



WORSHIP AT HOME

*with UCC Westerly
during the Covid-19 outbreak*

August 9, 2020

**Broadcast once again from our beautiful
sanctuary!!!**

□ This abbreviated At Home Worship Resource is for your use at home this coming Sunday.

- Create a small worship space in your home anywhere. Add a candle, a bible and perhaps a small summer bouquet!
- 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 would like me to include your prayer requests in the service, kindly send them to me by email or text prior to 9:30am.*

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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

[adapted from *The Love of Eternal Wisdom*, Rabbi Rami Shapiro, ©2011; p. 11]

When you know Spirit as all things, no thing is too small to awaken you to Her; the bee, the ant, an ear of corn, a flower, and a worm are each seen wrapped in ecstasy. And what is true of the smallest is true of you all the more. For you know not only the substance but the Source; not only the part but the Whole. You are the way Spirit is known.

OPENING SONG – Hymn of Promise

[WORDS & MUSIC: Natalie Sleeth, ©1986, Hope Publishing Co., All rights reserved. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE#A-734569]

1. *In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed, an apple tree;
In cocoons, a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.*

2. *There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;
There's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me.
From our past will come the future; what it holds a mystery,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.*

3. *In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;
In our doubt, there is believing; in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection; at the last a victory,
Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.*

UNISON PRAYER OF REFLECTION [adapted from "Ojibway Prayer," *Earth Prayers from Around the World*, Roberts & Amidon, Eds., © 1991, p. 95]

Holy One, look at our brokenness. We know that in all creation only the human family has strayed from the Sacred Way. We know that we are the ones who are divided and we are the ones who must come back together to walk in the Sacred Way. Holy One, Sacred One, teach us love, compassion and honor that we may heal the earth and heal each other. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING
Morning Message

Whose Plans Anyway?

Proverbs 16:1-9
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."*

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CLOSING SONG – *Sweet, Sweet Spirit*

[WORDS & MUSIC: Doris Akers, ©1962 Manna Music, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted under ONE LICENSE#A-734569]

*There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,
And I know that it's the Spirit of the Lord;
There are sweet expressions on each face,
And I know they feel the presence of the Lord.
Sweet Holy Spirit, sweet heavenly Dove,
Stay right here with us, filling us with your love;
And for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise;
Without a doubt we'll know that we have been revived
When we shall leave this place.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A PRAYER OF BENEDICTION – [source unknown]

May you always know and hold in your heart that the light of God surrounds you; the love of God enfolds you; the power of God protects you; the presence of God watches over you. May you trust always that wherever you are God is there with you and has always been. Amen.

PASSING OF THE PEACE

Music as the Service ends – *“Trumpet Tune”*

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***Whose Plans Anyway?***

A Message for Sunday Morning Worship  
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC, Pawcatuck, CT  
*Facebook Live* service on August 9, 2020  
Text: Proverbs 16:1-9

In my just after college career in the world of business – real estate development to be precise – I was introduced to all sorts of training courses as a part of the administrative team. For example, I was sent to a one-day computer training class where I learned the most valuable piece of information that still informs how I work with technology to this day. What was that little nugget? “Computers are as dumb as a box of rocks. They are only as good as the information put into them.” Simple, straight forward and absolutely true. And something which has prevented me from tossing a computer or two out the window over the years. Instead, when my frustration level reaches overload, I remember that computers are as dumb as a box of rocks and I walk away until I calm down enough to deal with the situation from a place of thoughtfulness instead of deep frustration. At least most of the time.

One of the other valuable things I learned came from a sales course I was sent to along with most of the real estate agents in the office I administrated. I think it was a Dale Carnegie course of some sort, but that’s not important. What matters is another little nugget I picked up that has informed my approach to life and work ever since. This is one some of you may also be familiar with since its originator was not Dale Carnegie (I was really surprised to learn this!) but Norman Vincent Peale – the originator of the concept of the power of positive thinking. While I am not a big fan of everything about Dr. Peale, I do like this concept. “Plan your work and work your plan.” Well, technically, Dr. Peale didn’t originate this idea either. It’s been taught, preached, coached – you name it – by all kinds of people in addition to Dr. Peale. Margaret Thatcher was one. Her version is, “plan your work for today and every day and then work your plan.” General George S. Patton also had a take on it: “A good plan today is

better than a perfect plan tomorrow.” The number of famous folks from saints to business tycoons with a spin on this one concept is mind boggling. Just google “plan your work and work your plan” and you will be astounded at what comes up – and who.

Plan your work and work your plan. I think the reason this resonated with me so much is because I come from a family of planners. My dad was a mechanical engineer who, among other things, was an expert at streamlining production processes. Suffice to say dad brought this skill home with him and there was a plan – a right way and a right time – to handle just about any facet of life at home. You could set your watch by my dad. He had breakfast at the same time every day, and he ate the same thing. He even took his shower at the exact same time for exactly the same amount of time. He designed his wood shop so that it allowed him maximum efficiency when working on his many projects and heaven help you if you displaced so much as a nail. Luckily, my mom was also a planner. She planned every detail of her life – she had a weekly cleaning schedule, a monthly cleaning schedule and an annual cleaning schedule. She adhered to these schedules so rigidly that I struggled when I was finally living on my own with the idea of doing laundry on any day but Monday. I’m not kidding.

And my brothers didn’t escape, although their inheritance of the family planning ethic manifested very differently. My oldest brother also became a metallurgical engineer, rising rapidly up the corporate ladder because of – you guessed it – his ability to plan and execute the operation of specialty steel mills at peak efficiency. Stockholders loved him. Steel workers, not so much. And my other brother Bill, well he ended up as a golf pro. Some of you have heard me mention this as Bill and I are quite close. Bill didn’t play the tour but instead spent his career managing the play of golf at high end courses in Western Pennsylvania. Guess what he was best known for? Yep, planning the flow of play, especially with the big Pro-Am Tour events that came to his course. The effortless way in which he made these events unfold made him very popular, especially with celebrities who could count on Bill to let them play while keeping adoring crowds at a safe distance. At the risk of name dropping, Michael Jordan got so he wouldn’t play the Nevillewood tournaments unless Bill was his partner. All because of Bill’s ability to plan his work and work his plan on the golf course. Bill says Michael is an excellent golfer, in case you were wondering...

As for me, I manifested my genetic planning skills in a completely different way than everyone else in the family. In the business world, and still today in the church, I am the queen of the “to do” list – an understated form of planning your work and working your plan. I have toned this down substantially from the days when I became the company “time management” trainer having received additional training for this in addition to my inborn planning and organizational tendencies. At one point in my business career, I had a daily schedule that mapped out every hour or every day. Seriously. So, those of you who see me as a skilled administrator and planner now, I am positively chill compared to who I was in my 20’s. And how did that happen? Simple answer. God. God happened to me and everything changed. Why? Because God has a completely different vision of planning than anything we humans can come up with.

Once I figured that out, God’s truth set me free from the tyranny of human plans—literally.

I am still a planner, don’t get me wrong. Everyone of us needs to have some planning skills in order to get anything done. We only have so much time in a day and there are always things that need doing. Often, we find ourselves with more things that need doing than we have time to do. That’s when our anxiety begins to creep up. We worry. We fret. We wonder what we can afford to let slide. Then, we second guess the decisions we make on what to prioritize. “Oh geesh, why did I decide to do *that*? I should have done *this* instead?” Sound familiar? Of course it does. And this year, in the middle of Coronavirus craziness with all routines and schedules literally out the window, those anxieties are at an epic level. That’s because planning is a control mechanism. Planning how we invest our time – deciding what we will do and not do – is a means of imposing some order in our lives. It is a way of controlling, at least to some extent, what does and does not happen. It is a means of assuming some authority over our lives and the passage of time, thereby keeping chaos at bay. Planning your work and working your plan is, therefore, not only sensible and efficient. It’s comforting. It soothes us by letting us feel that our lives are not a chaotic mess bumbling along on the random trails of life. At least it did until Covid-19 threw all semblance of planning and control out the window. And here we are – five months later still trying to figure out not only how to pick up the pieces but what pieces are even possible to pick up.

This is precisely the human predicament the author of today’s text from Proverbs was addressing in this collection of sayings or proverbs – individual bits of wisdom – devoted to the human tendency, the human need, to plan. We see this in verse 1: “The plans of the mind belong to mortals, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord. “ You can make all sorts of plans, the Proverbist says, but what happens is God’s answer to your plans. This is because, “all one’s ways may be pure in one’s own eyes, but the Lord weighs the spirit.” In other words, you think you have the best of intentions in all your plans, but God considers the entire picture, most of which is invisible to you. God still likes us to plan: “Commit your work to the Lord and your plans will be established.” But, remember that God’s will, God’s plans, will always take precedence over our own. “The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble.” Imagine that! God even accounts for the fact that some people are just not nice. Some are downright evil but even those evil intentions can still serve God’s plans. Now that’s something to hold on to these days, isn’t it? This text continues on for several more verses, each one another clarification of what God’s role is in all our planning. I urge you to pull out this text later today or this week, and just spend some time with it. Focus on one verse at a time and consider how it reflects what’s happening in your life. Invite God into your planning, into your reflections on your life in this moment with all its challenges and worries, all its joys and celebrations. Pause to listen for that still small voice that comes to us only when we make the space for it in our minds and, most importantly, in our hearts.

Dear ones, please know that this takes practice – a lot of practice. It is in fact a spiritual discipline – a method, or plan if you prefer, for deepening your relationship with God and figuring out how to make more room in your life for God. And it is the work of a lifetime! This is not a one and done situation! It takes commitment and practice because it involves letting go of that all too human tendency to want to control and plan everything and, let's be honest, a lot of us are white knuckle planners. What I mean here is that most of us hold on to our self-conceived plans so tightly that our knuckles become white with the effort, metaphorically speaking. Not only is that exhausting to do, but it actually keeps God at a distance from us and, dear ones, this is never what we want to do. This is never as helpful as it might seem to be in the moment. Instead of keeping God at a distance, we want, we need, God to be the foundation of life each day. This takes effort at the same time it requires relinquishment. If we want God and our faith in God to form the foundation of our lives, we must be willing to put in the effort to know God more deeply at the same time we let go of our plans for the moment, for the day, for a lifetime perhaps. But, if we are willing to “let go and let God” – another pithy phrase I'm fond of – we will have discovered for ourselves an essential truth that becomes a workable roadmap to the future: “The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps.” Let it be so, God. Let it be so. Amen.