

At Home Worship
June 26, 2022
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

Let us gather together and give praise to the Lord!

We would serve the Lord wherever God would send us.

Christ has called us to carry the Gospel to every part of the earth.

But life's demands are heavy and we have much yet to do this day!

Only those who serve Christ first can truly know the Kingdom of God.

Blessed be the name of the Lord!

Almighty Creator God, in the midst of the rushing world around us You have called us to hear Your voice and to follow You. Give us ears to hear and strength to follow faithfully. In Christ we pray. Amen.

Sing, Listen, or Read Hymn "Sanctuary" #2164

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

A Time of Confession and Assurance

Lord, we are overwhelmed by discipleship that seems so demanding. But when we consider anything less than that, we confess it is not real Christianity, nor is it real living. Forgive us for wanting to design our own life, and then fill in the gaps with a little religion. Help us to reorient our lives, and build them around our sacrificial commitment to you.

(silent prayer of personal confession).....Amen!

God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. The good news is that Christ calls us to new life and enables us to begin again and again and again and again. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel.

People: **In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

1. When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word, what a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still, and with all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.
2. Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies, But His smile quickly drives it away; Not a doubt
or a fear, not a sigh or a tear, can abide while we trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there's no
other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.
4. But we never can prove the delights of His love Until all on the altar we lay; For the favor He
shows, for the joy He bestows, are for them who will trust and obey. Trust and obey, for there's no
other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.
5. Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet. Or we'll walk by His side in the way.
What He says we will do, where He sends, we will go; Never fear, only trust and obey. Trust and
obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

The Forward Look

Luke 9:57-62

One secret to being successful in the world is to learn how to motivate yourself as well as others. A tough old cowboy counseled his grandson that if he wanted to live a long life, the secret was to sprinkle a little gunpowder on his oatmeal every morning. The grandson did this and lived to be 93. When he died, he left 14 children, 28 grandchildren, 35 great-grandchildren, and a 15-foot hole in the ceiling of the funeral home.

So, I'm not going to suggest that you sprinkle a little gunpowder on your oatmeal, but don't we all need a little extra push from time to time to help motivate us to do the things we know we ought to do?

Jesus had that difficulty with his disciples. There are books on Jesus' leadership principles because he was a master leader and motivator. In our lesson from Luke's gospel for today Jesus says to a certain man, "Follow me." But the man said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus responded with these rather forceful words, "Let the dead bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home."

Jesus said to him, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Jesus expected his disciples to be totally committed. They could not straddle the fence. They could not hold on to the past at the expense of the present. He wanted them to focus on the future. "No one who puts a hand to the plow while looking back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Some people are not able to enjoy the present or prepare for tomorrow because they are still living in the past. Dr. Warren W. Wiersbe has put it like

this: "Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" You do not move ahead by constantly looking in a rear-view mirror. The past is a rudder to guide you, not an anchor to drag you down. We must learn from the past but not live in the past." Or as Thomas Holdcroft once put it, "The past is a guide post, not a hitching post."

Noted preacher John Claypool tells about a thunderstorm that swept through southern Kentucky at the farm where his forebears had lived for six generations. In the orchard, the wind blew over an old pear tree that had been there as long as anybody could remember. Claypool's grandfather was saddened to lose the tree on which he had climbed as a boy and whose fruit he had eaten all his life.

A neighbor came by and said, "Doc, I'm really sorry to see your pear tree blown down."

"I'm sorry too," said his grandfather. "It was a real part of my past."

"What are you going to do?" the neighbor asked.

His grandfather paused for a moment and then said, "I'm going to pick the fruit and burn what's left."

"That is the wise way to deal with many things in our past," says John Claypool. "We need to learn their lessons, enjoy their pleasures, and then go on with the present and the future."

That's a wise outlook on life. There are some people who can never let go of past experiences, and thus, they are handicapped in dealing with the present and future.

William Goodin in his book *God Laughs, Too* tells a hilarious story that he heard from a seminary president. At this president's seminary, when candidates are ordained into the ministry, they have one thing to do in the service. At the conclusion of the worship, the candidate stands, walks up the steps into the chancel, turns and gives the benediction. That is their first official act as an ordained pastor.

One candidate stood, approached the steps, and ascended the steps. But on the first step, he got tangled up inside the hem of his robe. Now, it would seem that the obvious thing to do would be to step back out of the robe . . . but he didn't. The poor candidate kept climbing the steps . . . all the time walking up the inside of his robe. Each step made him smaller as he was forced to "duck walk" up the inside of his own robe.

Finally, at the top of the steps, looking like nothing more than a dwarf in a black tent, he turned around. His robe couldn't turn with him, since he was standing inside it. Turning his body placed the left arm of his robe right in the center of his chest and the right arm between his shoulders. All he could move was his wrist, which he waved as he gave the benediction. When he was done, two ushers came forward, picked him up by the arms, and carried him off like a piece of furniture!

The image of that poor seminary student trying to maintain his dignity while being hobbled by his robe reminds me of people who go through life hobbled by the past.

Is there anyone in this room who remembers the Great Depression? Is there anyone in the room whose parents went through the depression? Have you noticed that people who went through the

depression are much more conservative with their money than people who were born after the depression?

One man's reference point for thankfulness was his childhood memory of worn-out shoes. If we will think of times when we did without, he says, we'll become thankful for what we have. That's why God told the children of Israel to remember how He brought them out of the house of slavery (Deut. 8:14). He wanted that experience to be a reference point in their minds for thankfulness.

In that particular case, remembering the past was beneficial. It fostered a spirit of gratitude. But that's not always true.

Crockett also tells about a woman he knew with a history of rejection who was always suspicious of others' motives. A friend once complimented her by saying, "You look nice today."

The woman replied, "Are you saying that I don't look nice every day? You said I look nice today. That must mean you think I don't look good on other days."

Her puzzled friend said, "No, I didn't mean that. I just think your dress looks nice. I didn't mean... "

"Well, I don't know how to take it any other way. You think I look bad most of the time, don't you?" Because of her twisted perspective based on past experiences, this woman turned a compliment into an insult.

You don't have to hold up your hand, but has anyone ever been unlucky in love? Have you ever been rejected? Embarrassed? Humiliated? Does it color how you approach life now? There are people who carry around a deep sense of rejection because they can't let go of the past. There are marriages that are suffering because one partner or another can't let go of the past. There are people sabotaging their future because their lives are so deeply affected by an incident or a series of incidents in their past.

Psychotherapist Pat Pearson had a client named Susan--a gifted young woman who achieved success early in her career. For a woman who was raised in near poverty, this was quite an accomplishment. At first, Susan's family and friends were supportive of her career. But soon, they began to make snide comments about how Susan was getting too fancy. She wasn't like them anymore. Who did she think she was? And so Susan began unconsciously sabotaging her own success. Her income and achievements shrank. Susan knew that she could be more successful, but she was uncomfortable with the image of herself as a successful person, so she deliberately downgraded her efforts.

Psychologists tell us that this is not uncommon. Our past can so color our perceptions of reality that we are not able to profit from the present or prepare for the future.

Fixation on the past is a perennial problem in the church. There are churches all over our land, church growth experts tell us, that are dying because they can't let go of the past. You remember those seven last words of the church: "We've never done it that way before." That's why in many denominations the emphasis is upon starting new congregations, rather than trying to revive old congregations. The past is too great an obstacle. People have a certain picture in their minds of what church ought to be. It is a picture, usually, of the church of their youth. So the ideal church for

many people is a church that by its very nature is geared to the needs of a previous generation rather than the present generation.

Then they wonder why the church is not growing.

Dealing with the past has always been a tricky proposition for religious people. The story is told of a devout Christian who was faithful in his daily devotions. He read portions of scripture and a devotional book, meditated silently for a while, and then prayed. As time went by, his prayers became longer and more intense. He came to cherish this quiet time with God.

His cat liked this devotional time, too! She snuggled against her owner and purred loudly. This interrupted the man so he put a collar around the cat's neck and tied her to the bedpost whenever he wanted to be left undisturbed.

The man's daughter noticed how much his devotional time meant to him, and she adopted the same practice. She dutifully tied her cat to the bedpost and proceeded to read and pray. Her prayer time was shorter, however.

The day came when her son grew up. He wanted to keep some of the family traditions, but the pace of life had quickened greatly in his generation. He felt that he had no time for elaborate devotions, so he eliminated the time for meditation, Bible reading, and prayer. So in order to carry on the family's religious tradition, while dressing each morning, he just tied his cat to the bedpost!

There's a warning there. We cherish many good things in our past, but we want to make certain that we are not simply tying the cat to the bedpost. Every church needs to continually evaluate itself to see if it is meeting the needs of the present generation. Those are the people our Lord has called us to serve in this time and in this place. Jesus said, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." Jesus has called us to be a forward-looking people.

I wonder if there is anyone here today who needs to let go of something in the past? A time when you were betrayed, or humiliated, or deeply hurt. Is some past traumatic experience keeping you from enjoying the present? Sometimes even good experiences can hinder us. Are you evaluating your present family situation, for example, on the basis of how things were when you were a child? Maybe your parents kept their conflicts and disagreements carefully hidden, and so you went into your marriage with an unrealistic expectation about what marriage is supposed to be--compared to your parent's marriage, your relationship with your spouse doesn't measure up. There are an infinite number of ways that the past can affect our perceptions of our lives now. Do you come into God's church wanting to recreate something from long ago or do you remember that in the Presbyterian Church we are reformed and constantly reforming. Give thanks for the experiences in your life that have brought you to this point. But do not let them interfere with the present.

Sometimes you need to do something to get rid of past memories that are interfering with present happiness. Of course, that is what our faith is about. It's not about life in the past. It's about living joyfully and freely in the present. "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

Thanks be to God for His call to us and for the hard lessons! Amen.

1. I have decided to follow Jesus; I have decided to follow Jesus; I have decided to follow Jesus;
No turning back, no turning back.
2. The world behind me, the cross before me; the world behind me, the cross before me;
the world behind me, the cross before me; No turning back, no turning back.
3. Though none go with me, still I will follow; though none go with me, still I will follow;
though none go with me, still I will follow; No turning back, no turning back.

Blessing

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