



Connect Share Explore

Traditional Worship • September 9

- Prayer Concerns: Nancy Hitch
- Today's Sanctuary flowers given by the Flower Committee to the glory of God
- Today's choral selections are provided by the Temple Choir under the direction of Don Travis. Organist: Barbara Waite.
- Ushers (9): Greg & Linda Stilwell, captains; Chuck Taylor, Jacque Hardin, Nelson & Joys Rivers
- Ushers (16): Eric Eades, captain; Seby Durgy, Chuck Taylor, Ronnie Pursley, Thornton Patberg (balcony), Margo Borre (balcony)
- Greeters (9): Marty Van Stone, Wanda Erwin, Carla Bolin
- Greeters (16): Warren & Rosemary Heinsohn, Janet Kissel

ORDER OF WORSHIP

PRE-SERVICE MUSIC

WELCOME PRELUDE

"Earth and All Stars" by R. Hobby

CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: What does the Lord require of you?
 People: **To seek justice, love kindness, and walk with humility.**
 Leader: Give thanks to God, for His paths are good.
 People: Then let us worship God.

CHORAL INTROIT

"Christians, We Have Come To Worship" by Douglas E. Wagner

*CHIMES & SERVICES OF LIGHT

*FIRST HYMN #181

"Ye Servants of God"

*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.

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: Lord God, we put ourselves in Your hands. Hold us in love. Teach us to be gentle with ourselves, as You are gentle to all. O God, hear us now as we pray, each in our own hearts and our own ways...

GIVING OFFERING

"I Need Thee Every Hour" by E. L. Diemer

*DOXOLOGY the congregation stands as the Ushers return the offering to the Altar.

#94 in Hymnal

ANTHEM

"How Deep the Father's Love For Us" by Stuart Townsend/Larry Shackley

KIDZ MOMENT

SCRIPTURE READING

Leviticus 26:1-2

Reward for Obedience

"Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the Lord your God. 2 "Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord.

SCRIPTURE RESPONSE TFWS #2203

"In His Time"

MESSAGE by Pastor Andy Payton

Explore: Nothing in Stone

Well good morning Methodist Temple. It is good to be with you in this place at this time on this day. It was also good to be on vacation last week, I have to confess. It's always good to get away. People always ask me after I get back, so what did you do? Well the truth of the matter is my vacation was a staycation. I stayed home. I didn't do anything really in terms of going anywhere, but I enjoyed our community. Some things I did was I went to the Saturday matinee to see the Han Solo movie. I know some of you really like that maybe, I don't know. And the other thing we did was we took the kids to the zoo. Another thing that we did was well I went riding horses with my dad. Another thing we did was we took the girls to Wesslemen Woods. I have a picture of that. There they are. If you look really close I'm pretty sure I caught a picture of a Sasquatch way up on that trail. Just kidding. Just kidding. If I caught a picture of a Sasquatch, you would have already known that. But that's the girls as they're walking down the trail. We went to the Playscape. If you've been in the Playscape, if your grandparent, you've probably been to the Playscape. It's a great thing at Wesslemen Woods for the kids. It's wonderful. They've got this creek that they've built. It's just so cool. The girls had so much fun, and it was so good to just be in nature with the kiddos.

Well enough about me. For the last few weeks we have been talking about what it means to connect share and to explore as a church. We've been talking about what our dream and our vision is for our congregation. For the first four weeks we've talked about what it means to connect. We've been talking about what it means to share. And today we're going to begin a two week mini-series on what we mean by Explore. And more than anything else, to explore means that we are not afraid to ask questions. To explore means that we're not afraid to ask good questions. Before I dive in too deep, let's begin with a moment of prayer. Help us to be present to you today, Oh God, even as you are here present with us. Amen.

So where should the church be going? What should the church be doing? These are some of the questions that many of us find ourselves asking in this time of, I think it's fair to say, change for Christianity in America today. As far as I can tell there is like three broad answers to that question about where the church should be going and what the church should be doing. There's one camp that says that the answer to what we should be doing is in the past. We need to go back to the past and do what we used to do but do it with more intensity. If we just go back to the past do what we used to do with more intensity, this camp suggests that, it'll somehow bring back the glory days of what it once was. That's one camp. Another camp on the complete other side of the spectrum says, as they look at the church today, that it is irrelevant. We should simply throw the baby out with the bathwater. Religion, faith, those kinds of things are irrelevant- especially institutionalized faith and religion is irrelevant. That's the complete other side of the spectrum.

And somewhere in between, I think there's a group that says this: I don't know. But we do believe that God is faithful and we do believe that God is going to take us somewhere. What's important is that we're on the journey. This sermon is about the group that says 'I don't know, but I want to be on the journey'. Our reading today is from Leviticus. Leviticus, if you've ever read it, is an interesting book. A word of caution, it's not really a page turner if you've ever tried to read the book of Leviticus. You might even think to yourself as we read that this morning, what is he doing with that passage of Scripture from Leviticus? But interestingly enough, the tradition tells us that the book of Leviticus was given to the people Israel while they were on a journey. Their journey of course was to the Promised Land, and the instructions in Leviticus were basically pragmatic in nature in the sense that they were given to keep the Israelites on the path as they were heading on the journey. The Leviticus instructions are not necessarily what to believe, but if you will, how to believe.

Like I said though a word of caution. If you open Leviticus and look for answers, you're going to scratch your head a little bit about what it says. Here's an example. Pretend with me for a moment. Pretend that you say you know I really wonder where God wants me to go. I think I'll just read Leviticus today. It's a Saturday afternoon and you're wanting some great reading, so you open the third book in the Bible and you say, I wonder what God has to say to me in the book of Leviticus. And so as you start to read you come across some interesting instructions about how to sacrifice animals. If implemented I assure you of this, animal control will come to see you. Your dog and your cat better run. I'm just telling you straight up.

But you continue to read. Well, I don't know. It's kind of weird. So you keep reading, then you find some instructions on how to raise children. One of the things that Leviticus says is if your child is disobedient then you take him outside the city gates and you stone them to death. Word of advice. I don't know if I would follow through on that one. I'm glad my parents didn't follow through on that because I probably wouldn't made it to the third grade if they implemented that one. If you do that one, at best DCS is coming to your house. But you keep reading. You keep reading and as you keep reading you find some interesting dietary instructions about what to eat what not to eat. There's stuff about catfish. Weird stuff like that. You think, well if I implement that, that's going to successfully shut down the fall festival and the Golden Corral is in a lot of trouble.

So here's the point. The beautiful thing about Leviticus is not the answer is that it gives. The beautiful thing about Leviticus it's the questions that it asks. Let me say that again. The beautiful thing about Leviticus is not the answers that it gives, the beautiful thing about Leviticus is the questions that it asks. I mean let's admit it, we live in a different world than the Leviticus world but we're asking the same questions if you really think about it. How best to worship God? How do we worship God? That's a question that we ask, if we're on the journey. Here's another question: how best to raise our kids? That's a question we should ask if we're for on the journey. Here's another question. What's the best food to eat that's good for us? I mean that's normally not a spiritual type of conversation, but it's an important one if our body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. And so that's an important question to ask if we're on the journey.

A few weeks ago Pastor JillAnn posted something on Facebook that I thought was quite interesting. She said that- I don't think JillAnn said this but she quoted someone else who said this but I'm not sure who said anyway she put it on Facebook and it said -that we opened the Bible not to find answers, but we opened the Bible to learn to ask better questions. Leviticus invites us to ask better questions for people on the journey. How best should we worship? How best should we raise our kids? What foods should we eat? And if we take a look at our scripture this morning, Leviticus Chapter 26 where it says don't make for yourself a graven image, the question we should ask is: What are our idols? No, we don't make things out of stone like they did in the olden days. But friends hear me when we say this, we have idols. We have idols. The idols that we have our beliefs and practices that live within our hearts.

I had a seminary professor who taught me this. He said that an idol is any belief or practice that we have within our hearts that is above question and it gives us permission not to love our neighbor as ourselves. It's something we've set into stone. Historically, we've come across quite a few idols on our faith journey. We've come across things that were set into stone that needed to be questioned. Slavery. For centuries, we as human beings practiced slavery. It's in the Bible. David had slaves. Solomon had slaves. There's even a burst of the New Testament says slaves obey your masters. Slavery was the heart and the bedrock of many economies, so by the time the 1700 and 1800 started rolling around and people started asking questions about slavery, about that idol, certainly there were some resistance. Even within our own denomination Methodism in the 1800's, when we began to question the idol of slavery, our own denomination split over the issue. The Northern Methodist Church and there was a Southern Methodist Church in the 1800's. Praise be to God that we finally came to our senses. That's an idol that got called into question- something that had been set into stone but we had to ask ourselves is this really the right thing to do.

Another one if you want to fast forward a little bit is the treatment of women within the life of the church. Historically clergy have been men over the centuries even in some denominations, it continues to be the case where the clergy world is a man's world. But in the mid 20th century we as Methodists began to ask the question well, what should the role of women within the Church? Specifically should we ordain women? And there was resistance. Praise be to God we finally decided yes, women can be nonetheless called as men can be nonetheless called by God to be ministers. And we at Methodist Temple benefit from that today, don't we? We of the best young preachers I know.

If you read my article in a newsletter, one of the other things that's been called into question within the United Methodist Church today surrounds the issue of human sexuality. It's not really a article- it's a paragraph- but one of the questions we as United Methodists have asked and continue to ask is: What should the role of gay people be within the life of the church? Specifically the question that is being asked is: should we ordain openly gay people and should our clergy be allowed to preside over gay wedding ceremonies? That's the question. And in February, we have this thing called a special session of General Conference where they're going to debate this issue. They're going to decide on it, and I don't know what's going to happen. I don't know. I know what you're thinking, Pastor Andy, what do you think? And here's what I think. I think there's committed Christians on both sides of the issue. That's what I think. I think it's important that despite our differences, we have the good sense to love each other and respect each other even though we might disagree. Here's what I think. I think it's important that we ask ourselves the question: what does it mean to love our neighbors as ourselves? And we never stop asking that question.

Well these are some big ticket items I've already thrown out here. I'm on a roll now, so I'm as well keep going. These are kind of broad things, but if we narrowed the scope a little more and talked about idols that might live within our lives today, here are some items that might hit a little more home us. Style of worship can be an idol. When we think that's the only way to worship God. When our way is the only way to worship God, that's an idol. Here's another idol. Religion can become an idol when we think that our religion is the only way to relate to God. When we start thinking that our way is the only way to relate to God, hear I'm sort of say this when we said things like that stone, violence is always on the other side of that border. Just read history. One more and then I'll stop- sort of stop. Politics. I can't not say it. I can't not say it. It's like the elephant in the room wherever we go in our society today. Now hear me when I say this, it's okay to have strong political beliefs. We're going to have them. Here's the problem though. When those beliefs become so hardened and set into stone within our hearts that we say and do unloving things to one another, that's an idol that we should call into question. As a people of faith, we should call it in to question.

The beauty of our vision statement connect, share, explore is this: it's not about the answers that it provides but the questions then it forces us to ask. Think about it. We say we want to strive to become a safe and non-judgmental place for people to connect, to share, and to explore. These are questions that we're asking ourselves- not answers. Just humor me for a second: What does it mean to be a safe and non-judgmental place? What's the question that leads to? Well basically, what's in our heart? What's our motivation? Are we coming from a loving place- when we come to this place or any place as a people's faith- that's the question.

Connect, what's the question? The question is how am I relating to other people? Who am I relating to? Specifically on a local, congregation level, the question you might ask yourself is: have I met any person who is different than me? Have I met any people that I didn't otherwise know? How am I relating to the neighborhood in which our church is located in? Share. Here's the question: what gifts am I going to share with my community and others. That's the question. Explore. Never stop asking the questions. Am I coming from a loving place? Who am I trying to connect with? How am I trying to share my gifts? If we continue to ask these questions, if we continue to ask these questions, hear me when I say this we will continue to be on the journey. These questions keep us from becoming set into stone. They keep us from becoming a country club. They challenge us to be a movement. That's what Christianity really is about. It's a movement, a movement of God's Spirit in which we struggle to make the world a Christ like place.

The image that comes to my mind is my two girls. Back to my two girls from Wesslemen's. I have to show the photo twice. Just look at the picture. They're journeying together. They can't really see where they're going, but that's not what's important. The important thing is their journeying together. I think that's a powerful metaphor for our church today or any church today. The point being: we must journey together and the way we journey together is we never stop asking the questions. Amen

*LAST HYMN UMH #530

"Are Ye Able"

*CHIMES & SERVICE OF LIGHT

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

"When Morning Gilds The Skies" by R. Hobby