



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

May 30, 2021-Trintiy Sunday

PRELUDE

“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” (French carol)

WELCOME

Opening Hymn

“Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty”

UMH 64

1. Holy, holy, holy!
Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning
our song shall rise to thee.
Holy, holy, holy!
Merciful and mighty,
God in three persons,
blessed Trinity!

2. Holy, holy, holy!
All the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns
around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim
falling down before thee,
which wert, and art, and
Evermore shalt be.

3. Holy, holy, holy!
Though the darkness hide thee,
though the eye of sinful man
thy glory may not see,
only thou art holy;
there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in
love and purity.

4. Holy, holy, holy!
Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name,
in earth and sky and sea.
Holy, holy, holy!
Merciful and mighty,
God in thee persons,
Blessed Trinity.

Call to Worship: Isaiah 6, Romans 8, John 3

Leader: We come this morning to praise God, the three in one.

People: Holy, Holy, Holy is the God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of God's glory.

Leader: We come embracing our adoption as sons and daughters of God.

People: We rejoice in our identity and our new birth in the Spirit.

Leader: Let us come before our God with praise and thanksgiving. Let us worship the God of glory and love.

Opening Prayer (Isaiah 6, Romans 8)

God of love, we come this morning with hearts full of praise; we come with deepest gratitude to you for adopting us as your sons and daughters. Help us feel the Spirit move within our lives, not only during our worship, but in every aspect of our days. Help us respond to your loving Spirit with a full-throated, "Here am I, send me." May our time together bless us, inspire us, and lead us in your pathways. Amen.

Special Music

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

God of call and new birth,
sometimes we are so filled
with awe at your presence
that we think we are unworthy of you.
Help us remember that you are the God of love—
the one who has birthed us again and again
into new life as adopted sons and daughters.
Forgive us when we doubt our identity.
Forgive us when we shrink from your call
or feel inadequate as your children.
Forgive us for not understanding your full identity
as the one who creates us, calls us, loves us,
saves us, inspires us, and sustains us.
Help us say Holy, Holy, Holy, Abba,
and know that you are three in one.
God so loved the world, and not just the world,
but each and every one of us,

that God sent Jesus into the world
to bring the message of love, forgiveness,
and salvation.
Give us courage to do as your word instructs.
Help us remember that we are loved and treasured
beyond measure as a true child of God.

Thank you, O God, for the many blessings you have given us, and meeting our needs.

Bless those who need your healing, and bless this world in which we live. Be with those that you call to serve in leadership throughout the world that all will do your will and your peace that passes all understanding will come.

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

“To God Be the Glory”

UMH 98

1. To God be the glory,
great things he hath done!
So loved he the world
that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life
an atonement for sin,
and opened the lifegate
that all may go in.

2. O perfect redemption,
the purchase of blood,
to every believer
the promise of God;
the vilest offender
who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus
a pardon receives.

Refrain

Refrain

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,
let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father through Jesus the Son,
and give him the glory,
great things he hath done!

3. Great things he hath taught us,
great things he hath done,
and great our rejoicing
thru Jesus the Son;
but purer, and higher,
and greater will be
our wonder, our transport,
When Jesus we see.

Refrain

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Hebrew Scripture Lesson: Psalm 29

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

²Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendor.

³The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over mighty waters.

⁴The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

⁵The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

⁶He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox.

⁷The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.

⁸The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

⁹The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl, and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all say,
“Glory!”

¹⁰The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever.

¹¹May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!

Epistle Lesson: Romans 8:12-17

Gospel Lesson: John 3:1-17

³Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus 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.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus 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?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind 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.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus 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 do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. 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.

Response to Scriptures:

Leader: This is the word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God!

Sermon:

“In the Shadows of Faith”

Today is Trinity Sunday in the calendar of the Christian Year. First, the word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible. That is actually not that unusual, because there are a number of theological concepts not found explicitly in the Bible that scholars, and Church history and tradition have validated over the past 2,000 years. The absence of direct teaching from the Bible on the Trinity, makes it hard to find a passage of Scripture from which to launch out for a sermon. The passage we read today has hints of a Trinitarian relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit, but you have to look carefully for it.

Rarely is Trinity preached on directly because it is a topic, a concept, from the academic discipline called “systematic theology.” Systematic theology, is the attempt by Christian theologians to craft a coherent understanding of the work of God. They use **Scripture**, church “**Tradition**”, and the (overarching) philosophy or in Methodism “**Reason**”, and our “**Experience**” to proof out the concept of the Holy Trinity. The topics of systematic theology tend to be conceptual, and often difficult to explain in a way that doesn’t put us all to sleep. I am just kidding about being put to sleep. I find it

very interesting! The primary reason Trinity is not preached is because it is one of those doctrines that Christians worldwide affirm, but have great difficulty explaining.

Now we are going to shift gears, and talk about faith in the shadows. In our gospel lesson from John 3, it begins with introducing a character named Nicodemus. He was a devout Jew, and steeped in the culture, and beliefs.

Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Pharisees were a group of extremely observant, influential Jews, who came mainly from Palestine. The name "Pharisee" means, "separate ones." They were sticklers for practicing ritual purity, tithing, and interpretation of biblical law. Most Pharisees of the day, according to biblical gospel scholars, were considered those who made the law, and enforced Jewish law.

Josephus, an ancient, Jewish historian of the first century, regarded Pharisees as a chosen way of life, and philosophy. We do not know how one joined the Pharisees, or how one remained in the group. They were the most influential group with the people, and often competed with other groups for recognition, and power within the social factions of Judaism. They associated with the scribes, and were often viewed in the New Testament as in opposition of Jesus teachings, and way of life.

Nicodemus was also part of a group called the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin of that time were a council of the leaders of leaders over politics, military, federating states, and served as a court to decide major cases, and interpretation of law. This sect also included some priests, high religious leaders, and aristocrats.

Nicodemus was an important man with high credentials. Both of the groups in which he was associated, were not supporters of Jesus' ministry. Only in the book of John, is Nicodemus mentioned on three different occasions. Our gospel lesson today is the first mention of Nicodemus. The passage that came before this one contained part of the story where Jesus was in Jerusalem, during the days of the Passover Feast. Jesus became angry, and turned over the tables of the money changers.

Our story today, begins with Nicodemus sneaking around at night, when no one could see him. There is much speculation as to why he would sneak around at night in the shadows left from the day. He did call Jesus, "Rabbi," which is a sign of respect for his position.

Nicodemus seemed to have watched Jesus prior to this meeting enough to have taken notice of the miracles that could have only come from God. In the shadows of his faith, he was questioning, seeking, and wanting to know more about Jesus. The answer that Jesus gave him was difficult to understand. Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Even though Nicodemus was a learned man, this did not make sense to him. He may have watched from the shadows, but he would not have been in the midst of a crowd. That would **not** have worked well with his position. It makes us wonder, if he had been in the midst of a crowd would he have understood better. The disciples struggled to understand, and they were with Jesus day and night.

Nicodemus asked, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” We sense the logical mind of Nicodemus from his question. He is seeking to understand Jesus better. Jesus did not turn away from him or tell him that his question was ridiculous. Jesus answered him. This helps us to know that Jesus meets us where we are, and answers our questions. Like Nicodemus, we may not understand the answer right away, but within time, and working with him, we too may come to understand.

Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of the water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind 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.” It is no wonder that Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was trying to explain. Nicodemus was used to strict rules, laws and regulations to follow for his religious life. Some of us have check lists as to what we believe will get us in “right” with God. Jesus was describing an intimate relationship with the Spirit, one in which we must be reborn into **by and with** the Spirit of God. This relationship is not a check list of ‘do’s and don’ts’. It is based on the intension, and desire of our heart to love our Lord with all of our being, and forever which can only refer to our own spirit, as the flesh will die. The spirit can live on with Jesus. This relationship is to be available at the whim of the Spirit, God’s will.

In this Spiritual relationship, we are to be open to the grace, upon grace, upon grace of our Lord, and accept this gift of new life in Him. Jesus lets him know that even though he is a religious teacher, he is missing the point of God’s love for him, and his love and acceptance of our Lord. It is not on a check list! Jesus tries to help him understand that it will be difficult for Nicodemus to accept as long as he looks at his life through the lens of the check list that he knows. Jesus shares the challenge of trying to understand heavenly things when we have not seen it.

He shared with Nicodemus what his death will mean for him personally as well as the world. Jesus tried to help Nicodemus come to see the reversal of God’s way through him by quoting a reference of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness, compared with the Son of Man being lift high on the cross. The symbol of suffering, and shame through Jesus death, and resurrection has become a symbol of new life that is for those close to Jesus as well as the world.

Jesus came to save the world. God’s message and salvation is universal! God is a God of love, not a God of rules, or worldly ways! God’s love is unconditional and universal! The rules, and laws that Nicodemus was used to following and interpreting are not the way, the truth or the life that God offers through Jesus. John 3:17, says, “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.”

In the shadows, Nicodemus asked, questioned, and challenged his beliefs, and faith to better understand Jesus’ good news. Many times we do the same thing. It is easier to attend to a check list of rules than to have hearts open to the direction of the Spirit of the Lord. As we grown in our faith, which we hope is an ongoing process, we too may desire to stay in the shadows so that no one will know our struggles. We don’t want to be embarrassed by what we don’t know.

As your pastor, I will share with you that we are all growing together. We may be at different levels of spiritual growth, and some grow faster than others, but we are all growing together. It is okay to come out of the shadows of your faith into the light of Christ. Let us all strive to live in the light of his love. 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 94

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise God, the source of all our gifts!
Praise Jesus Christ, whose power uplifts!
Praise the Spirit, Holy Spirit!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Offering Prayer

(Romans 8, John 3)

O God of new birth, we offer ourselves and our gifts in deepest gratitude for all your gifts. May we use them to spread the word of your love, your grace, and your call to all the world. Through our gifts, may others claim their true identity as your children and may they live into that identity with integrity and thankfulness. Amen.

Closing Hymn “Lift High the Cross” UMH 159

Refrain
Lift high the cross,
the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world
adore his sacred name.

1. Come Christians, follow
this triumphant sign.
The hosts of God
in unity combine.
Refrain

2. Each newborn servant of the Crucified

3. O Lord, once lifted
on the glorious tree,

bears on the brow the
seal of him who died.

Refrain

as thou hast promised,
Draw the world to thee.

Refrain

4. So shall our song of
triumph ever be:
Praise to the
Crucified for victory!

Refrain

BENEDICTION

When God calls, we will answer. As Christ loves, we will love. Where the Spirit leads, we will follow!
Go forth in the peace of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit! Amen.

POSTLUDE