

ZOOM Worship for August 1, 2021

10th Sunday after Pentecost

Territorial Acknowledgment and Announcements

We acknowledge that the land on which we gather is situated upon traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron - Wyandot, the Haudenosaunee and later the Mississauga of the Credit First Nations. The territory is mutually covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibway and other allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes.

Today, this remains the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in their community, and to share and respect Mother Earth.

Announcements

Centering Music: "Come all You People" MV 2

Come all you people,
come and praise your Maker;
come all you people,
come and praise your Maker;
come all you people,
come and praise your Maker;
come now and worship the Lord.

Call to Worship:

One: Eternal God, you have been the dwelling place of your people for all generations.

Two: We have come to know this for ourselves.

One: Today we praise you knowing that you are at work in your universe;

Two: You are a light unto our path; you are with us not only in the noontime of fulfillment but also in the midnight of despair, and you are the One that can make a way out of no way.

One: God you assure us that the contradictions of life are neither final nor ultimate, for you are present and you care for us.

Two: As we ponder again your presence and power and purpose, increase our confidence that your everlasting arms support us, just as they have supported our foreparents in faith, and will support our descendants as well.

Opening Prayer:

One: O gracious God, we thank you for the inspiration of Jesus the Christ who came into this world to show us the way.

Two: We thank you for the example of countless faithful followers of Christ who lived out the way of Christ.

One: Grant that we will see in that life and in those lives the fact that we are made for that which is high and noble and good.

Two: Help us to live in line with that high calling, that great destiny. And let us now pray together:

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done
On earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil,
For the kingdom, the power and glory are yours
now and forever. Amen

Opening Hymn: "Alleluia, Praise to God" MV 59

Alleluia, praise to God.

Alleluia, praise to God.

Praises, high praises, we bring you, O God.

Alleluia, praise to God.

Songs of joy sing out to God.

Songs of joy sing out to God.

Dancing and singing, we praise you, O God.

Songs of joy sing out to God.

Beat the drums, sing out to God.

Beat the drums, sing out to God.

Praises, high praises we bring you, O God.

Beat the drums, sing out to God.

Scripture readings:

Habakkuk 1: 1 – 4; 2: 1 – 4

The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw.

The Prophet's Complaint

O LORD, how long shall I cry for help,

and you will not listen?

Or cry to you 'Violence!'

and you will not save?

Why do you make me see wrongdoing

and look at trouble?

Destruction and violence are before me;

strife and contention arise.

So the law becomes slack

and justice never prevails.

The wicked surround the righteous—

therefore judgement comes forth perverted.

God's Reply to the Prophet's Complaint

I will stand at my watch-post,

and station myself on the rampart;

I will keep watch to see what he will say to me,

and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

Then the LORD answered me and said:

Write the vision;

make it plain on tablets,

so that a runner may read it.

For there is still a vision for the appointed time;

it speaks of the end, and does not lie.

If it seems to tarry, wait for it;

it will surely come, it will not delay.
Look at the proud!
Their spirit is not right in them,
but the righteous live by their faith.

Matthew 5: 43 – 48

Love for Enemies

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Reader: Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.
All: Thanks be to God.

Choir: "All Night and All Day" (Spiritual)

Reflection: "I Believe in the Future Because I Believe in God"

Hymn: "How Great Thou Art" VU 238

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!

When through the woods and forest glades I wander,
I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze.

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!

But when I think that God, his Son not sparing,
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in,
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin.

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
and there proclaim, 'My God, how great thou art!'

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art! How great thou art!

Offering Invitation

Prayer of Dedication:

One: Generous God, you give us abundant life through Jesus Christ.

Two: We seek to reflect this abundance by sharing not only our money but also our lives.

One: We ask you to bless these gifts that they may be used to further the mission of Jesus. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Closing Hymn: "Sing a Happy Hallelujah" VU 224

Sing a happy hallelujah,
sing it out with heart and style,
we're the echo of God's laughter,
we're the image of God's smile.

Hallelujah, all creation,
hallelujah everyone!
Hallelujah, all creation,
hallelujah everyone!

We're the proof of God's good humour,
we're the twinkle in God's eye,
made to shine, reflect the glory,
given light and space to fly.

Hallelujah, all creation,
hallelujah everyone!
Hallelujah, all creation,
hallelujah everyone!

Sarah laughed at God's good timing,
Mary sang and David danced,
Jesus smiled and hugged the children,
so is life for us enhanced.

Hallelujah, all creation,
hallelujah everyone!
Hallelujah, all creation,
hallelujah everyone!

Every day sing hallelujah!
We are loved, though so absurd,
human, foolish, chosen people,
God still takes us at our word!

Hallelujah, all creation,
hallelujah everyone!
Hallelujah, all creation,
hallelujah everyone!

Commissioning:

One: We are the hands and feet of Jesus in this world we share.

Two: We each have a ministry to ease the suffering,

One: to live with compassion, seek friendship,

Two: and build up God's loving peace.

One: As we go from this place let us encourage one another to share the gifts we have been given.

Two: By grace, may we speak the truth, uphold the beauty in others, seek justice with mercy and embrace the freedom of life in the Spirit.

One: May we go in love, go in peace, go with God. Amen.

Musical Postlude

Reflection

"I Believe In The Future Because I Believe In God" - Martin Luther King Jr.

Martin Luther King Jr. and the Christian black community down through many generations have much to teach us about faith in God. Their faith is a strong faith, an optimistic faith even under the worst of circumstances.

King was born January 15, 1929 to a Baptist minister and his wife. His grandfather was a minister. King became a Baptist minister and a leader in the U.S. civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s.

King and his followers inherited a deeply religious nonviolent tradition from their foreparents who lived out Jesus' command to **"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be children of your Father in heaven."** (Matthew 5: 44)

King was a pacifist who experienced much violence. He was assaulted and stabbed, jailed and had his house bombed. In 1964 he won the Nobel Peace Prize. On April 4, 1968 he was assassinated. Let us look at King and his heritage.

The enslaved Africans suffered much. They were taken from their homes and land, chained and stacked in the holds of ships, their families disregarded and separated; they were auctioned, whipped, raped, killed, forced to work under severe circumstances.

Slavery continued in America for 244 years, followed by more than another 100 years of segregation and continuing discrimination and racism. In an ongoing and seemingly hopeless situation, God formed and these enslaved Africans fashioned within their souls a creative optimism and faith that strengthened them.

These people of Africa were literal in their interpretation of the Old Testament liberation events. The Exodus story with its slavery, oppression and eventual freedom struck a responsive chord with them. The Exodus story and other biblical events were lyricized in spirituals. The enslaved African would sing with anticipation:

When Israel was in Egypt land, let my people go,

**Oppressed so hard they could not stand, let my people go,
“Thus spoke the Lord,” bold Moses said, let my people go,
If not I’ll smite your first born dead, let my people go.
Go down Moses, Way down in Egypt land,
Tell ole Pharoah, let my people go.**

As God was much greater than their oppressors they could foresee a day when they would be free at last. An obscure verse like Jeremiah 8: 22 was taken and put to song undoubtedly due to its reference to a wounded people. To quote Jeremiah, **“Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?”** Jeremiah was asking God on behalf of his people Israel why they were suffering so much.

The author of the spiritual “There is a Balm in Gilead” does not focus on Jeremiah’s question but wrote the song based on his own answer to Jeremiah’s question. To the songwriter there was no question that a balm is available. This confident trust in God in the face of brutality is amazing and inspiring.

Their faith in a God who is good and just put to song provided them with the nourishment and therapeutic affirmation to endure. An academic study of 1,700 gospel songs sung by the black community found the largest group, nearly one-third, centred on the person of Jesus Christ.

What do these songs say about Jesus?

Jesus is everything because he is friend, protector, liberator. Jesus is regarded as the answer to problems. Their God in Jesus had personally experienced life on earth with its hostility, injustice, suffering, brutality.

A well-known spiritual links personal suffering and Jesus this way:

**Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, nobody knows but Jesus
Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, Glory, hallelujah!**

Their faith took them beyond their sorrows. One commentator has said; **“this is the most triumphant music the world has ever produced.”**

In the face of threats and violence, people sang spirituals. These songs controlled their fear and the need to retaliate. These songs allowed for King’s non-violent campaign for basic rights in the face of brutality condoned at top government levels.

Although King struggled with the reality of sin and evil in the world his roots in the theistic tradition of the black church kept him from denying God’s existence, God’s goodness, God’s power, God’s justice.

To quote King, **“We must be reminded anew that God is at work in his universe. He is not outside the world looking on with a sort of cold indifference. Here on all the roads of life, he is striving in our striving. Like an ever-loving Father, he is working through history for the salvation of his children. As we struggle to defeat the forces of evil, the God of the universe struggles with us. Evil dies on the seashore, not merely because of man’s endless struggle against it, but because of God’s power to defeat it.”**

King used the words of the English poet, Matthew Arnold, **“There is an enduring power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness.”**

To quote King, **“We must also remember that God does not forget his children who are the victims of evil forces. God gives us the interior resources to bear the burdens and tribulations of life. . . . When the lamp of hope flickers and the candle of faith runs low, he restoreth our souls, giving us the renewed vigor to carry on. He is with us not only in the noontime of fulfillment but also in the midnight of despair.”**

King's faith was tested, refined and strengthened by the crisis arising out of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-56. On December 1, 1955, a young black woman, Rosa Parks, sat in a place on a bus reserved for whites and was arrested. Out of this event arose a boycott by the black community of all the buses in Montgomery, Alabama. In the midst of the boycott King found relief, strength and determination through an encounter with the personal God whom he had learned about through his church and parents.

On January 27, 1956, King was 27, King's "vision in the kitchen" took place. King would refer to this episode time and time again to lift his spirit and motivate his people in the midst of their struggle.

I will never forget one night, very late – it was around midnight and you can have some strange experiences at midnight. The telephone started ringing and I picked it up. On the other end was an ugly voice. That voice said to me in substance, ' . . . , we are tired of you and your mess now and if you aren't out of town in 3 days we're going to blow your brains out and blow up your house. ' I'd heard these things before but for some reason that night it got to me. I turned it over and tried to go to sleep. I was frustrated, I was bewildered. Then I got up and went back to the kitchen and started warming some coffee, thinking that coffee would give me a little relief. Then I started thinking about many things – I pulled back on the theology and philosophy that I had just studied in the universities, trying to give philosophical and theological reasons for the existence and reality of sin and evil, but the answer didn't quite come there.

I sat there and thought about a beautiful little daughter who had just been born about a month earlier . . . she was the darling of my life. I'd come in night after night and see that little gentle smile. And I sat at that table thinking about that little girl and thinking about the fact that she could be taken away from me any minute. And I started thinking about a dedicated, devoted and loyal wife who was over there asleep. And she could be taken away from me. I could be taken from her. And I got to the point where I couldn't take it any longer – I was weak.

And something said to me, 'You can't call on daddy now, he's up in Atlanta, a hundred and seventy-five miles away. You can't even call on mamma now. You've got to call on that something and that person your daddy used to tell you about – that power that can make a way out of no way.' And I discovered then that religion had to become real to me and I had to know God for myself. And I bowed down over that cup of coffee, I will never forget it. Oh yes, I prayed a prayer, and I prayed out loud that night. I said, 'Lord, I'm down here trying to do what is right. I think I'm right. I think that the cause we represent is right. But Lord, I must confess that I'm weak now, I'm faltering, I'm losing my courage, and I can't let people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to get weak.

And it seemed at that moment that I could hear an inner voice saying to me, '**Martin Luther**, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo I will be with you, even until the end of the world . . . ' I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone. No, never alone. No, never alone. He promised never to leave me, never to leave me alone."

Three days later King's house was bombed. No one was hurt.

King saw God's hand at work in the success of the bus boycott. The black churches set up a voluntary car pool to get people to and from their jobs. For 11 months the car pool worked very well but then the Mayor got the city's legal department to file proceedings to stop the any transportation system growing out of the bus boycott. It looked like the churches would be defeated.

The night before the hearing King addressed a gathered crowd. Could he ask people to walk back and forth to work? He said, "**Tonight we must believe that a way will be made out of no way.** Yet I could feel the cold breeze of pessimism pass over the audience. The night was darker than a thousand midnights. The light of hope was about to fade and the lamp of faith to flicker."

Next morning before Judge Carter, the city argued that the black churches were operating a 'private enterprise' without a franchise. King's people argued that the car pool was a voluntary share-a-ride plan

provided without profit as a service by the black churches but it became obvious Judge Carter would rule in favor of the city.

At noon during a recess there arose a commotion in the courtroom. Several reporters moved about and one handed a release to our defence team and said, **“Here is the decision you have been waiting for.”** In anxiety and hope I read these words: **“The United States Supreme Court today unanimously ruled bus segregation unconstitutional in Montgomery, Alabama.”** The darkest hour of our struggle had become the first hour of victory. Someone shouted from the back of the courtroom **“God Almighty has spoken from Washington!”**

King’s ongoing public expressions on national and foreign policy issues such as his opposition to the Vietnam War developed out of his perception of his calling as a minister of the Gospel. King said, **“I cannot stand idly by and not raise my voice against something that I see as wrong. When my father and others put their hands on my head and ordained me to the Christian ministry it was a commission. And something said to me that the fire of truth is shut up in my bones and when it burns I must tell it.”**

On April 3, 1968 the night before he was assassinated, King inspired by the prophetic heritage of the Bible, in particular Moses, seemed to prophesy his own death.

Well I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn’t matter with me now, because I’ve been to the mountaintop. And I don’t mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And he’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over and I’ve seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the promised land. And I’m happy tonight. I’m not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.

At the time of his death King was 39 years old.

In conclusion what can we learn from King and his religious heritage? God sustains people in all situations even in the midst of oppression and violence. God in Jesus has experienced this world and its hardships and shares our experiences with us. We will not be forsaken. God cares for the oppressed. A difficult situation may not change in a person’s lifetime but God nourishes and affirms – provides the resources to carry on examples being: Archbishop Romero in El Salvador, the church in Romania under President Cseaneau, the Church in China and North Korea.

Faith can overcome all obstacles. The support of the Christian community is very important in facing our difficulties. The Church’s eternal message of hope is that dawn will come, the contradictions of life are neither final nor ultimate for God cares for us; evil, oppression and death will be destroyed. We can believe in the future for God made and sustains the universe; God is a God of love and God’s divine purpose is to eliminate all evil, including death and draw us into his presence one day face to face.

August 1, 2021

Dale Burkart

Resources:

“There is a Balm in Gilead” Lewis V. Baldwin

“I Have a Dream” Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Strength to Love” Martin Luther King, Jr.

“Protest and Praise – Sacred Music of Black Religion” Jon M. Spencer