

GAYLORD UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
Reign of Christ Sunday
November 22, 2020



Meditation

Verna J. Dozier, "The Dream of God: A Call to Return," 20th century
"The important question to ask is not, 'What do you believe?' but 'What difference does it make that you believe?' Does the world come nearer to the dream of God because of what you believe?"

AS WE GO BACK TO WORSHIPING ONLINE AT YOU CAN VIEW OUR SERVICE AT: WWW.LISTEN2GOD.ORG
THE WORSHIP VIDEO WILL BE POSTED ASAP EACH WEEK UNTIL WE COME TOGETHER AGAIN!

WELCOME AND NEWS OF THE CHURCH

NO MATTER WHO I AM, NO MATTER WHERE I AM ON LIFE'S JOURNEY, I AM WELCOME HERE.

NO MATTER WHO YOU ARE, NO MATTER WHERE YOU ARE ON LIFE'S JOURNEY, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE!

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

ONE: WHO ARE YOU?

ALL: I AM A BELOVED CHILD OF GOD!

ONE: WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

ALL: I AM A PERSON OF WORTH TO BE VALUED!

ONE: THEN WHAT WILL YOU DO?

**ALL: I WILL LIVE A LIFE OF LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE OF MYSELF
AND ALL GOD'S PEOPLE**

THE CALL

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to God all the earth. Worship God with gladness; come into God's presence with singing. Know that the Sovereign is God. It is God that made us, and we are God's; we are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture. Enter God's gates with thanksgiving, and enter God's courts with praise. Give thanks to God, and bless God's name. For God is good; God's steadfast love endures forever, and God's faithfulness to all generations.

PRELUDE

SANDY WENTZLOFF

CALL TO WORSHIP

ONE Know that the Holy One is God.

People: We are God's people.

One: Worship the Holy One with gladness;

People: Come into God's presence with singing.

One: Enter God's gates with thanksgiving, and God's courts with praise.

People: Make a joyful noise!

One: For God is good; God's steadfast love endures forever, and God's faithfulness to all generations.

People: Let us worship with thanks and joy!

Let us praise God in song and word and prayer!

GATHERING HYMN

"STANDING AT THE FUTURE'S THRESHOLD"

TUNE OF NCH #4

**STANDING AT THE FUTURE'S THRESHOLD, GRATEFUL FOR GOD'S GUIDING HAND,
ASKING NO PROTECTED STRONGHOLD, CALLED TO BE A PILGRIM BAND,
SEEKING EVER FOR NEW VISION OF THE GOSPEL FOR OUR DAY,
WE MOVE FORWARD IN GOD'S MISSION WITH OUR FAITH TO SHOW THE WAY.**

**BUILDING JUSTICE AS THE BULWARK OF THE PEACE THAT GOD WOULD GIVE,
MAKING SACRIFICE THE HALLMARK OF THE LIFE WE'RE CALLED TO LIVE:
GRANT US, GOD, TO BEAR OUR WITNESS TO THIS PEACE IN CHRIST, AND MOVE
FORWARD WITH OUR FAITH'S OWN ACCESS TO THE LIFE OF HOPE AND LOVE.**

INVOCATION

Gracious God, we long to know you better. Open us to recognize your presence, to receive you fully, and to be ready to follow your leading. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God, too often we overlook the needs of people around us while we proclaim our devotion to you. We could do so much more to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, to welcome the stranger, and heal the sick.

We fail to see how our prison system diminishes the humanity of all of us, how our medical system denies healing to the poor, how poverty leaves children without coats, how legal obstacles keep the strangers at a distance.

Open our eyes to see your presence in every person, and to respond to their needs so that we may be rightly called by your name. **Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Though we wander, God searches us out. Speaking through Ezekiel, God said, "As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick gloom."

God reaches out to us, longing to bring us ever closer.

Hear this good news: you are forgiven and free.

GLORIA

PIANO

LECTIONARY TEXT

Matt 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' Then he will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

MESSAGE

"God Surprises Us"

People of God, grace to you and God's peace. Amen.

I heard this story of a woman who wanted to surprise her husband on his birthday. So, she invited several of their friends over for a surprise party. Her husband thought that they were going out for dinner. He's upstairs getting ready-taking a shower. While he was in the shower, wife was welcoming

the guests and getting them down in the basement. After everyone had arrived, she called her husband and said there was a strange noise coming from the furnace. Would he come down and check it out. The husband was sure he knew what the problem was, so he quickly ran downstairs to let her know what was going on. And so, he without as much as a towel, opened the basement door, turned on the light and everyone yelled, "Surprise!" It was a surprise alright!

How about you? Do you like surprises?

I ask this question because our Gospel for today turns on the matter of surprises. Notice that both those people identified as sheep and those people named goats are surprised. They are surprised by what Jesus says. "Lord, when did we see you hungry, and thirsty, and alone and cared for you?" the sheep ask. And the goats ask "and "when didn't we see you as a stranger, and naked and hungry and thirsty and not care for you?" both capture the shock each group expresses when Jesus COMMENDS or CONDEMNS their behavior.

Perhaps this passage is telling us that God regularly shows up in places and persons and experiences we least expect God to be. Dear friend, God regularly, even relentlessly, shows up just where we least expect God to be. Not in Jerusalem or Rome, but in the backwater town of Bethlehem. Not in armor but in the vulnerable flesh of a babe in a manger. Not in conquest but in crucifixion. Not in power but in weakness. Again and again, God in Jesus Christ shows up where we least expect God to be to surprise us, to disarm us and overturn our expectations and judgments, all in order to invite you and me to give up our attempts to save ourselves and go it alone, instead of trusting God's saving, unconditional and surprising love.

One day a little girl came into the kitchen and asked her mother, "Where is God?" Her mother answered, "Honey, God is everywhere." "Well then," asked the little girl "is God in the bread?" "Yes," her mother responded. "Is God in the refrigerator?" "Of course," said her mother. "Is God in this sugar bowl?" "Yes of course," the mother responded. Upon hearing that God was in the sugar bowl the little took the lid and placed it tightly on top of the sugar bowl and proclaimed, "OK, now I've got God."

The little girl wanted to contain God. But in our gospel, Jesus says outright to his first followers and to you and to me today, "You don't have me. You find me out there...out there in the needs of others. You meet me, Jesus says to us, when you find compassion for the hurting. You see me, Jesus says, when you care for the lonely, the hungry, the homeless. You encounter Jesus says, when you welcome the stranger and the misunderstood. You understand me and love when you have empathy for the most undeserving and the least of these.

When was it that we saw you? Jesus gets awfully specific telling us where we can find him. Each of the habitations he lists here is marked by lack: lack of food, lack of water, lack of hospitality, lack of clothing, lack of health, lack of freedom. But please note that Christ comes not in the form of those who visit the stranger but in the stranger being cared for; Christ's presence is not embodied in those who feed the hungry, but Christ's presence is in the hungry being fed; Christ does not come to us as the poor and the hungry and the servants. We all are equally as sinful and as saintly as the other. Let me repeat that. We all are equally as sinful and saintly as the other. The Good News is that Christ comes to us in the NEEDS of the hungry and the poor, needs that are met by another SO THAT the loving grace of God might be known.

No one gets to play Jesus! But we do get to experience Jesus in that holy place where we meet others' needs AND have our own needs meet. We tend to see two groups of people in this parable—those in need and those who serve. But the parable is not about who plays which role, it is about needs being met and serving being done. You see, we are ALL the needy and the ones who meet needs. To place ourselves or anyone else in only one category is to lie to ourselves.

When was it that we saw you? Both groups of people ask. Who is left out of the kingdom of God? Or perhaps more to the point just now, who might you and I be leaving out of the reign of God's love? There is judgment in this parable, without question. But it is ultimately God's judgment, a judgment we do not control, a judgment rendered by God in and through Christ Jesus who in the very next verses will be handed over in vulnerability and weakness to be crucified in order that we might know the absolute and relentless mercy and love that God has for all people.

Shane Claiborne is an extraordinary man who founded the Simple Way in Philadelphia and has tried to take seriously what Jesus said in our Gospel reading. He tried seriously to feed the hungry and to take mercy and generosity to the streets. In his book, "The Irresistible Revolution," he tells of some of his experiences. He tells of a crowd that had packed tightly around a late-night food van and a woman who was struggling- trying to move to the front where she could get some food. When it became possible, he asked whether it was really worth the fight to get some food. She responded: "Oh, yes, I am hungry AND I get it for another homeless lady- an elderly woman around the corner who can't fight for a meal."

This Sunday is Christ the King Sunday. It is the last Sunday of the church year. As we prepare to cross the threshold into Advent, we wonder what Christ who came in such a raged, radical guise, has in store for us in the season to come. How will Christ show up to us? Where will Christ invite you and me to see him? Will we see ourselves as being those who are both the needy and ones who meet needs? When we are the only ones being the blessing to others, do we keep Christ from being revealed in our own needs that could be met by another?

All we have is a promise, a promise that our needs and the needs of others are holy to God. A promise that Jesus is present in the meeting of needs and that his kingdom is there. As we wrap up this church year and look towards the next, I invite you to wrestle with these questions- knowing that God is present in the messiness of no easy answers. The fruit may just be finding Jesus in surprising and unexpected places and people and being changed in unexpected ways as a result. Amen.

MORNING HYMN

"WON'T YOU LET ME BE YOUR SERVANT?"

NCH #539

WON'T YOU LET ME BE YOUR SERVANT, LET ME BE AS CHRIST TO YOU?
PRAY THAT I MAY HAVE THE GRACE TO LET YOU BE MY SERVANT, TOO.

WE ARE PILGRIMS ON A JOURNEY, WE ARE TRAVELERS ON THE ROAD;
WE ARE HERE TO HELP EACH OTHER GO THE MILE AND BEAR THE LOAD.

WHEN WE SING TO GOD IN HEAVEN WE SHALL FIND SUCH HARMONY,
BORN OF ALL WE'VE KNOWN TOGETHER OF CHRIST'S LOVE AND AGONY.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

CALL FOR THE OFFERING

Generosity may come as an impulse, but it is cultivated by the practice of regular giving.

Let us today move from beliefs to actions that make a difference in the world.

We give in gratitude for God's gifts to us, and we give because we need to live beyond ourselves. Use this time of offering as an opportunity to grow and to grow the realm of God.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**People: God of abundance, we give these offerings of material goods
as our commitment to give back to you and to care for your people.
Let our giving remind us to see Jesus all around us.
Use our offerings of money and of our lives for ministry to your purposes.
Amen.**

SENDING HYMN*“LORD, DISMISS US WITH YOUR BLESSING”*

NCH #77

LORD, DISMISS US WITH YOUR BLESSING; FILL OUR HEARTS WITH JOY AND PEACE;
 LET US EACH YOUR LOVE POSSESSING TRIUMPH IN REDEEMING GRACE:
 OH, REFRESH US, OH, REFRESH US, TRAVELING THROUGH THIS WILDERNESS.

WE GIVE THANKS AND ADORATION FOR YOUR GOSPEL'S JOYFUL SOUND;
 MAY THE FRUITS OF YOUR SALVATION IN OUR HEARTS AND LIVES ABOUND.
 EVER FAITHFUL, EVER FAITHFUL TO THE TRUTH MAY WE BE FOUND.

BENEDICTION

May God give you wisdom and revelation.
 May the eyes of your heart be enlightened.
 May you know the hope to which God has called you, and may the blessings
 of the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sustainer go with you this day and always.
Amen.

Postlude

Sandy Wentzloff

Remember in Prayer: Jim Peterson, David Bias (Diane Mosel's brother), Greg Armstrong (Howard's brother), Dick Carlson, Ann Pinsky (Ted's sister-in-law), Ewald Keller, Bill Cowell, Eunice Gasow, and Aggie Schue. We pray for health and healing for all people everywhere. Pray for the ministries of our church. Pray for those serving in the military and for our local and national leaders.

If you have a prayer request or would like to receive a call from Pastor Dennis call his office at 237-2595 (leave a private voice mail) or his cell 763-258-3371

Pastor Dennis is usually in the office each Tuesday and Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. He can be reached at the office, 237-2595 (private voice mail) or his cell: 763-258-3371. E-mail: dmckee545@gmail.com • Website at listen2god.org

Please Remember how important your financial support of the ministry of Gaylord United Church of Christ is especially in this time.

We pray for wisdom of leaders, the support of us all in doing what we can to suppress the spread of corona virus, and the safety of all our friends, families, and people of the world. *God is Good, all the time.*

Tithes, Offerings and Pledges can be sent to Gaylord United Church of Christ P.O. Box 385 Gaylord, MN 55334. *You can also donate on our website or drop off at the church office on Wednesday between 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.*

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- ❖ Our **From the Heart Offering** in **November** goes to ***Santa's Helpers***.
 - ❖ **Women's Fellowship is selling dish cloths**. Cost is \$1.00 each.
 - ❖ **Mission Board is sponsoring "Coats for Kids"** Bring your donations of gently used or new winter wear to church until the end of the year.
 - ❖ **Mission Board** is also collecting donations of new toys, games, hats and mittens, quilts, wrapping paper and monetary donations for ***Santa's Helpers***. These items can be brought to church by the back door and placed by the Mitten Tree thru December 6th.
******Drop off your donations at church on Wednesdays between 10 a.m. – 4 p.m.***