



WORSHIPPING AT HOME

*with UCC Westerly
during the Covid-19 outbreak*

**May 4, 2020
Third Sunday of Eastertide**

□ Create a small worship space in your home anywhere. Add a candle, a bible and perhaps a lily or daffodil or tulip to get that Easter feel.

□ If you are doing this on your own, settle into your worship space around 9:30am on Sunday and begin. Make your list of prayer concerns. Then sit in silence and let your mind calm down. When you reach the Prayer Time in the service, aloud or just in your own mind, ask God to bless each of the persons and situations on your list. End with the Lord's Prayer in whatever words are most comfortable for you.

- If you are joining in the prayers during the Facebook Live broadcast, before worship take a few minutes to send them to me via text, email or Facebook message. It is helpful for me to receive them at least 20 minutes before the service begins.
- A reminder I will be streaming our worship service on Facebook Live beginning at 9:45am. You can still access it even if you are not on Facebook by going to the church website, www.uccwesterly.org, and clicking on the Facebook icon on the homepage.
- Since we will be celebrating the sacrament of Communion together though scattered you will need to have your own Communion elements ready. The kind of bread or cracker and juice is your choice!

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Light your candle as a reminder of God's presence with you

Gathering Music -- *Every Drop of Rain*

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CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from *An Iona Prayer Book*, Peter Millar, 1998, p. 71)

This is the day that God has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it.

We will not offer to God gifts that cost us nothing.

We will live each day striving to serve the Lord, to seek truth and pursue it.

In the name of the Trinity of Love – Creator, Christ and Advocate

We set out upon God's pilgrim way.

Opening Song “Sanctuary”

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*Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true.
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you.*

UNISON PRAYER OF REFLECTION

(adapted from *An Iona Prayer Book*, Peter Millar, 1998, p. 69)

Explorer God, you have put within us a spirit of adventure to move us beyond the immediate, and to see in the ordinary things your extraordinary presence of love. Propelled by your Spirit, may each day become an adventure of people, tasks, places and responsibilities. And when we feel grey and lifeless may you remind us that each day holds its own gifts: new truths, restored vision, inner healing and the possibility to forgive even our enemies. This we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION*

Statement of Faith (adapted from *Gifts of Many Cultures*, Tirabassi & Eddy, Eds., p. 118)

We believe in God, our Heavenly Father;

We believe in Jesus Christ our Savior;

We trust in our dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit;

We seek to live in God's presence according to all God has made known and will make known to us.

We covenant to worship, work and witness together in the fellowship of this church for the building up of the Body of Christ and manifesting the Kingdom of God on earth.

COMMUNION HYMN -- “Let Us Break Bread Together”

[CONTRIBUTORS: William Farley Smith; TUNE: United Methodist Publishing House/Abingdon Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE#A-734569]

V. 1 -- *Let us break bread together on our knees (2 X)*

When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,

O Lord, have mercy on me.

Words of Invitation and Prayer

Sharing of the Elements

Unison Prayer of Thanksgiving

May we be as living loaves, kneaded and shaped by the hands of God. May we be as wine of the Spirit, poured out that others might know joy. Love be the leaven within. Love be the flavor of thought and word and deed. Peace be among us, always. Amen.

COMMUNION HYMN – Let Us Break Bread Together”

V. 3 -- *Let us praise God together on our knees (2 X)*

When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun,

O Lord, have mercy on me.

SCRIPTURE READING

Morning Message

Looking for the Genuine

1 Corinthians 11:17-26

Rev. Ruth

A TIME OF PRAYER: Prayers of the People; Silent Prayer; the Lord's Prayer

OUR RESPONSE TO GOD

Acknowledgement of Gifts & Offerings*

*Doxology *“Praise God from who all blessings flow; Praise Christ all creatures here below; Praise Holy Spirit, Comforter; One God, Triune, whom we adore. Amen.”*

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CLOSING SONG – “Open My Eyes”

[This hymn is in the Public Domain.]

1. *Open my eyes that I may see, glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key, that shall unclasp and set me free.
Refrain: Silently now, I wait for thee, ready my God thy will to see. Open my
(eyes*), illumine me, Spirit divine!*

2. *Open my mouth and let me bear gladly the warm truth everywhere;
Open my heart and let me prepare, love with thy children thus to share.
Refrain: (mouth*)*

A Prayer of Benediction

May the Light of God surround you, the Love of God enfold you, the Power of God protect you and the Presence of God watch over you. May you always know and treasure in your heart that wherever you are, God is already there waiting. Amen.

Music as the Service ends – Dollar Store Man

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SCRIPTURE READING

1 Corinthians 11:17-26

Morning Message

Looking for the Genuine

Rev. Ruth

Today's text from 1st Corinthians is one we in the Christian Protestant traditions are much more familiar with than we realize. This is because for most of us, especially those in the so-called “mainline” churches, it is Paul's words we hear when the sacrament of Communion is celebrated in our sanctuaries:

“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘this cup is also the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Sound familiar?? Yes, it is Paul's words we usually hear when we are gathered around the Communion tables in our churches. It is Paul's theology of Communion, his understanding of what Jesus was doing in this sacred ritual, that has become our reality on Communion Sundays in our churches.

But, was that Paul's intent when he said these words to the leaders of the ancient church in Corinth? Was he trying to establish for all the time what would become known as the "words of institution" in the Protestant celebration of Communion? No, he wasn't. What he was doing is re-explaining what the Lord's Supper, as he called it, was supposed to be in light of complaints he had been receiving about some of the people in the Corinthian church. Paul himself explains the situation he is trying to address in the first verses of the text we read this morning, We should note here that Paul's letters, like this one to the church of Corinth, were his responses to letters he had received from people in those churches who were raising concerns in his absence. We don't have those letters sent to Paul. All we have is the letters he wrote back in order to address the problems he was hearing about. This is one such occasion and the problem he is addressing is pretty easy to figure out.

In the paragraphs just preceding this morning's text, Paul had been offering advice, and some gentle reprimands, on a number of different issues. He has realized there are divisions, or factions as we might call them, in the church, and the tensions between these different groups are causing problems for the church at large. Not surprising. When we bring together large groups of people they will naturally settle into different smaller groups and sometimes those different groups reach differing conclusions about the same issues. Anyone who has ever been part of a large group of any sort is all too familiar with that scenario. It's virtually inevitable when people get together that there will be disagreements. How those disagreements are dealt with then becomes crucial in the group being able to stay together and function collectively to preserve the common good of the whole. Makes sense, right? Except that's not really what Paul is talking about here.

In this particular text, which ends with Paul establishing the Words of Institution for Communion for the centuries to follow, he is really talking about an essential truth of the Christian faith as Jesus articulated it to all who would follow him. That simple truth is that everyone matters equally to God. In the situation we read about in this text, we see that Paul is angry with some of the people in the Corinthian church. Important to know here is that he is referring to a weekly gathering of all the smaller house churches in Corinth when they would come together as the larger church primarily to celebrate the Lord's supper together. In other words, it was a big gathering of a lot smaller groups which had in common their connection with Paul's original church in Corinth. But all was not well when these groups came together. As already noted, Paul knows there are factions within the larger group, but that's okay, he says. It's okay because by observing the faith and practices of the different groups, "it will become clear," he says, "who among you is genuine." It will become clear who among you is genuine. In other words, some of you are doing all this because you want to live as Jesus taught us to live, practicing our faith in God through loving each other. But, Paul says, this is not what's happening with everyone. "When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper," he tells them.

What does he mean by this? We don't know for certain but it appears as though some of the people showing up for the weekly celebrations of the Lord's Supper are coming early and eating all the food before everyone else can arrive. Some are drinking so much of the wine that they are becoming drunk before everyone has had a chance to partake. This is not a dinner party, Paul reminds them quite forcibly. "Do you not have homes to eat and drink in?" he asks, almost sarcastically. Some biblical scholars think this situation reflects the Greco-Roman etiquette of Paul's time which would have dictated that food and drink be apportioned to the guests according to their wealth and social status. Thus, the wealthiest and most socially connected of the people would have their fill of bread and wine while others looked on unsatisfied. This might just be the case as Paul really rails on these people at this point. "Do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you?"

Paul is angry here, very angry. In what should be a celebration to recall all that Jesus taught them about loving God and caring for the least of these, they are instead having a party. This is not about nurturing your faith, Paul is telling them. This is about your self-serving reinterpretation of what Jesus said the Lord's Supper was to be about. This is the point at which Paul reminds them of Jesus' words by repeating them himself. His words in this instance are intended as a sharp rebuke to people who have forgotten what the sacrament was supposed to be, instead allowing it to devolve into nothing more than a dinner party for a select few. And Paul was NOT having it. He is calling out people on the genuineness of their faith. He is reminding them and us that what you say you believe does not matter nearly as much as how your faith informs your actions. He is challenging all of us to consider carefully the genuineness of our faith as it is revealed to others through our actions. He asks the Corinthians who always make sure they eat and drink their fill, if they believe they should be commended for this behavior but, before they can answer, he tells them no. Echoing the words of Rhode Island's Governor Raimondo as she oversees the Coronavirus response, he essentially tells these selfish folks to "knock it off" in no uncertain terms.

Our own search for the genuine, for the right path forward through this Valley of Covid-19, is a continual one. We are bombarded by information and opinions on every aspect of the situation to the point where it becomes difficult to discern what is genuine information we can act upon and what is misinformation spread by folks with motives that are anything but altruistic. So, how do we tell the difference? How do we know what information is good and reliable? How do we know who is genuine in their expressions of concern for best paths forward coming out of this lockdown? The arguments on both sides of this argument – health and safety of people vs. viability of the economy on which we all rely – are compelling and well-articulated. Both sides make good points. In one sense it is a chicken and egg situation. Which must come first – sending people back to work to keep the economy healthy or safeguarding the health of the people so they are well enough to rebuild and sustain the economy? On the surface, they might appear to be equally valid arguments. But are they, really? How would Paul answer this question? How would Jesus?

That at least is clear. Both Paul, and Jesus whom he devoted his life to serving, would have advised us to look for what is genuine in the situation. This is why divisions exist in the first place, Paul says. It is those divisions, those differences, that help us to see who is genuine, and who is not. And what determines who is genuine? The one who puts concern for the other before their own comfort is genuine. The one who worries about the health and well-being of the others in their own communities is genuine. The one who makes sure all are cared for, all are fed, even at their own expense is genuine. Paul is very clear on this in today's text. Jesus is very clear on this throughout his ministry. The genuine truth is the truth grounded in the love of God and concern for the well-being of the other. Everything else, *everything else*, is secondary to that.

So, dear ones, in the days and weeks ahead as we work together to co-create this new reality waiting to take shape as the Coronavirus slides into the rearview mirror, I urge you as Paul would to look for the genuine. Who has God's love for everyone first and foremost in their hearts? What new reality can we envision that will celebrate the many things we are learning in this experience while leaving behind that which harms the people and the earth? To what is God calling each of us and all of us as our sojourn in the Valley of Covid 19 gradually comes to an end? Now there is something worth considering. Just remember always to look for the genuine. Amen.