



WORSHIP AT HOME

*with UCC Westerly
during the Covid-19 outbreak*

August 2, 2020

Rev. Ruth's 1st Sunday Back!

□ Create a small worship space in your home anywhere. Add a candle, a bible and perhaps a small summer bouquet!

□ 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 30 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!

~ ~ ~ ~

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

Gathering Music – Prelude on “Beach Spring”

[MUSIC: David Paxton, ©2000, Lorenz Publishing Co., All rights reserved. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE#A-734569]

CALL TO WORSHIP [from *Touch Holiness*, Duck & Tirabassi, 1990, p. 97]

Come to Christ, the living bread, who satisfies those who hunger and thirst for what is right. Come to Christ, who gives living water, that you may never thirst again. Come to Christ, that being filled yourself, you may minister to the hunger and thirst of others. Come to God, in worship and praise, through Jesus Christ, who gives us life.

OPENING SONG – “Come, O Fount of Every Blessing”

[WORDS: Robert Robinson & MUSIC: John Wyeth's Repository of Sacred Music; ©1995, The Pilgrim Press. All rights reserved. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE#A-734569]

1. *Come, O Fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing your grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of endless praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount; I'm fixed upon it, mount of God's unfailing love.*
2. *Here I pause in my sojourning, giving thanks for having come,
Come to trust, at every turning, God will guide me safely home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God,
Came to rescue me from danger, blessed body, precious blood.*
3. *O to grace how great a debtor daily I am drawn anew!
Let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to you.
Prone to wonder, I can feel it, wander from the love I've know:
Here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for your very own.*

UNISON PRAYER OF REFLECTION [from *Touch Holiness*, Duck & Tirabassi, 1990, p. 97]
**Gracious and Holy God, we come to you because you have first come to us.
We know you because you have revealed yourself. Give us in this time of
worship a new sense of your Spirit breathing through us. Lift our hearts
with the wings of song, heal our souls with the balm of prayer, enliven our
minds with the words of scripture and interpretation, and newly enable us
to dedicate our strength, our substance, and our service to your work in the
world. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.**

THE CELEBRATION OF HOLY COMMUNION*

Statement of Faith (adapted from Worship Resources, *New Century Hymnal*, #886)

**You, O God, are supreme and holy. You create our world and give us life.
Your purpose overarches everything we do. You have always been with us.
You are God.**

**You, O God, are infinitely generous, good beyond all measure. You came to
us before we came to you. You have revealed and proved your love for us in
Jesus Christ., who lived and died and rose again. You are with us now.
You are God.**

**You, O God, are Holy Spirit. You empower us to be your gospel in the world.
You reconcile and heal; you overcome death.**

You are our God. We worship you.

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

Bountiful God, we give you thanks that you have refreshed us at your table by granting us the presence of Christ. Strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and send us forth into the world as your rainbow of hope in an uncertain world. Send us in courage and peace, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. 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

Our Gracious Lord

Isaiah 30:18-21

Rev. Ruth

A TIME OF PRAYER

Pastoral Prayers

Silent Prayers

The Lord’s Prayer in whatever words are most comfortable for you

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.”*

[WORDS & MUSIC ©2013 Public Domain. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE#A-734569]

CLOSING SONG – “Let There Be Peace on Earth”

[WORDS & MUSIC: Sy Miller & Jill Jackson, © 1955, 1983, Jan-Lee Music (ASCAP). All rights reserved. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE#A-734569]

*Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me;
Let there be peace on earth, the pace that was meant to be.
With God our Creator, children all are we.
Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.
Let peace begin with me; let this be the moment now.
With every step I take let this be my solemn vow:
To take each moment and live each moment in peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A PRAYER OF BENEDICTION –

May God bless you and keep you. May God’s face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May God’s entire being be lifted up upon you and give you peace. Amen.

PASSING OF THE PEACE

Music as the Service ends – “Trumpet Tune”

~~~~

## ***Our Gracious Lord***

A Message for Sunday Morning Worship with Communion  
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT  
*Facebook Live* service on August 2, 2020  
Text: Isaiah 30:18-21

I am so very grateful this morning to be back with you and back in the pulpit of our church, figuratively speaking, at least for now. I also need to share with you that only in hindsight can I affirm how very much I needed that break from what has been a most difficult and challenging year for us all in so very many ways. The importance of taking time apart for the daily routines of life for rest and renewal is now crystal clear to me, especially when those routines have been completely upended and then restructured as we have had to due to Coronavirus situation. The insights I gained during that time away were and remain life affirming for me as your pastor and as a person. So, you might say, this morning's message and the ones in the weeks to come will be a sort of "what I learned on my summer vacation" series of sermons. Forming the foundation of these messages will be certain key scripture passages that have been part of my prayer practice for years. They have become for me what I think of as my "lifeline" scripture texts – the ones that have carried me through all the seasons and moments of my life – the good and bad, the scary and joyful, the sad and overwhelming. Dear ones, I share with you now and in the weeks to come the sustaining faith I profess and teach. And so it begins...

Today's text comes from the book of Isaiah, a complex and crucial text from the Hebrew Scriptures which we call the Old Testament. I've preached on Isaiah before and have explained its biblical pedigree which you might remember, or maybe not. In a nutshell, Isaiah, though it appears in our Bible as one book, is actually a compilation of three books written over the course of several hundred years. The original Isaiah wrote chapters 1-39; an anonymous prophet writing in the style of Isaiah wrote chapters 40-55 and the third and final set of chapters, 56-66, were most likely written by several other authors trained in the prophetic "school" or tradition of Isaiah. Scholars know this is the case because of the vast time period covered by the entire book of Isaiah and because the writing styles, though similar, have obvious differences and the intent of the various sections is markedly different.

Our text for this morning comes from Isaiah 30 meaning it was written by the original prophet Isaiah. It is a decidedly political text which is not surprising since the role of the prophet in ancient Judah and Israel was to hold the rulers accountable to the will of God. Prophets were seen and respected as a primary link between the people – especially the rulers – and God. Important to understand as we consider this morning's text is that Isaiah wrote it to let the king of Judah at that time, just before a decimating attack by the Assyrians, know that he, Isaiah, was completely against King Hezekiah's plans to try to secure the assistance of the Egyptians in fighting against the Assyrians. Isaiah told the king this was exactly the wrong thing to do because it was putting the future of God's people – the Hebrews – in their own hands

instead of trusting in God to protect and provide for them. Isaiah was arguing that the king, and the people, needed to put their faith totally in God and God's plans for them. Putting their faith in themselves and in Egyptian might was exactly the wrong thing to do.

“For the Lord is a God of justice,” Isaiah says. “Blessed are they who wait for him.” Isaiah hits it on the head right there. In order to receive God's blessing, God's justice, God's assistance, we must wait for God. We must WAIT for God. But, in those moments when we are most afraid, most worried, most overwhelmed by a situation – like wondering when this Coronavirus pandemic and all its resulting chaos – will be resolved – these moments are precisely when we do not want to wait one second longer. We want answers NOW. We want this all to be over and done with. We are tired of endless bad news on the radio, the television and newspapers. We are tired of the endless arguing between factions that can't seem to agree about anything. We are angry that our lives have been totally upended with no end in sight. We are mired in the grief of so many losses ongoing. These losses are about the victims of Covid, of course, but also about so much more. We have lost our way of life, or so it feels. All those things we took for granted – something as simple as going to the dentist or getting a haircut, or having lunch with a friend in a favorite restaurant – were ripped away from us with no warning. And now, even as they are creeping back into the realm of the possible, they seem forever changed. Masks, social distancing and fear are our constant companions gobbling up all the space in our lives that used to be filled with mundane things we could do without a thought or care in the world. And we miss all those mundane things desperately! Dear ones, this is a huge change from the lives we were living this time last year. This a huge loss for each and everyone of us. That is a lot of grief – usually unacknowledged grief – to lug around with us each day. No wonder we feel so tired all the time. No wonder we can never seem to feel quite rested enough, quite confident enough that all will be well. No wonder.

Back to our buddy Isaiah. Now that he has identified the problem – we want answers now but they are not forthcoming – he explains to us why waiting for God is a good thing. We have to wait for God to act, Isaiah explains, because we must be ready to receive the graciousness God offers us or it will have no effect. *We must be ready to receive God's graciousness or it will have no effect.* Yes, things are bad, but through these overwhelming circumstances we can't control but only live through, we are learning what it is to endure. We are learning that we need God and God's graciousness to us. “Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself from you anymore,” Isaiah says. God is right there with you all the time, Isaiah explains. Even when you have no sense that God is with you in these horrible moments of adversity and affliction, God is still there. God is still there with you because you are precious in God's sight. “I have called you by name, you are mine” Isaiah reminds us in chapter 43, verse 1.

So... the issue of our needing to wait for God to act is not a God problem – it's an “us” problem. We must be ready to receive God's graciousness. Our body, mind and spirit must be ready to receive God's graciousness, recognizing it for what it is. We must be ready to be impacted, to be transformed, by this graciousness God is going to bestow on us because until we are ready to receive it, we will not be able to recognize it when it comes to us. We will not be able to be transformed by it if we cannot recognize it for what it is. Maybe, then, what Isaiah wants us to understand is that we're not really waiting on God to act in these moments when we are so desperate for things to change. What we're really waiting on is ourselves. Perhaps God is always acting, always there to help us make meaning of whatever affliction or adversity comes

our way. But we have to be ready to see for ourselves that God is acting in the present, right here and now, in our lives. We have to be ready to look for God and God's guidance through whatever comes our way – the big moments of loss and challenge and fear, as well as the small moments of annoyance and irritation. We have to be ready to receive this gift of graciousness and that needing to be ready is all on us.

Do note that I said God is always there ready to be with us through whatever comes our way – to help us *make meaning* of those painful moments in our lives. Notice I said “make meaning” and not “make sense.” This is because no one can make sense of situations and events that are senseless. Not even God because God is not about making sense. God has never been about making sense. God is about making meaning and providing the cocoon for us in which that transformation brought about by making meaning of the senseless can happen. Faith is not a rational act. Trust in God is not a rational act. A relationship with God is about living a life of meaning beyond the sensible and the rational. Living as one who has been touched and transformed by God means that we have recognized God's gift of graciousness for what it is and accepted it into our very beings. This, dear ones, is the work of a lifetime.

How do we know when this has happened, when we're on the right track? Isaiah explains it like this: “when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, ‘this is the way, walk in it.’” Dear ones, this word Isaiah describes can only come to us if we are listening for it, if we are waiting for it, if we are confident we will hear it when it comes into our awareness. This word is the word of God which comes to us through scripture, in moments of prayer and quiet reflection, in worship together. This word of God can reach us through the response of a trusted friend or a spouse or parent or even a child or grandchild. Trusting that God is with us in every moment, that God will offer the guidance and direction we seek is the key to it all. We must work hard to build up those “trust” muscles so that when we most need to know God is with us, we will be cognizant we are already there in His presence.

Dear ones, this takes work and effort. It does not just happen. So how do we cultivate these trust muscles? How do we prepare ourselves to receive this gift of God's graciousness, of God's willingness to help us make meaning from the senseless? Back once more to Isaiah and his reminders that we must wait for God but with a new understanding of what it means to wait. We are not to wait passively, like we are standing on the street corner waiting for a bus. No, dear ones. We are to wait actively, doing things to prepare ourselves to receive the gift of God's graciousness. We must work at cultivating a prayer practice by putting some effort into it. Pick a time and place where each day to invest time and energy with God in prayer, even just sitting in God's presence. Sitting in the silence in a spot sacred to you invites God into your soul. Dear ones, just sit and wait, not for God to show up because God is already there. Wait for the moment when you recognize, when you know, in your very soul that God is already there and has always been. Waiting for God is an investment anyone can make at any time. Will you? Amen.