaven and Earth,  
you call us to leave behind our preoccupations  
and to follow you into the future.  
Sometimes we find your call challenging.  
We are comfortable, maybe even complacent, in our present.  
May this act of giving be a gesture of our willingness  
to follow where you lead.  
In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

### **Benediction**

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you, wherever He may send you. May He guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm. May He bring you home rejoicing at the wonders He has shown you.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen  
Go now in peace.

### **Announcements**

- Thank you, Betty Segelstrom, for sharing the scripture today
- Thank you to music leader Ellen Timmers and accompanist Elaine Keehr for our music
- Thanks to Ben and his helpers for the children's message
- If you are interested in receiving an Upper Room Meditation for July and August contact the church office at 320-679-2713
- **Mora and Ogilvie United Methodist Church will not offer in-person worship until we can do so safely**, adhering to federal and state recommendations, and the guidance of the Minnesota Annual Conference. As we continue to navigate this challenging season, let us remember that God is with us.

So until we meet gather again, I wish you peace.

