

**WORSHIP SERVICE  
AUGUST 2, 2020**

PRELUDE

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS  
CALL TO WORSHIP

O God of peace, who has taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved,  
In quietness and confidence shall be our strength,  
By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence,  
Where we may be still and know that you are God.

OPENING PRAYER

**Gentle God, you shepherd us in times of trouble. When the way seems dark, you guide us safely through. When we cannot bear to slow down, you show us the wisdom of rest. In your presence there is life, overflowing, abundant and free.  
As we rest in your goodness, teach us to see with your heart. Open our eyes to the world beyond what we know, and to all of your beloved children. Open our hearts to the blessed fierceness of your creation. Anoint us with your spirit of blessing that we might be as Christ to one another, in our welcome, compassion and care. Amen.**

HYMN                   “Come and Find the Quiet Center”

CALL TO CONFESSION

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Most merciful God, we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. For the sake of Jesus Christ, have mercy on us. Forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and follow in your ways, to the glory of your name. Amen.**

A TIME OF QUIET/PERSONAL CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF GOD’S PARDON

RESPONSE #359       “More Love to Thee, O Christ” (v. 1)  
***More love to Thee, O Christ, More love to Thee! Hear Thou the prayer I make on bended knee. This is my earnest plea: More love, O Christ, to Thee, More love to Thee, More love to Thee!***

PASSING THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you! **And also with you.** Now fold your hands in front of your heart and bow to your neighbors near and far, wishing them God’s peace, God’s Shalom.

**WE HEAR GOD’S WORD**

MEDITATION INCLUDING SCRIPTURE READINGS “View from a Mountain Cabin Pt. 1” (Isaiah 55: 6, 10-13, Mark 6:30-32)

During our vacation last week in Pigeon Forge, TN, I spent a lot of time sitting out on the back deck of our cabin. The view was absolutely beautiful! And the Adirondack chairs were pretty comfortable too. It was the perfect place for my morning coffee and a great place to read my book. But even when I was reading my book, I found myself glancing up quite a bit because I couldn’t take my eyes off the view. I tried to do it justice with my phone’s camera, but it’s not quite the same. Maybe you saw the pictures in the newsletter this month. Up close there were the trees, the tops of which were about at eye level. And

then in the middle ground were the smaller and closer hills. And then, off in the distance, were the Smoky Mountains. And they did look smoky, especially the morning that it rained. The clouds were low and spread out like a smoky mist.

Summer is a great time to remind ourselves that God continually invites us into a time of rest. This summer, maybe more than any other, we need to take in that message and make it personal. And in case you're thinking you have more time than you know what to do with, and so maybe too much time to rest, I would say, think again. Just because our bodies are resting doesn't mean our minds are resting. Our minds are really busy all the time because that's what they do best. They think and think and think—most of the time too much! And our thinking causes us to worry. And our worry causes us to miss so many gifts God wants to give us- starting with the gift of the present moment, which is the only time we have to experience God's presence and accept God's gifts.

When the disciples were tired, Jesus suggested that they come with him to a quiet place. Listen to these words from Mark 6: *The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.* They had been so busy teaching and caring for people- so many people- that they really needed a break. What do you do when you need a break? Do you have a favorite chair or a spot outside or a favorite park bench that beckons to you? And when you sit down, how do you get your mind to rest along with your body?

How about the idea of using our breath as a way to relax our minds? This is an ancient practice to quiet the mind. We breathe all the time and don't think about it because it's one of those things our bodies do automatically. But focusing on our breathing intentionally helps to quiet our busy minds and calm that constant flow of thoughts. Give it a try! With your eyes open or closed, breathe in slowly, hold it for a moment, and then breathe out slowly. And if a worrisome thought pops into your head, and it will, you can simply acknowledge it and then let it go.

Or try it this way. When we drove up into Smoky Mountain National Park the road wound up the mountain right next to a river. The whole way up, that river was right there next to us. If you've been there, you know how deep and dense the forest is. Lots of trees had fallen down across the river and all around it. But we could always see the river flowing down over the rocks. I kept my eye out for animals but I didn't see any. The river by itself was so beautiful though. So when you're sitting in your peaceful spot, imagine your thoughts are like a river flowing downstream. When a thought flows into your head, just let it go downstream. Don't hold onto it. Just watch it go. Try this for 5 minutes at first. Set a timer so you don't have to look at your watch and then close your eyes and breathe.

I'm not sure the disciples had even 5 minutes to eat a meal and get some quiet time before the crowds found them again. But I wonder if during that little time apart, they had a chance to hear some words from scripture. Jesus read from the Prophet Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry, so he might have done so on a regular basis and the disciples may have heard him read these verses from Isaiah Chapter 55. *Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn bush will grow the juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the Lord's renown, for an everlasting sign, that will endure forever.*" (Isaiah 55:6, 10-13.)

You know what? We are much more connected to nature than we realize. Do you agree that nature reflects what's going on with people? There are lots of negative examples of this, like global warming and deforestation and animals that are in danger of extinction. But how about positive examples? These words were originally written for the people who were living in exile, away from their land and all that was familiar to them. Isaiah wants the people to know that God has a plan for them—to bring them back to their homeland where they will flourish. They will be able to plant their crops and live off the land again. And not only will they flourish, but all of nature will rejoice along with them. God is saying that his word can be counted on. Just like the rain waters the earth and makes the crops grow, so God will be true to his word and bring the people back to their land. And then there will be peace and joy and the mountains and hills will burst into song.

All of this is based in history as the people who were taken away from their country towards the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century BCE (a long time ago I know!) were allowed to go back when the Persian Empire came to power towards the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. They went back to Jerusalem and they began to rebuild the temple. It certainly wasn't easy and so some people say that this part of Isaiah is full of unguarded optimism. But I say, a little unguarded optimism isn't such a bad thing! The people did experience a lot of hardship and challenges when they returned to their homeland, but at least they were back home.

Today we could say that we're just a little bit like those exiles. We haven't been taken away from our homes. But we have been taken away from worshipping together in the same place at the same time. Yes it's for a good reason. But that doesn't make it easy. It's all necessary and the right thing to do to keep our distance from one another, but, boy it's hard! And that brings me back to that view from our mountain cabin last week. When I was gazing out over that beautiful landscape, I saw the tops of trees. And at times it looked like they were clapping their hands, especially when the wind was blowing. And if I turned my gaze to the middle distance, I saw so many different shades of green, just like all those greens in a jumbo box of Crayola crayons. I don't know if junipers grow in TN, but they'd fit right in. They are evergreens, a symbol of eternal life. And I'd prefer a juniper over a thorn bush any day!

And then in the distance were those smoky mountains—a little hazy, a little out of focus, but still strong and majestic. This week is part 1 of a mini sermon series I'm calling "View from a Mountain Cabin." That view, along with all the beautiful views you are enjoying this summer, are proof that God's word is strong and true. God's word does not return to us empty. God's word is woven throughout the natural world and we are an inseparable part of that natural world. We can't and we shouldn't try to hide behind our technology or our air-conditioned cars and houses, or anything else that leads us to believe that we are somehow separate from God's natural world. And yes that natural world also includes the coronavirus. That's just the way it is.

And so in the meantime, as we are getting tired of the masks and the social distancing, what do we do? We take time to breathe. Go outside, take off your mask and find your favorite spot. Then sit down and take a deep breath. Close your eyes and watch those worrisome thoughts flow down the river. Don't hold on to them. Just let them go. Jesus took his disciples away to a quiet place, and he wants to take us there too. Yes we have much work to do in the world. But first we spend a little time with Jesus and remember that God's word is strong and true. It doesn't return to us empty... Let's meet up again next week on the back deck of that mountain cabin. I'll be waiting for you. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC

## **WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD**

### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Joys and Concerns

### Pastoral Prayer & The Lord's Prayer

Dear God, Even though we are apart, we are one in spirit and we give thanks for your presence among us. You are with us whether we are gathered or scattered. We confess that these days we feel scattered. We are impatient for this pandemic to be over. We are impatient to get "back to normal" even though we know deep down it will be a "new normal" that we get back to. And so, as we wait, help us not to squander today. Help us as we seek to find our quiet center in the midst of our daily lives. Some of us feel busy as we try to make a living and meet our own needs, as well as those of our family and our church and our community.

It's not easy and yet there you are in the midst of it all. We thank you today for the gift of prayer; for there is power in our prayers whether we pray out loud or in the quiet of our hearts. We know you are listening. And so we lift up prayers for those fighting Covid-19, for those homebound, for those fighting illness, anxiety or depression. May each of us feel you filling those places inside of us which are the emptiest. We rejoice in the gifts of summer- for plentiful gardens and ripe vegetables, for the warmth of the sun and the cool nights.

Hear all of our prayers- prayers that you might lead us into action and prayers for a quiet moment apart, for we lift them all to you as we continue to 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 debts as we forgive our debtors; 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 OUR GIFTS

Call to the Offering

Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Christ, all people here below; Praise Holy Spirit evermore; Praise Triune God, whom we adore. Amen***

#### PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**Great and generous God, we thank you for all your gifts—of life and love, beauty and rest. Please accept offerings today, given so that others might know you and find your peace. Amen.**

HYMN

“Make Me a Channel of Your Peace”

#### BENEDICTION

RESPONSE #535 Go with Us, Lord”

***Go with us, Lord, and guide the way Through this and every coming day, That in Your Spirit strong and true Our lives may be our gift to You.***

POSTLUDE

#### ANNOUNCEMENTS

Popcorn with the Pastor continues on Tuesdays at 6:30 PM. Join in for a time of informal conversation over Zoom. If you would like to learn how to use Zoom and/or receive the link to join the call, please contact Pastor Julia or Don Niece.

If you would like to purchase a copy of White Fragility, by Robin Diangelo for our Zoom book discussion in September, please let Pastor Julia know. The cost is under \$10.

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