

First Sunday in Lent **February 21, 2021**

Prelude: *“Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child”*

“Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child” is a traditional spiritual. It dates back to the era of slavery in the United States. It’s an expression of pain and despair. The singer compares the hopelessness of a child who has been torn from his or her parents. It was often performed in the 1960’s during the Civil Rights Movement in our country.

Centering Words:

I offer my life to you, God, for I know that you love me dearly and faithfully. I offer my life to you God. Teach me your paths.

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Call to Worship: *Holy Ground*

We are standing on holy ground, and I know that there are angels all around;
let us praise Jesus now; we are standing in his presence on holy ground.

From *The Faith We Sing* Copyright 2000, Abingdon Press, 2272.

Prayer of the Day:

God of faithful love and powerful purpose, there are times when we are open to your leading - times when we walk the path of Jesus with courage and hope, even when doing so is fearful. At other times we close ourselves off, hoping that you won’t tear open the skies and disrupt our lives completely. Following Jesus can be pretty risky. Your compassion and faithful love claim us forever, as they claimed Jesus when he entered the Jordan and made a bold decision to follow you on a new and uncertain path. May we follow the path of the one who taught us to pray:

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The Lord’s Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith: Apostles’ 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 Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at 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 Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayer of Illumination:

Open our ears that we may hear and our hearts and minds that we may receive your word O Lord our rock and redeemer.

(After each reading take two to three minutes to reflect upon the meaning of the passage to you today.)

Old Testament Reading Genesis 9: 8-17

Psalm 25:1-10

New Testament Reading 1 Peter 3: 18-22

Special Music *“Go Down, Moses”*

“Go Down, Moses” is a traditional spiritual that originally described an Old Testament story in Exodus 5:1. “And the Lord said to Moses, Go to Pharaoh and say to him, Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me.” The lyrics represent the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt. In 1850, Harriet Tubman began her work to free African American slaves, like herself, in what became known as the Underground Railroad, which continued throughout the Civil War. Harriet became referred to as Moses. Sarah Bradford’s authorized biography of Tubman quotes Harriet saying she used *“Go Down, Moses”* as one of two code songs fugitive slaves used to communicate when fleeing to Maryland.

Gospel Reading Mark 1: 9-15

Sermon *Choosing Paths*

Hymn:

Wild and Lone the Prophet’s Voice

1. Wild and lone the prophet’s voice echoes through the desert still,
calling us to make a choice, bidding us to do God’s will:
“Turn from sin and be baptized; cleanse your heart and mind and soul.
Quitting all the sin you prized, yield your life to God’s control.”
2. “Bear the fruit repentance sows: lives of justice, truth, and love.
Trust no other claim than those; set your heart on things above.
Soon the Lord will come in power, burning clean the threshing floor:
then will flames the chaff devour; wheat alone shall fill God’s store.”
3. With such preaching stark and bold John proclaimed salvation near,
and his timeless warnings hold words of hope to all who hear.
So we dare to journey on, led by faith through ways untrod,
till we come at last like John - to behold the Lamb of God.
From *The Faith We Sing* Copyright 2000, Abingdon Press, 2089.

Benediction:

God be in your head, and in your understanding.

God be in your eyes, and in your looking.

God be in your mouth, and in your speaking.

God be in your heart, and in your thinking.

God be at your end, and at your departing.

From *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. Copyright 1992 The United Methodist Publishing House, 566.

Response:

God Be with You till We Meet Again
God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

From *The United Methodist Hymnal*, Copyright 1989, The United Methodist Publishing House, 673.

Leading in Worship Today

Pastor: *John D. Jordan* AV Assistant: *K. C. Warble*
Choir Director: *Christopher A. McCroskey*
Church Musician

“AS MEMBERS OF THIS CONGREGATION, WE WILL FAITHFULLY PARTICIPATE IN ITS MINISTRIES BY OUR PRAYERS...”

Pam Hook Oren Edwards Patsy Shuler John Ballentine
Steve White Latson Lewis George Taylor Steve Aiello

Shut-Ins: Shirley Butler; Esther Carter; Carolyn Hardee; Francis & Gillett Hipp; June Hutto; Georgeann Pace; Shirley Padgett; Jean Raynor; Claudia Sineath; Wayne Tallon; Irvin Wells

Family and Friends: *Joyce Richards (wife of Boots Morgan’s cousin); Chip Hooker (Wayne Hooker’s father); Robert Bradley (Business Associate of Simon Ross); Mildred Hart (mother of Dee Senn); Dave Burrell (Business Associate of Tommy Gleaton); Gene Odom (grandfather of Mark Branham); Gary Becton (friend of Mark Branham); Audrey Cassidy (sister-in-law of Mary Louise Robinson); Rusty Browning (friend of Erin Derrick); Monnie Tiller, Mrs. Miles, Jerry Fowler (friends of Chris Derrick); Donna Walker (coworker of Jack Stevens); Gil Merrick (friend of Laurie Knapp); Kelly Knapp (wife of Laurie Knapp’s nephew); Ruby Pennington (friend of Laurie Knapp); Paul Kidney (son-in-law of Charles & Jackie McNeill); Sara Krisnow (niece of Marty Johnson); Rick Baldwin (nephew of Tommy Johnson); Judy Bauer (cousin of Marty Johnson); Iris Turlington (aunt of John Zeigler); Betty Jean Newton (sister-in-law of Mary Kamoroff); ; Tonya Spires (friend of the Derricks); Vivian Almendinger (great-niece of Christopher McCroskey); J. B. & Stephanie Martindale (cousins of Christopher McCroskey); Linda Hargett (stepmom of Christopher McCroskey); Ollie Shelly (friend of the Derricks); Brenlee Carnes; Danielle Spotts (co-worker of Kathy White); Vickie Edwards (neighbor of Kathy White); Greg Ammer, George Duke, Debbie Ranck, Vicki Beatty, Connie Mason, Brenda Grier (friends of Lynn Martin); Diane Kelsey, Erma Ruff, David Price & Family, Mark Leonhart, Ty Moore, Julie Stroud, Fran Huck, George Dorn (friends of Kay Jordan); Teddy Derrick (uncle of Arvan Derrick); Haidee Baehr (friends of Ruth Frady); Dianne Schmotzer (sister-in-law of Gale Frady); Dan Connor, Denise Paul (cousin of Gale Frady); Billy Johnson, Max Johnson (friends of Gale Frady); Ray Culbreth’s Group House; Nellie Gantt (mother of friend of Ray Culbreth); Amelia Zinski (great-niece of Linda Maloch); Wayne Blair (son of Dot Johnson); Luther Baker (friend of John Ballentine); Xavier Crane (grandnephew of John Ballentine); Janet Beck (friend of Jo Ann Heiting); Vera Von Glahn (sister-in-law of Jo Ann Heiting); Michael Carter (son of Esther Carter); Adam Lavender (son of Phil Lavender)*

OUR PRESENCE ...

In-Person Attendance 02/14 Worship: 19

OUR GIFTS ...

General Fund 02/14 \$ 2,171.00 Souper Bowl: \$ 20.00

OUR SERVICE ...

OUR WITNESS.”



Ministers	The Congregation
Pastor	John D. Jordan
Resident Bishop	Jonathan Holston
District Superintendent	Rev. Dr. Cathy Jamieson

Our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Our vision is to Connect, Nurture, Inspire and Transform

L First Sunday
in
Lent

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Mark 1: 9-15

You are walking on a path. It is the only path you know and you have been told that it is the only path there is. So, you walk along with everyone else. Suddenly people start slowing down. You notice some people have stopped. You look and there you see another path, going in a different direction. The path you are on is well worn and smooth. This other path is rocky and uneven. Many people continue down the well-worn path. Some stop at the point where the paths fork, perplexed, not knowing which path to take. Some take this other path. When you get to the place where the paths fork, you notice a man with nail scarred hands and feet pointing to the other path saying this way, follow me, to a better life.

This is the good news of God. The way of the world is no longer the only way. The worldly way of violence and oppression is no longer the only kingdom in the world. There is another kingdom, the Kingdom of God.

Israel, at the time of Jesus, was ruled by the oppressive power of Rome. Sure, it was a time of “peace”, but a peace that was maintained by violently squashing any dissent against the power of Rome. The Roman barracks in Jerusalem looked down into the temple courts so that any religious dissent against the Roman rule could be quickly squashed if the temple authorities were unable to deal with it.

The peasantry was heavily taxed by not only the Roman rulers but also the Roman puppet kings. It was not uncommon for wives, daughters, sons and whole families to be taken into slavery if one could not pay taxes.

Yes, it was a time of peace, a peace maintained by fear, violence and oppression. That was the way it was. That was the way the world, at least Jesus’ world, was ruled.

The rule of the world is not that much different today. Soldiers may not swoop into town and take people into slavery, but people are bought and sold. We just call it human trafficking, sounds much nicer. People are kept in dead-end jobs with wages that barely meet their needs. Health care and many basic needs are not available. Many do not have food or even clean drinking water. I am not talking about some third world countries, but right here in the good old USA.

The rule of the world is for the haves to get more and for the have nots to get less. The rule of the world is that the righteous are blessed with wealth and material things, while those without are wicked. The wealthy must be good for they are blessed with wealth and the poor must be sinners for they have no blessings.

No, the rule of the world is not much different than it was 2,000 years ago. It is still a well-worn, smooth path.

But Jesus proclaims that the time is fulfilled. A new season is coming. The time is fulfilled through the incarnation of Jesus. Jesus was identified as God’s Son. Jesus was tempted by Satan, whom we assume he overcame. Jesus was out in the wilderness with wild beasts for forty days. Jesus was waited on by angels. Now he was proclaiming that the time was fulfilled and the Kingdom of God has come near.

The Kingdom of God has come near. Does this mean we are nearing the end of the world and all of us good people are going to heaven to live in God's kingdom? No, it means that God's rule for the world will be revealed through Jesus. Jesus will point and lead us on the path that leads us to God. That is the Good News that we are to believe.

But it is not just to believe, but more importantly, to trust. We not only believe that Jesus is pointing the path to God, we trust him enough to take that path.

That path is not easy. It is not smooth and well worn. It is difficult and rocky because it is countercultural. It was countercultural in Jesus' time. Why do you think he ended up on a cross? Why were so many early church fathers and mothers martyred? It was because the Kingdom of God was the antithesis of the kingdom of the world. It remains the antithesis of the kingdom of the world.

The kingdom of the world, the rule of the world, is based on individualism and getting as much as you can while you can. Hold onto your resources and make sure anything you do is in your best interest. Be sure that your race, your religion, your party, your tribe maintains the upper hand in any way possible. The strength of the economy is based on how well the rich are doing.

The Kingdom of God, the rule of God, is based on love and caring for all members of the community and society. Share your resources and do what is in the best interest of all members of the community and society. Remove all the barriers of race, religion, political persuasion, and remember that there is only one tribe, God's. Under God's Kingdom the strength of the economy is on how well the poor are doing.

Yes, even today the different path of God's Kingdom is still difficult. It is a path that requires discipline, daily and intentionally taking time to commune with God in spite of all the demands for our time. It is a path that may require giving up certain relationships with people that entice you off the path. It is a path that may require making choices that according to the world's rule is foolish, such as giving to the poor items which could have been sold or not buying hot stock in a company that has a history of exploiting workers. This different path is difficult, but it is a path that leads us to a closer relationship with God. It is a path that increases our love for God and neighbor.

As that path of God's kingdom is revealed to us by God's grace, we have our choices. We can choose to continue down the well-worn, smooth path of the worldly kingdom. We can continue to live as we always have, not changing our lives at all. Not changing our behavior, thoughts and attitudes, so we remain aligned to the world. We continue to move away from God toward death, toward separation from God.

Jesus calls for us to repent. Jesus says to repent because the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. (I find it mystifying the word "because" is left out of the English translations, for it is included in the Greek.) Jesus is saying that the good news is that there is a different path of life being revealed. It will be revealed further throughout the gospel. The rule of the world is no longer the only option. You do not have to go down that road. There is another road.

Many choose not to continue down the worldly path. They are relieved that Jesus presents a different path and that by not going down the worldly path they are saved from sin and death. They are satisfied because they are saved from sin and death. They feel that they don't have to go down that other path.

But repentance is more than just turning from sin, turning away from the worldly path. Repentance means to change one's way. Repentance is to change the path we take in life. It is not just turning away from the worldly path but walking up that difficult path that Jesus reveals. This is the path that is further revealed as we continue to read the Gospel. It is the path that not only frees us from sin but frees us for God's purposes. This path leads us closer to God, to receive more of God's love and grace, and to love our neighbor.

An even better part of this good news is this: Jesus does not just point the way to a new path, he tells us to follow him. He does not point the way. He leads us on the way. We do not walk the lonesome valley by ourselves. Jesus, who did walk it alone, walks it with us.

Jesus came into the world as God incarnate to show humanity a different path, a different way of life. This path leads us to be drawn closer to God and greater in our love for neighbor. It is the path of eternal life that leads us into God's presence.

Which path do we choose? We can refuse to go down the new path and continue on the path of the world that leads us from God. We can stop going down the worldly path but not take the steps to go down the path of God. Thus, we may be saved from sin but do not receive new life. We may go down the path that Jesus guides us on, being drawn closer to God, loving our neighbor more, till we experience the perfect love of God and neighbor and become the person God created us to be. May we walk this new path that leads to God.