

Worship May 30, 2021

Welcome

Call to Worship

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son
that whoever believes in him should not perish
but have eternal life.

Let those who know they are redeemed celebrate it!

Those who have been reclaimed from deep trouble!

Though we were as good as dead,
God made us alive with the grace of Christ
through whom we are rescued and healed.

**O give thanks to God for such unswerving love,
for such wonderful deeds for the children of earth.**

Written by Bruce Prewer, and posted on Bruce Prewer's Home Page. <http://www.bruceprewer.com/>.

Opening Prayer

Blow, wind of God, Blow away the tight rules that hold me back from trusting, risking, loving
Blow away my sin that stands in the way of encountering my neighbors Ready me for birth
Prepare me for risk Equip me with courage and vision for the new thing that waits around the corner
We cannot choose the stories we have inherited But we can choose the stories that we become.

Amen

Written by Eileen Klassen Hamm (second line by Dori Zerbe Kornelson). Posted on the website of the Superb Mennonite Church. <http://www.superbmennonite.org/>.

Hymn **UMH # 526 What A Friend We Have in Jesus**

Memorial Day Remembrance

We gather this Memorial Weekend with persons all over our nation to remember those who make great sacrifices in service to their country and to pray for God's promised peace.

The last Monday in May is Memorial Day. It is set aside to honor military service members who died while serving in the military. It was first called Decoration Day because graves were decorated with flowers and flags. It was changed to Memorial Day to put the emphasis on the fallen, not the graves. We will also remember them today.

Jesus, we hear your words, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13 NRSV)

Please name out loud those known to be currently serving as active-duty military or as reservists that we may honor and bless them now.

Almighty God, we are grateful for those who are willing to sacrifice and to serve. Strengthen the men and women mentioned here today and all who risk their lives to protect others. Help all military personnel to serve with honor, wisdom, and compassion. Guard them against hard-heartedness, despair, and evil. Strengthen and bless their families, especially when they are separated one from another. Surround them with your protection, your grace, and your peace.

Please name out loud those who died while serving their country in the armed forces.

Let us pause for a moment of silence as we remember and honor those who died while serving their country in the armed forces.

Merciful God, we recognize those who made the ultimate sacrifice, putting the welfare of others ahead of their own safety. We are grateful and humbled by their actions. Strengthen and comfort their friends and family members as they remember and grieve. Amen

Micah 4:1-4 NRSV

Hear these words of promise and hope from the prophet Micah.

In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.

God of Love, it is your will for the nations to seek you and to know you. It is your will for us live together in peace, provision, and equity. Forgive us our warring ways. End the selfishness and corruption. End the mistrust and misinformation. End the violence. Bring wholeness and hope to every system, relationship, and person broken by war. Show us where we can join you in your great work of peace. Give us the courage to act and your wisdom to know what to do. We ask this in the strong name of Jesus

The Savior of the World, The Lord of All, The Prince of Peace. Amen

Prayers Remembering Armed Forces Day and Memorial Day © 2016 Lisa Ann Moss Degrenia

Hymn UMH #431 Let There Be Peace on Earth

Scripture John 3:1-21 **Nicodemus Visits Jesus**

3 Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus^[a] by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³ Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above."^[b] ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit."^[c] ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You^[d] must be born from above.'^[e] ⁸ The wind^[f] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you^[g] do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man."^[h] ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.^[i] ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."^[j]

Meditation

Born to Be Different

Please pray with me...

For many years I participated in a Wednesday 6:30am Bible study. One of my Bible study friends stated may time "it is not what I don't understand in the Bible that concerns me – it is what I do understand".

I'm not sure if verse 18 of today's scripture is on my list of those I understand or on the I don't understand list. Hopefully after a time of study and listening to God I will have a clear understanding and will be able to share that with you.

In v. 18 we read, "...he who does not believe is condemned already." One Bible scholar has used a couple of "Charlie Brown" stories to help us understand our sinful nature.

Lucy once said to Charlie Brown, "Discouraged again, eh, Charlie Brown?" "You know what your whole trouble is? The whole trouble with you is that you're you!"

Charlie asks, "Well, what in the world can I do about that?"

Lucy answers, "I don't pretend to be able to give advice...I merely point out the trouble!"

At a later date we find Lucy saying

"You know what the whole trouble with you is, Charlie Brown?"

Charlie answers, "No, and I don't want to know! Leave me alone!" He walks away.

Lucy shouts after him, "The whole trouble with you is you won't listen to what the whole trouble with you is!"

The solution begins with listening. If "we" are the problem, "we" can't be the solution. The solution has to come from outside us.

Often, rather than admitting, "I am the problem," we are more likely to confess that a few bad deeds are the problem:

- "I've lied, so I'd better stop lying."
- "Ops, I gossiped again I'd better stop doing that."
- "I was driving too fast, and I'll try to keep my speed down."

In this same vein of thinking the problem is defined as doing something bad, the solution is simply to stop doing that bad deed -- or start doing good deeds.

With this attitude Salvation becomes nothing more than doing good things and avoiding the bad. This type of solution doesn't need Jesus -- or Jesus simply becomes a model of doing the right things.

This watered-down, cheap salvation comes about when we don't see that we are the problem. The problem is not the things we do; but that we are us -- sinful human beings.

The snake told Eve in the book of Genesis that it was OK to eat the fruit and that it doesn't matter what God said. In that one act Satan deceived all of humanity in the Garden of Eden. This is called "original sin" and it means that sin is part of our human "spiritual DNA".

Oh my friends, we are born with a sinful nature. and the only way we can be different is to be born again a different way. I don't want to lose you with the words born again. Please stay with me

We can try to live right and follow the rules, but when we have tried our hardest, we will realize that the "god" we are following is not God our Creator but a "god" of our own effort. To be different from the way we are born here below on earth, we must have a spiritual birth from above so that we are children of God. Verse 16 reads

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

How does this work? How can we have a spiritual birth and become children of God? First, the guilt we are born with must be cleansed. Jesus gives us assurance that he has already taken our guilt away. It is because of the death of Jesus on the cross that we have been declared "not guilty" before God. This is the great doctrine of Justification by Faith that is so central to all Protestant churches. In the United Methodist Church we say that that, "in justification we are, through faith, forgiven of our sins and restored to God's favor."

In the Old Testament there was a time when snakes were biting and killing the Children of Israel in the wilderness. This concept kind of gives me the heebie-jeebies feeling.

But God to the rescue - God told Moses to put a bronze snake on a pole and set it up so that the people could see it.

When anyone was bitten all they had to do was look at the bronze snake and they would be healed. In vs. 14-15 Jesus

refers to this when he said, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

Many Christians know John 3:16 by heart.

Today I would like for us to say it together in a slightly different way. The NRSV version of this scripture is: ¹⁶ “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Today, let’s say that “since I believe in Him, I will not perish.” Repeat after me: For God so loved “me,” that he gave his only Son, that “since I believe in Him, I will not perish,” but have everlasting life.

Christian friends, let us all keep this deep in hearts—God loves each of us. The God who made the sun come up, the God who created the daffodils knows you and loves you. Jesus loves you so much that he gave his earthly life for you. All we have to do is look to his death on the cross. We don’t have to carry the old burden of sin; our lives can be different when we look up to Jesus who died on the cross for us.

Now let’s tackle the topic of New birth; with reference to v.5 Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. When we experience the New Birth, a wonderful life begins for us that is different from our old life. At the time John wrote this, society was organized so that a person’s birth position controlled almost everything about their life. If they were born to a family that baked bread, they would become bakers and they could only marry people from families of bakers or similar professions. The amount of education they could receive, the people they could talk with, the places they could travel to, were all determined by their birth position.

Most in the UMC view salvation as ongoing and not one-time. Here’ how UMC.org puts it: ...we understand conversion to be a lifelong process, a continual turning of our lives and wills over to God for God’s use and purposes. And to begin that lifelong process, we must, as the scriptures teach and John Wesley reminds us, be “born again.”

Ascribed honor, the honor resulting from one’s status at birth (birth order and gender), were simply a given. It usually stayed with a person for life. ... To be born over again, born for a second time ... however unthinkable that event might be, would alter one’s recognized honor status in a very fundamental way. Thus, a second birth, especially if it differed substantially in honor level from the first birth, would be a life-changing event of staggering proportions...To be born "from above" -- that is, to be born of the sky, of the realm of God -- is to belong to that realm, to become a true child of God. This, of course, is to acquire an honor status of the very highest sort. ... Thus, whatever honor status a person might have in an Israelite society, being born "from above" would re-create that person at a whole new level. In addition, since all children of the same father share that father’s honor status, differences in status among "the children of God" obviously disappear.

When we are born from above, from God, a new life, in a new world begins. We can start to live a different way, a way that was never possible before.

To bring us up to date, 1) we are born with a sinful nature and life is restricted by who we are. 2) Christ died on the cross to forgive us of our sins, all we have to do is look to him. 3) When we receive the new birth, we are children of God and can begin to live in a new and different way. Remember, this is just the beginning—too many people stop Christian growth when they are the spiritual equivalent of an infant. Remember, the Bible doesn’t teach us to make converts—the Bible teaches us to make disciples. If an infant is not fed, it won’t survive, but an infant who lives grows to be different in the same way that an adult is stronger and more capable than an infant.

John Wesley observed that for Christians this growth can be seen in both Inward and outward holiness. Inward holiness is the idea of having our hearts right, the idea of reading Scripture, praying, and being in right relation with God. Outward holiness has to do with the more visible part of our faith—treating other people well, sharing with others, living sober and meaningful lives

Rev. Roger L. Fredrikson, back in the mid-1980's told a story with the results being truly born again that I think helps understand this. There was a group of people who helped our soldiers during the war in Viet Nam. They lived in the more mountainous regions that bordered Viet Nam and Laos. The North Vietnamese persecuted these people terribly, especially after the US soldiers pulled out. Our nation has tried to help these people; I think we should do more for them because they saved so many of our soldiers. These people are called the Hmong, and there is now growing community in the Twin Cities.

Rev. Fredrikson's church worked with many of these Hmong people soon after they came to the US from the refugee camps where they went to escape persecution from the communist government. He said that at one time well over one hundred came "to be a part of his church family, and what a joy they have brought into our congregational life.

One in particular is Mr. Nou, was gifted with many leadership qualities. At one time he shared a story about his 'old life.' He had frequently beaten his wife and children, often neglected them while he was 'partying with other women' as he put it. His weekends were often drunken orgies. Coming to the United States as a refugee from Laos did not change his situation. In fact, it worsened it! He finally gave in to one of his persistent friends who almost angered him by constantly urging him to come with him to church. At first, it was all a joke for Mr. Nou. But then, in God's mysterious way, he met the One to whom Nicodemus came at night, Jesus. It was a radical, life-changing encounter, and Mr. Nou was 'born again.' He emptied the whiskey bottles in his home and began to treat his wife and children with new love and respect. Then he discovered new friends among his church and began to eagerly study the Scriptures at 5:00 each morning.... His wife said, 'I don't have a different husband. I have a new husband.'

Our Christian faith does matter! Inward and outward holiness means that we are born to be different from the world. When we are re-born from above, we live a different way. We are born to be holy. We are born to treat our family better. We are born to be free of guilt. We are born to celebrate the joy of a daily Christian life. We are born to leave the darkness of this world and to live in the light of Christ.

Amen

Praise Team Love Medley

Arranged by Russell Mauldin

Pastoral Prayer and The Lord's Prayer

God,
we confess that we are an impatient and selfish people.
When you offer us the promise of a new future,
we complain that you don't get there fast enough.
When you provide for our needs,
we complain that it isn't enough.
And when our bad attitudes and negative outlooks cause us to stumble,
we blame you.
Holy God, forgive our sinful ways.
Teach us to be patient.
Instruct us to be grateful.
Guide us to be responsible and humble.
As we turn ourselves around and look to the cross,
let us experience your grace and your gift of new life.
In the name of Christ our Savior, we pray. Amen.

Written by Amy Loving, and posted on The Worship Closet: The Place for Creative Worship Ideas.

And together in the name of Christ, we pray.

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 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**

Offering

Do you experience joy in giving to Christ? I do receive joy in my giving, especially the last couple weeks when I saw my giving to Christ represented in the confirmation of our three young people and the baptism of three children.

Our giving to Christ made it possible for the confirmands to have a place to learn, materials to study, bibles to guide them and a pastor to lead them.

Our giving to Christ made it possible for three young people to be initiated into Christ's holy Church through the Sacrament of baptism and our continued giving makes their grow in Christ possible.

Allow yourself to experience the joy of giving to Christ.

Christ's morning offering will now be received.

Doxology

Prayer of Dedication

Holy God, above us, among us, within us: we rejoice this day that while you might have chosen to be unknown to us, you have revealed yourself in many ways. Each encounter with you calls us to return blessings with worship, compassion, and service. So, when we give this day, we do so in gratitude for all your parental care for us through your creation.

When we give this day, we give because, in love, you gave us Christ, that through him we might find eternal life. When we give this day, your Spirit leads your church to reach out in compassion, mercy, and grace to all your children everywhere. In gratitude, we celebrate you, three and yet one. Amen

Hymn UMH #191 Jesus Loves Me

Benediction

Just as God's Word was sent into the world
to heal and redeem,
so God sends you into the world this day
to be light and love, healing and hope.
Go now to be light for the world!
And may the grace and peace of God the Creator,
the Redeemer, and the Sustainer
come upon you this day
and remain with you always. Amen.

Taken from "O Merciful God: God of Wisdom: Prayers for the Fourth Sunday in Lent," written by Rev. Kathryn Matthews Huey and the Rev. Susan A. Blain. Posted on the United Church of Christ's Worship Ways website.