



Connect Share Explore

Traditional Worship • August 19

- Prayer Concerns: Theresa Webb & Family in the passing of Joe Webb; Marjory Bogan & Family in the passing of Bob Bogan.
- Today's Sanctuary flowers given by Kathryn & Jim Zelle to the glory of God in honor of their wedding anniversary.
- Today's choral selections are provided by the Temple Choir under the direction of Don Travis. Organist: Barbara Waite. Additional Music provided by the Temple Brass.
- Ushers (19): Eric Eades, captain; Bonnie Durgy, Chuck Taylor, Ronnie Pursley, Thornton Patberg (balcony), Margo Borre (balcony)
- Ushers (26): Eric Eades, captain; Chuck Taylor, Ronnie Pursley, John Oberhelman, Thornton Patberg (balcony), Margo Borre (balcony)
- Greeters (19): Warren & Rosemary Heinsohn, Mary Lockett
- Greeters (26): Pat & Ken Haynie, Tom Harvey, Janet Kissel

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC
WELCOME
PRELUDE "All Things Bright and Beautiful" by K. Kolander

CALL TO WORSHIP
Leader: Come, let us gather in the presence of God.
People: In God's presence, we find the community we long for.
Leader: Come, as a community - a family of God's people.
People: Our voices will shout praise to God, gratitude for bringing us together.

CHORAL INTROIT "I Was Glad" by C. O. Beck
***CHIMES & SERVICES OF LIGHT**

***FIRST HYMN #178** "Hope of the World"
***PASSING OF THE PEACE**
Leader: May the peace of Christ be with you.
People: And also with you.
Leader: Please turn to those around you and pass the peace of Christ.

SPECIAL MUSIC Temple Brass
CALL TO PRAYER
Leader: The Lord be with you.
People: And also with you.
Leader: Let us listen for God in the silence.

PASTORAL PRAYER
All: Holy One-in-Three, Three-in-One, You are a God of relationship. Weave us together like a cord, with You as the center strand. Let nothing and no one tear our community asunder, not even us. O God, hear us now as we pray, each in our own hearts and our own ways...

GIVING OFFERING "Jesus, Lover of My Soul" by Parry/DiCosola
***DOXOLOGY the congregation stands as the Ushers return the offering to the Altar.** Parry in Hymnal
ANTHEM "By Our Love" by Christy Nockels/arr. by Mary McDonald

KIDZ MOMENT
SCRIPTURE READING Hebrews 10:19-25
A Call to Persevere

¹⁹ Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus,²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh)²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,²² let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.²³ Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.²⁴ And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

SCRIPTURE RESPONSE TFWS #2203 "In His Time"
MESSAGE by Pastor Andy Payton Connect: Persevere

Well good morning everyone. I trust you have all had a great week, but more importantly, I trust at some point in some way you've seen the face of Christ within your life this past week. As Julian was talking through our prayer requests earlier she mentioned some of the things that have been happening in the life of our church. Namely, we've had a lot of people pass away in the last couple of months. In fact, I think I've done- at the end of next week I've done- seven funerals since July 1 in the life of our church which in some ways is sad. It's sad that some of our brothers and sisters in Christ have gone on to be with the Lord, but in another sense it is a time for joy because our brothers and sisters in Christ have gone on to be with the Lord. One thing that is certain for us, as I've thought about the many funerals and the grieving and all the things that are happening with the life of our church, is that one thing that is evident is change. We can't stop it. It's going to happen. Change is inevitable, and of course we can sense that within the life of church and Christianity, change is happening as well. I mean if you don't notice the changes that are happening within religious life in America today, I don't think you're paying attention because change is happening.

I read an article this past week of a professor- his name is Harvey Cox- who talked about the changes that are happening within religious life. Harvey Cox wrote a book entitled "The Future of Faith". And in that book he talks about the different eras within Christianity. The first era he described as the season of faith- that was the first 300 years of Christianity. He said during the season of faith, Christianity had yet to develop a creed or a canon and they didn't even really have a Bible yet. And so really in that first 300 years what Christianity did was basically follow the ethos of Jesus, even to the point of suffering. That was the age of faith.

Well the age of faith gave way to the age of belief, and the age of belief started around really the fourth century, and it ran up until just about 50 years ago. During the age of belief, Professor Cox says that Christianity developed our doctrines and developed our sacred canon and developed our Bible. And as a result, it became an institution that enjoyed much political and cultural influence. And certainly we can see the remnants of the age of belief. But what was interesting to me is Professor Cox said that the age of belief gave way to what he calls the age of the spirit, and that started that started really about 50 years ago or so. Fifty years ago or so people started moving away from institutional religion but not moving away from an interest in God. The mantra of the age of the spirit, Professor Cox says is this: I am spiritual but not religious. That's the era that we find ourselves in right now.

So the question is What does it mean to be a church? What does it mean to be a church in this season of radical change? What does it mean to be a church in this era that Professor Cox calls the age of the spirit? And we believe that we at Methodist Temple are called to be a church in the sense that we want to strive- here it is- we want to strive to be a safe and non-judgemental place for people to connect to one another and develop relationships, to share their gifts both within the congregation but also in the community, and to explore the Christian faith. In the midst of this age of the spirit, we want to be a safe and non-judgemental place for people to connect, to share, and to explore.

So how does that become a reality? How does that become a reality within our church? And last week we began our series, and what I suggest to you is that the first and most important step to making connect, share, and explore a reality within our church is to come to the realization that despite all of our differences, that deep down we're looking for the same thing. That same thing that we're all looking for is a relationship with the God of love. There's all kinds of differences within our world. There's differences within our church. There's worship preferences that are different. There are political preferences that are different. There are theological belief systems that are different. But underneath all these differences is a deep down hunger for a relationship with God. If we start there, I think we have a solid foundation to connect, to share, and to explore.

So that's where we started last week, and this week I'm going to talk to you a little bit about what I believe is one of the most critically important practices that needs to be a part of our lives as Christians if we're going to grow that relationship with God. And for me, one of the most critically important practices that we have to make a part of our life if we're going to grow in our relationship with Christ and God is we need to be part of a community of faith. We've got to be a part of a community- that's just how it works. Before I jump in any deeper, let me just begin with the moment of prayer.

Let's pray. Holy God we do ask that you would help us this day to be present to you even as you are here present with us. I do ask that you would take the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts and that you would work this day and always to make them to be acceptable in your sight. We pray this through Christ. Amen.

All right. So today I want to do a little something different. It's going to be kind of like a Bible Study. We're going to have a Bible Study Sermon. Now, I hope I don't bore you to death, but we're going to have a Bible Study Sermon. And so what I want to invite you to do is take out your bulletin, and in your bulletin our scripture lesson is there. Our scripture lesson is there, and so as we get started on this journey together, what we're going to start with is a word search in our Bible Scripture for today. And now you can either take out a pen and literally circle these words that I'm going to share, or you can just kind of mentally circle these words that I'm about to share. But these words are going to be the framework if you will of our journey together this morning. Are you ready? Word Search. Hebrews Chapter 10. So the first word I want you to circle is in verse 19- that's our first verse- I want you to circle the word blood. Circle the blood of Jesus. Next word in verse 20, circle the word curtain. The next word I want you to circle is priest- that's in verse 21. Next word in verse 22, circle the word washed. This is kind of fun. You all are listening and attentive. I should have done this more often. Then the final word is in verse 25- together.

Blood. Curtain. Priest. Washed. Together. These are our words for this morning. All right. So let's talk about blood. Let's talk about the first one. Blood. It says in Verse 19, "therefore my friends since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus". Now if you're like me you get a little squeamish when you hear all this blood talk. You get a little squeamish. It's like my neighbor lady. My neighbor lady the other day told me that she had the blood of Jesus running through her veins. That's what she told me. And I was like awkward. I think I know what you mean by that, but you know, a part of me was thinking so how did you get a blood transfusion from Jesus? And what does his blood type, I wonder? So I found myself thinking at this moment I'm just going to be quiet and I'm going to do the Enneagram type 9 gift- that's when I am enneagram type 9; it was a former sermon series- The enneagram type 9 gift is this: when you don't know what else to do, just smile and nod. That's what I did. When she was talking about the blood of Jesus running through her veins, I just smiled and nodded. I'm sure that's great. I'm sure that's wonderful. But if you really understand the historical context of this language of blood, it does have some power.

Blood is symbolic and it is rich in what it is telling us and what it is pointing to. This idea of the blood of Jesus, you see, is rooted and grounded in a what we call a sacrificial system. You see in those days- and the days in which Hebrews was written- the primary mode of worship was through sacrifice. It was through sacrifice. That's how people worship God. So there were sacrifices for Thanksgiving. If something good happened, you would go make a sacrifice as a way to express your gratitude to God for the gift that God has given you. There were sacrifices of petition. When you wanted to get God's attention and you wanted to make your petitions to God, people would make a sacrifice of petition and say "God I really am serious about this I'm going to make a sacrifice so that you hear me." And of course there are sacrifices for forgiveness. I've done something wrong, God, so I'm going to sacrifice in order to ask for your forgiveness. Sacrifice was the primary mode of worship in the ancient world in which this particular passage was written. Generally speaking for me, the idea of sacrifice is fundamentally about taking something that is very important to us and making it holy by offering it to God. Sacrifice is taking something that is valuable to us and making it holy by offering it to God. Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice. He didn't make a Thanksgiving sacrifice or a petition sacrifice or any of that. He offered his life, the most valuable thing he had offered it to God and made it holy. He became so obedient to God that it led to his execution. And he offered his life to God. It made Him holy. In doing so, Jesus opened up a way for us to see and relate to God in a new way. Through Jesus's life and his example through his blood, through his sacrifice we find a new way to relate to and to understand God.

Next word: Curtain. He opened the curtain. Again odd language if you don't really understand the historical context. Well this finds its home in the Jewish temple system that was prevalent in Jesus's day. You see in Judaism, the primary religion that was going on when this was written- at least within the community that this was probably going to be written to- within Judaism, in Jerusalem was the temple. The Temple in Jerusalem was literally believed to be the dwelling place of God on earth. The Temple in Jerusalem was IT when it came to relationship with God. It was IT. In that temple, since it was a dwelling place for God, there was a curtain. On one side of the curtain, people could gather and on the other side of the curtain no one could go. And so when it says that when Jesus opened the curtains, what does it say? He took away any barrier that we thought was between us and God. He took away the barriers that we thought kept us away from God. You see, just to say simply, the only barrier that really exists between you and God right now is the one that you've put up within your mind and within your heart. Jesus took the barriers away. The curtain is open, symbolically speaking. God's with you. God's with me. The only barrier is, well, the ones we put up in our heart. We think that part of me is just so lovable that God can't be in it. That part of me is just so awful that God can't dwell in it. Those are not real barriers. They're just things that we've told ourselves. It is in those places, probably more than anything else, that God wants to dwell. So here's the question: what's your barrier? What's that place in your life that you have told yourself that's just unlovable? It's probably there that God wants to dwell the most.

Priest again finds its home in the Jewish Temple theology. There was a person from the tribe of Levi usually- it wasn't always that case when the Romans took over. They just kind of put whoever they wanted as the priest, but we won't go there. There was this guy- it was always old guy- who was the great high priest. And the great high priest in the Jewish Temple was the only one that could go behind the curtain. And the priest's job basically was this, the priest's job was to represent God to the people and the people to God. The priest's job was to represent God to the people and the people to God. So along comes the author of Hebrews, and says well we've got a new priest which is really subversive. I'm sure the dispensers of God in the Jewish Temple did not appreciate this idea, but they said that Jesus is our great high priest and he represents God to the people and the people to God. What I mean by that is, in Jesus we find a two way street. In Jesus we find, first what God is, who God is, who God is like. God is a God of love, forgiveness, healing, life, hope, joy. That's what we find in Jesus. He teaches us about who God is. What does he also teach us? He teaches us what it looks like to say yes to that God in the way that he lives his life.

In the Protestant church, we've picked up on this and we've taken even a step further. We said well we believe in the priesthood of all believers. And we believe the mission of us as believers is to represent God to the people and the people to God in the way that we live our lives. Right? There was a sign that I saw the other day that I think said it well: 'Preach the gospel always and use words if necessary'. God to the people. People to God. We are a people who believes that there's no barriers between us and God. We are called to live our lives in such a way that other people can see that.

The next word is washed. So what's this life like? Well the word washed finds its origin in the ritual of baptism in early Christianity. Washed by pure water. In those days- in the days in which Hebrews was written- a person would submit themselves to be baptized into the community. Literally it was like a ritual bath. When they said I want to be a follower of Christ, they would take a ritual bath. Symbolically it represented the former way of life was being washed away, and they would come up on the water and they would say I'm going to live my life in a in a new way, in light of this truth that I have decided to accept Jesus that there are no barriers between us and God. As people were washed so to speak, they were called to go forth and live their lives in a new way. Basically that new way is this: we're all family. Literally when they were baptized, they became a part of the family of God. But then they also saw the rest of the people in the world as their brothers and sisters as well. The one father of us all, and that led to a radically different way of life in which they would go forth and they would help the needy and the poor and they would love their enemies. And it was this kind of belief and ethic that led to Christianity spreading like wildfire through the early church in the ancient world.

If you really stop and think about what they were buying into and believing in and living into, it was really subversive- really subversive to the culture and the time. You see, in the Roman world, there was a lot of distinctions. It's kind of like the rich and the poor. There was the male. Then there's the female. There was the free people and then the slave people. In early Christianity, when they said well we're just all family, that blows all of that stuff apart. It blows all that stuff apart. And here comes along the early Christians that say well there's no longer male or female, no longer slave nor free. None of these distinctions really apply anymore when we're all family. They said this even to the point where they said we're going to serve Jesus as Lord, and we're going to love our neighbors even if the state, the Roman Empire tells us otherwise which meant that a lot of the early Christians were accused of treason. They were brought to jail and executed because they wouldn't bow their knee to the Roman way.

There's even one story where this lady was arrested and she was brought to jail. She was going to stand trial and be executed. And her father comes and says why don't you just renounce all this and live? And she says I can't because we're all brothers and sisters. I can't. It's who I am. It's who we are. That's so inspiring to me. That's so challenging though. If we would just buy into who we are as Christians, even today we would blow a lot of the things apart in this world.

Last word: together. It says basically don't give up meeting together. Don't give up getting together. You need each other to encourage each other if you're going to live this way of life. It comes as no surprise that some people didn't walk away from the community. It was just too hard. It's just too hard to live this life. It's just too hard to say Jesus is my priest, and there's no barriers between us and God. And I'm going to live as if everyone is my brother and sister. It's just too hard. It's just easier to go along with the culture. Some people started to leave and dissipate and walk away from the community. And here comes the author of Hebrews says, we can't give up meeting together. We need to encourage each other so we can live this way of life.

Now I realize much has changed since the days in which this was written. I realize that, but there still is that tendency isn't there? To walk away from the community of faith when it gets difficult. To walk away from the community of faith when we don't like something. To walk away from the community of faith when someone says something we don't like. And the tragedy is: when we do that, we miss our opportunity to grow in grace. That's the tragedy. I mean if you just hop from church to church until someone says something you don't like, you're going to be hopping forever. You'll be like a rabbit. Hop hop hop from church to church to church. But if you stick it out, you grow in grace which to me is the primary gift that the Bible can offer us if you just persevere. Yeah the church exists to call us to worship and remind us of God. That's important. Yeah the church exists to remind us of the ethics of Jesus in a world that's by and large forgot about that. That's important. Yes, the church exists to call us to live lives with compassion and justice, and that's important. Yes the church exists to remind us that we should be there for one another in our times of need. And that's important. But more than anything else I believe the church exists to teach us how to live gracefully.

And by gracefully this is what I mean. We've developed the capacity to live with the shortcomings of other people. When we can do that then we exhibit a life that reflects the love of Christ who died on the cross with criminals and he didn't respond with hate. He loved. Let me say it this way. We can go around looking for the perfect church. Or we can allow that community of faith to respect us in love. We can go around looking for the perfect church that gets the worship just right, gets the doctrine just right, gets the ministries just right, all these things just right- shopping for church- or we can allow the community of faith to teach us the most important lesson of all which is to live gracefully and learn to live with the shortcomings of other people. That's what makes us most like Jesus. So blood, priest, curtain, washed, together. These are my words, but basically what I mean is this: Jesus has taken away any barriers that we even think exist between us and God. He has called us to live our lives as if we're all brothers and sisters which means that we have to learn to live with the shortcomings of others. That's what it looks like when we think about discipleship. So persevere. Amen.

***LAST HYMN TFWS #2149** "Living for Jesus"
***CHIMES & SERVICE OF LIGHT**

BENEDICTION
POSTLUDE "The Rejoicing" by C. Callahan