

At Home Worship  
May 2, 2021 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter  
First Presbyterian Church-Sweetwater

Find a Sacred Space

Sit comfortably, perhaps with something warm to drink, where you can look out on the beauty Of God's creation today. Read aloud or quietly to yourself, or as a family share the various parts of the service.

Greeting - The Lord be with you. **And also, with you.**

Call to Worship and Prayer of Praise

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God!

**God is love, and manifested that love in Christ, the sacrifice for our sins.**

If God loved us so, then we should love one another!

**In this hour of worship, let us express our love for God, for Christ, and for one another: that God may abide in us and love may abound through us.**

**Blessed be the name of the Lord!**

Lord God, your steadfast love is full of surprises! The kingdoms of this earth may rise and fall but your steadfast love endures forever. There is no place where your Spirit cannot go. Your power and your love are without limit. Your presence in the world guarantees that no situation is hopeless. Lord God, your steadfast love is spread out in all directions! Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn

“This is My Commandment”

1. This is my commandment, that you love one another that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another that your joy may be full, that your joy may be full, that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another that your joy may be full.

2. This is my commandment, that your serve one another that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that your serve one another that your joy may be full, that your joy may be full, that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that your serve one another that your joy may be full.

A Time of Confession and Assurance

**God of mercy, we confess that we do not always love one another, or live as though we know You, who are love. We often nurture petty grievances and sometimes even sow and cultivate abject hatred. Forgive us, we pray. Instill in us your spirit of love, and give us the power to manifest that love in our relationships with one another, so that we may make visible in our lives Your true nature.** (silent prayer of personal confession).....Amen.

Hear the good news! Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us. Friends, Believe the good news of the gospel. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn      “You Are My Strength When I Am Weak”      # 519 x 2

You are my strength when I am weak; you are the treasure that I seek; you are my all in all.  
When I fall down, you pick me up; when I am dry, you fill my cup; you are my all in all.  
Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is your name! Jesus, Lamb of God, worthy is your name!

## **The Awesome Power of Love**

1 John 4: 7-21

In one of the PEANUTS cartoons, a little girl calls Charlie Brown on the telephone. "Marcie and I are about to leave for camp, Chuck," she says. "We're going to be swimming instructors." Marcie takes the phone and adds: "We just called to say goodbye, Charles. We are going to miss you. We love you."

The perennial loser Charlie Brown stands by the phone with a grin on his face. One little friend asks, "Who was that?"

He answers, "I think it was a right number."

Jesus was speaking to the church: "This I command you, to love one another."

Love was the mark of Christianity in the first two centuries. Tertullian summed it up like this, "Look...how they love one another."

Would the casual observer say the same thing about our church today? "Look how they love one another." Would it be possible for a hungry soul to come into our fellowship and to leave feeling nobody cares? How well do we measure up to this commandment from Christ?

**LOVE HAS AWESOME POWER.** Dr. Karl Menninger, the well-known psychiatrist, claimed that the most tragic word in society today is "unloved." "Love cures people," he said, "both the ones that give it and the ones that receive it." And he's right! Love cures! Love heals!

**LOVE HEALS HURTING BODIES.** Scientific research is now confirming what many of us suspected all along. Love can heal a hurting body.

Roy Angell once told the story of a particularly affectionate puppy who hung around a sanitarium. A doctor at the sanitarium decided to try an experiment on the pup. She made a small incision on the puppy's leg. Then she bandaged it. Finally, she instructed those at the sanitarium to feed the pup but not to show it any affection.

The change in the little dog was dramatic. Whereas it had always been energetic, frisky and friendly, it now seemed quite forlorn. Even more significantly, six weeks later the incision on its leg had not healed.

The doctor then instructed everyone at the sanitarium to lavish love on the tiny creature. Soon the little puppy was frisky and energetic again. And the incision healed quickly. No one knows the healing streams that lie within the human body which may be activated by the power of love.

In Sweden a nurse working in a government convalescent home, was assigned to an elderly woman patient. This patient had not spoken a word in three years. The other nurses disliked her and tried to have nothing to do with her. The new nurse decided to try unlimited love.

The elderly woman rocked all day in a rocking chair. So one day the nurse pulled up a rocking chair beside the lady and just rocked along with her and loved her. On the third day, the patient opened her eyes and said, "You're so kind." Two weeks later the lady was well enough to leave the home.

It doesn't always work like that, of course, but studies are accumulating. Love heals!

The poet Elizabeth Barrett was an invalid for many years, unable even to lift her head from her pillow. One day she was visited by a man named Robert Browning. In just one visit he gave her so much joy and happiness that she lifted her head. On his second visit she sat up in bed. On the third visit they eloped.

Love heals the body! No wonder people were healed by coming into contact with Jesus. He was love incarnate and that is what He calls His church to be today. Love made flesh. Love can heal the body.

LOVE CAN ALSO HEAL THE HEART. Somewhere I read about a pastor who asked his congregation if they knew of anyone who was suffering. A little girl, raised her hand and said, "My father is, but he won't tell anyone." The girl then hugged her father tightly.

The father, already embarrassed, said, "Stop hugging me. You're hugging me to death."

"Oh, no, Daddy," she cried, "I'm hugging you to life." That's what many people need more than anything else. They need someone to hug them to life. We live in a fragmented, alienated society. People desperately need to know that somebody cares.

A study was done by a government commission on chronic poverty in Appalachia. Before conducting the study, the members of the commission assumed that poverty was linked to environment or lack of education. These are important factors, of course. But the members of the commission made some discoveries they had not expected.

For example, on occasion they would journey up a creek beyond so called civilization. There they would run across a house and family that was falling apart. No surprise there. That is what they expected. Yet farther up the creek they would find a home that was well kept and a family that was industrious. What was the difference? It could not be isolation or lack of education for the families were nearly identical in such things. Rather the family that was doing well almost always had a relative nearby, or a neighbor-someone who cared enough to be interested in their welfare.

Everybody needs to know that somebody cares. That is the cause of a lot of the unhappiness, unrest, and uncivilized behavior in our society today. People have become isolated and estranged not only in Appalachia, but in small towns and even great cities. Perhaps we should say especially

in great cities. The closer we live physically, the farther apart we seem to drift socially and spiritually. That is why John Naisbitt in his bestselling book, MEGATRENDS, calls our age one that needs to provide both high tech and high touch. Naisbitt argues that with increased technology there must also come increased literal and figurative touching of people to fulfill their human needs. Love heals bodies. Love heals hearts, emotions, spirits.

LOVE ALSO LIFTS US TO A HIGHER PLANE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT. How often the story has been told, "He did it because of love."

That was true of Elias Howe. He was a man broken in health and poverty stricken. He wanted to give up. After all, why keep trying when life has knocked you down so many times? Day by day, though, he watched his wife slowly sewing in order to get them a little money for the next meal. Beyond and above all things, Howe loved his wife, and it hurt him to watch her work so hard.

Because of his love for her, he forgot his sick body and began thinking how he might help her. He went to work. Six months later he completed the first model of a machine that would revolutionize households throughout the world. It was the first sewing machine. Howe's invention made him famous, and it made him rich. It also helped restore him to health. It was his love for his wife, however, that drove him to this high achievement.

George Eastman, the talented inventor and founder of the Eastman Kodak Company, often stated that he never set out to become rich. Nor was it specifically his intent to promote photography.

Eastman lost his father while he was still young. He was forced to watch his mother scrape financially to provide the bare essentials for George and his two sisters. Memories of his mother mopping floors and washing clothes for other people haunted George like a bad dream throughout his life.

Consequently, he vowed to make enough money so that his mother would never have to work again.

Actually, he made millions, and he revolutionized photography but his real goal was a comfortable living for his mother. That's what love does for us. It lifts us. "Love lifted me," we sing, and it is true.

Marcus Bach tells about a young man who attended a summer camp in order to study under a noted art professor. He learned more about art in that camp than he ever dreamed possible but not from the professor.

The young man's roommate turned out to be a blind student, studying music. As he tried to assist his unseeing roommate by describing their surroundings, he came to realize that his roommate could see, too. Not with his eyes, but with his fingers and his other senses. He found, in fact, that his friend saw with a great sensitivity alien to persons with visual sight. This realization caused things, such as the purple flowers and vines he sought to describe to his new friend, to have a new and living reality to the young art student. He began to see with greater depth and insight. This new way of seeing in turn helped his art career immeasurably. Love lifted this art student to a new appreciation of the visual world in which he lived. Love does that. It brings us pleasure and comfort and lifts us to a new plane of accomplishment.

OF COURSE, LOVE LIFTED CHRIST TO THE CROSS OF CALVARY. "We love," John says in his epistle, "because he first loved us." Love doesn't always make us rich and healthy. Sometimes it costs us mightily. It cost Christ. But he paid the price gladly and thereby set an example for us. "Love one another," he said, "as I have loved you."

The love we share in this fellowship is love we first received from Him. And we are still receiving it, for He is with us now, and He is still loving. He is still comforting and reassuring us with His presence.

It reminds me of a story former President Ronald Reagan once told. During World War II, Reagan's job was to review letters of recommendations. Many of these letters resulted in soldiers receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor.

One letter told of a gunner who was trapped in a hole in the bottom of a B-29 bomber, following a crippling attack. The landing gear of the plane was destroyed, and the captain did not know if he could land the plane without the gunner being killed.

As it turned out, that decision never had to be made. As the plane neared England, the captain realized that they would never reach an airstrip anyway. He ordered everyone to bail out. Just as the last man stood ready to jump, the captain then took off his parachute. He knelt down beside the gunner still trapped helplessly in the hole and said, "Sergeant, looks like you and I are going to land this thing together." He did not forsake the young soldier even at the risk of his own life. That's love. That's the kind of love that lifted Christ to the cross. That's love like unto God's love for you and me.

Wouldn't it be tragic in the light of that kind of love, if you and I in the body of Christ could not get along with one another? How trivial our petty oppositions and resentments are in the shadow of Calvary. "Love one another." What a simple commandment, yet it carries such power. Power to heal minds, souls and bodies. Power to lift us to new planes of accomplishment. I cherish that kind of love for our fellowship and I believe it can empower us to reach out to our community. For the God of love is in our midst. He will empower us. And people will once again say, "Look...how those Christians love one another."

Thanks be to God! Amen.

### The Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and buried; he descended to hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn

“Bind Us Together”

# 2226

Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, with cords that cannot be broken. Bind us together, Lord, bind us together, bind us together in love. There is only one God, there is only one King, there is only one body, that is why we sing.

Blessing

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Philemon 25