



Johnsville United Methodist Church

Union Bridge, MD

Our mission is to nurture the members of the congregation in developing a personal relationship with God and to share His word and His love with the larger community.

PRAISE, WORSHIP AND CELEBRATION

Lent 2 - February 28, 2021

PRELUDE

“Something Beautiful” (Gaither)

WELCOME

Opening Hymn

“Take Up Thy Cross”

UMH 415

1. “Take up thy cross,” the Savior said,
“if thou wouldst my disciple be;
deny thyself, the world forsake,
and humbly follow after me.”

2. Take up thy cross, let not it weight
fill thy weak spirit with alarm;
his strength shall bear thy spirit up,
And brace thy heart and nerve thy arm.

3. Take up thy cross, nor heed the shame,
nor let thy foolish pride rebel;
thy Lord for thee the cross endured,
to save thy soul from death and hell.

4. Take up thy cross and follow Christ,
nor think till death to lay it down;
for only those who bear the cross
May hope to wear the glorious crown.

Call to Worship: (Genesis 17, Romans 4, Mark 8)

Leader: From generation to generation, God calls to us.

People: Christ names us as God’s own people.

Leader: In hope and faith, God walks before us.

People: Christ calls us to pick up our cross and follow.

Leader: In covenant and love, God promises us grace.

People: Christ carries us forward into life anew.

Opening Prayer of Confession (Genesis 17, Psalm 22, Romans 4, Mark 8)

People: God of grace and glory, forgive us when our failed faith causes us to stumble or stop on this journey with Christ. Grace us with faith that hopes against all hope, so that we may trust in your promises and walk in your ways. Lift us up, that we may carry our cross and continue on the path to new life.

Words of Assurance (Genesis 17, Romans 4, Mark 8)

Leader: Like Abram and Sarai before us, we have been claimed as God's own.

Like Simon and Levi, we have been named by Christ as chosen disciples. Through Christ, our faith has been reckoned as righteousness. In Christ, we are forgiven and raised to new life. My friends, we are forgiven and loved by God!

Special Music "Come Healing" Leonard Cohen (lyrics) Patrick Raymond Leonard (music)

Sung by Voices Three: Rebecca Price, Jodie Morris, and Donate Gardner.

Recorded and produced by Dempsey L. Price III (Final Focus).

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Lord, my Rock and Redeemer, thank you that you know me and you love me. Your word says that your people are to love one another, serve one another, honor one another, teach one another, rebuke one another and build one another up. Would you bless your church that we can fulfill these commands with one another and help each other grow in our faith. May the Lord make us increase and abound in love for each other. May you establish our hearts as blameless in holiness before you. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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.

Hymn

"I Have Decided to Follow Jesus"

TFWS 2129

1. I have decided to follow Jesus,
I have decided to follow Jesus,
I have decided to follow Jesus
no turning back, no turning back.

2. The world behind me, the cross before me,
the world behind me, the cross before me,
the world behind me, the cross before me
No turning back, no turning back.

3. Though none go with me, still I will follow,
though none go with me, still I will follow,
though none go with me, still I will follow
no turning back, no turning back.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Hebrew Scripture Lesson: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. ²And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” ³Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,

⁴“As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

⁷I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

¹⁵God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”

Gospel Lesson: Mark 8:27-38

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” ²⁸And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

Response to Scriptures:

Leader: This is the word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God!

Sermon: “Becoming Followers of the Cross” Pastor Shari McCourt

This week during my prayer/devotional time, I was thinking about the season of Lent. Like many of you, I struggle with balancing my work, with family, service, and the lack of much needed personal time whatever that is. I was contemplating additional spiritual disciplines for the season of

Lent. In the midst of prayer, I was directed to read a series of articles. It is so funny how the Spirit directs us to what we need when we are open to direction.

I began reading an article written by a man who is not a fan of Lent. He said, "I am not fond of Lent. There is for me a burdensome quality to a season that begins with ashes and ends with a tomb. It has for me the heavy feel of dark duty. So, I tend to approach Lent with an attitude that I need to do something, or give something up. By the end of Lent I have often been exhausted and aching for some decadent "death by chocolate" dessert." I laughed when I read this as it reminded me of a modern day parable.

There was a movie released in 2000, called "Chocolat". It stars Jonny Depp and Juliette Binoche. It is a story of unwed woman and her daughter who opened a chocolate shop during the season of Lent in a small French Village with a ridged belief structure. Her kindness in meeting people where they are, practice of non-judgmentalism, and unconditional love shake up the town. The mayor of the town is a character who is so strict in his belief system that he proofs the priest's sermons in fear that the priest would not know the "right" things to say to the people, instead of trusting in the Spirit of God to work through the priest. He creates a box around his beliefs of a punitive God that eventually makes him crack. He is found on the morning of Easter Sunday, after breaking into chocolate shop, in the store front window, sound asleep covered in chocolate. The owner of the chocolate shop never judges him but instead cleans him up, treats him with kindness, and cares for him despite his, spreading rumors about her, and breaking into her shop and stealing chocolate. She sends him into Easter Day celebration with a new perspective on life. He has rededicated his life to a life of service of unconditional love and kindness, that kindness included kindness to himself.

So I questioned how do I balance this out? The author of the article pointed out in his struggle he said, "But I need Lent. I need the disciplines that we associate with the season. I need the insights those disciplines typically reveal. I need the transforming power of the Spirit that the insight calls forth." Don't we all...? He quoted, "Twentieth century mystic Evelyn Underhill reminds us that "Lent is a good moment for a spiritual stocktaking; a pause, a retreat from life's busy surface to its solemn depths." Pointedly, she observes that "There are few who cannot benefit by a bit by bit examination of the resources that each baptized Christian has, a discernment of those things which must be treasured and kept in good order, as opposed to the "spiritual odds and ends" "which we have accumulated for ourselves."

Important as the discipline of stocktaking may be, taking the time to do it is often a luxury that it seems few can afford. The schedules of families with young children or teenagers are daunting. The demands of employment and careers are unceasing. Adding another thing to do for Lent seems unrealistic at best. But, true as that is, the cost of not doing it may be greater.

The author shared a story from his own life having to do with a near death experience if he did not change his ways. There is nothing that shakes us up more than a near death of experience for ourselves or someone we love.

The doctor shared with him, "Well, Dick," he began, "as we thought, your heart is OK. It's probably just stress." Then he smiled and said, "But, of course, you know that stress can kill you."

Finding the balance in our lives is made more difficult by our very own actions.

When I was receiving my calling into ministry it came through an accountability group. It is an old practice in Methodism. I was in a CD, or covenant discipleship group. We met weekly for one hour to account for our discipleship based on a covenant that we prayerfully wrote together as inspired by the Holy Spirit. That accountability was very balanced because it was based on the promises of God.

We read about this morning in Genesis 17 in the story of Sarah and Abraham. This is the first installment of the story in which God makes a covenant with Abraham. God promised to make him the father of the multitudes. God promised to make him fruitful and nations of him and keep covenant with his off-spring. Abraham who was 99 years old was married to Sarah and was promised to have children with her. God made a promise to this man and we know from history that both the covenant and promise were kept even though Abraham made mistakes, and got impatient waiting for God's time. We also get impatient waiting for God when it is God who is waiting for us to be still with God's Spirit for wholeness and direction. This story makes a good argument in favor of God keeping God's promises. There was never any guarantee that Abraham would live to see all of the promises fulfilled but they were fulfilled none the less.

As I went about this week, I continued to hear from people regarding, their struggle to practice additional spiritual disciplines in the midst of their lives, and especially during this pandemic. In our culture we all suffer an epidemic, of the addiction to busy-ness, which distracts us from the very time with our God that will restore us. We are challenged to believe that if we don't do it. The "It" won't get done. Trusting in God to provide the means is foreign to us. Percy Ainsworth has written: "I am afraid that too often we leave the depts of life untouched, not because we remember they are sacred, but because we forget they are there." From time to time we are called to the deep places of our lives where the very image of God abides. It is a holy place that, in our busy-ness, we don't often visit. Perhaps the reason why we are reluctant to go there is because of the risk involved. Instinctively we know that when we do finally stop, we will come face to face with God, who is holding up a mirror so that we can see ourselves more clearly. That is where the stocktaking begins, as we move in the Presence of God from our life's busy surface into its solemn depths.

At its best, Lent offers an invitation to the practice of stillness where, amid the bustle of our days, we can pause to let God take the measure of our lives. The great benefits of this encounter, says Evelyn Underhill, is "a return to first principles," where we find "all the essentials for feeding that inner life of which we talk so much and understand so very little. The article was titled, "Don't just do something, sit there!" Lent is not only about practicing spiritual disciplines, it is about our road that leads to the cross of Jesus.

In the gospel lesson from Mark chapter eight, Jesus is busy in mission with the disciples in the village of Cesarea, at the same time Jesus tried to prepare his disciples, and friends for what was coming. Jesus was trying to help them to understand that he came in fulfillment of God's love for God's creation, God's promises through covenant with God's people.

The second part of this text is a text that is often taken out of context to make people feel guilty or misused in some way. Jesus called the crowds over with the disciples that said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For

those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life will save it.” Jesus tried so hard in this text to teach all those present that all we can count on is God. We cannot count on what we see in this world, and we too often do not see the best in humanity. But, we can count on God to keep God’s promises to love us, save us, and although we may not see it in our life time, God is the ultimate justice by sending God’s only Son Jesus to die for our sake and our salvation so that we might have life.

When we spend the time in quiet, just sitting with Our Lord, we grow in the love of God that propels us to take up our cross and follow Jesus into new life. We are given strength that comes from God and God alone. We become instruments of grace that defies the old comfort of God in a box. When we pick up our cross, and follow, we become God’s agents of transformation in a world so in need of transformation. Let us be thankful for the hope we have as we take up our cross and follow the Lord. Amen.

OFFERING OF OUR GIFTS TO GOD

Many thanks for your faithfulness in supporting the ministries of the church.

As an act of worship, please consider keeping current in your tithes and offerings. Even though the church building is closed, we still have financial obligations we need to meet. The mailbox will be checked daily. The address is: Johnsville United Methodist Church, 11106 Green Valley Road, Union Bridge, MD 21791

OFFERTORY

DOXOLOGY

“Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow”

UMH 95

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise him, all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Offering Prayer

Bless us and our gifts this day, that we may be a blessing to all the ends of the earth. As these gifts go forth into the world, may the ministries they support help others remember and turn to you, O God, recognizing the great love and grace you shower upon us all. Amen.

Closing Hymn

“Where He Leads Me”

UMH 338

1. I can hear my Savior calling,
I can hear my Savior calling,
I can hear my Savior calling,
“Take thy cross and follow, follow me.”

Refrain

Where he leads me I will follow,
where he leads me I will follow,
Where he leads me I will follow;
I’ll go with him, with him all the way.

2. I'll go with him through the garden,
I'll go with him through the garden,
I'll go with him through the garden,
I'll go with him, with him all the way.

Refrain

3. I'll go with him through the judgement,
I'll go with him through the judgement,
I'll go with him through the judgement,
I'll go with him, with him all the way.

Refrain

4. He will give me grace and glory,
he will give me grace and glory,
he will give me grace and glory,
and go with me, with me all the way.

Refrain

BENEDICTION

Rom. 15:5-6 - May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

POSTLUDE

“Living for Jesus” (Lowden)