



First United Methodist Church of Moweaqua

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Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors. The People of the First United Methodist Church.

Self - Guided worship For May 2, 2021- Fifth Easter

You may go at your own pace. Some ideas for centering yourself for worship: Set a particular time and a particular place. Light a candle as you begin and extinguish it as you end. Set aside a place in your home that is quiet, perhaps even a space where that is the only thing that will happen in that space- a spot in a spare bedroom, a corner of the living room, or a place that can be changed and used at the time. Turn off distractions like the TV or the computer. Take some deep centering breaths as you begin. Take your time and be present to the Holy Spirit at work in you.

Opening Sentences

All dominion belongs to God who rules over the nations. Let me praise God in the great congregation, and proclaim God's deliverance to the ages.

Psalm Reading Psalm 22:25-31

Prayer of Confession

O God, in your great love you reconciled heaven and earth through your only begotten son: Grant that I, who by the darkness of sin have turned aside from loving others as I should, may be filled with heavenly sweetness that I might embrace friends and enemies in holy affection. Have mercy upon me when I fail to love as I ought and cut myself off from the vine that affords me life in you. Hear my prayer and restore me to right relationship with you.

Time of Silent Prayer

Assurance of Forgiveness

Accept the good news, Christ died for me while I was yet a sinner; that proves God's love toward me. In the name of Jesus Christ, I have been forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Lord, open my heart and mind by the power of your Holy Spirit, that as I read the scriptures I may hear with joy what you say to me today. Amen.

First Lesson: 1 John 4:7-21

Second Lesson: John 15:1-8

Meditation on the Scripture: See meditation page

Offering (You may wish to place your offering in a prominent place at this time as a symbol of bringing it before God and then mail it later)

Offertory Prayer:

Most gracious and loving God, you give me all good things. You sent me your son that I might know of your great love for me. May I give to you as generously as you have given to me. Bless my offering today as I come before you. Magnify my efforts that through what I offer, your name may be glorified and those in need may hear your words, and see your face. I pray today in the name of your son Jesus the risen Christ. Amen.

Prayer for Joys and Concerns:

Most Powerful God, May the words I bring this day be of praise and adoration. Help me to stay connected to you the vine of life. I continue to lift in prayer those who are ill and suffering, those who I name before you and know personally and those who only you know to need healing. I lift to you those whose hearts are breaking this day because they have lost loved ones to death. Give them comfort in the words and actions I share. Continue to give me a sense of wisdom and calm as I keep my community of church and school and work connected. Bless those who I name before you _____ . I give thanks for the joys that I have encountered this week. The joy of celebrating birthdays for _____ and anniversaries for _____. The simple joy of knowing I live in a community that cares for me. As I go into this week give me the strength and courage to face unafraid each day knowing you are beside me. In Christ's name I pray. Amen.

Benediction:

May the love of God, the peace of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be mine today and always. Amen.

Scriptures:

Psalm 22:25-31 Common English Bible (CEB)

25 I offer praise in the great congregation because of you; I will fulfill my promises in the presence of those who honor God.

26 Let all those who are suffering eat and be full! Let all who seek the Lord praise him! I pray your hearts live forever!

27 Every part of the earth will remember and come back to the Lord; every family among all the nations will worship you.

28 Because the right to rule belongs to the Lord, he rules all nations.

29 Indeed, all the earth's powerful will worship him; all who are descending to the dust will kneel before him; my being also lives for him.

30 Future descendants will serve him; generations to come will be told about my Lord.
31 They will proclaim God's righteousness to those not yet born, telling them what God has done.

1 John 4:7-21 Common English Bible (CEB)

7 Dear friends, let's love each other, because love is from God, and everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. 8 The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how the love of God is revealed to us: God has sent his only Son into the world so that we can live through him. 10 This is love: it is not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins.

11 Dear friends, if God loved us this way, we also ought to love each other. 12 No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God remains in us and his love is made perfect in us. 13 This is how we know we remain in him and he remains in us, because he has given us a measure of his Spirit. 14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the savior of the world. 15 If any of us confess that Jesus is God's Son, God remains in us and we remain in God. 16 We have known and have believed the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who remain in love remain in God and God remains in them. 17 This is how love has been perfected in us, so that we can have confidence on the Judgment Day, because we are exactly the same as God is in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear expects punishment. The person who is afraid has not been made perfect in love. 19 We love because God first loved us. 20 Those who say, "I love God" and hate their brothers or sisters are liars. After all, those who don't love their brothers or sisters whom they have seen can hardly love God whom they have not seen! 21 This commandment we have from him: Those who claim to love God ought to love their brother and sister also.

John 15:1-8 Common English Bible (CEB)

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. 2 He removes any of my branches that don't produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. 3 You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can't produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can't produce fruit unless you remain in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can't do anything. 6 If you don't remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Those branches are gathered up, thrown into a fire, and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples.

Meditation:

What does it mean to succeed? What does it mean to have success? TO be successful?

"What is success?" asked Ralph Waldo Emerson. "Success," he said, "was to know even one life has breathed easier because you lived. This is to have succeeded."

In poetic language, we hear a similar definition:

An old man walking a lonesome road,
Came at the evening, cold and gray,
To a chasm vast and wide and steep,
With waters running cold and deep.

The old man crossed in the twilight dim,
The rolling stream had no fears for him;
But he turned when safe on the other side,
And built a bridge to span the tide.

"Old man," said a fellow traveler near,
"you are wasting your strength with building here.
Your journey will end with the passing day,
You never again will pass this way.
You've crossed the chasm, deep and wide,
Why build you this bridge at eventide?"

The builder lifted his old gray head,
"Good friend, in the path I have come," he said,
"There followeth after me today
A youth whose feet must pass this way.
The chasm that was nought to me
To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be.
He too must cross in the twilight dim -
Good friend, I am building this bridge for him." -1

This example of what success might look like rings true because it is in close harmony with the intention we have from Jesus in today's Gospel Lesson:

"He who abides in Me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit ... by this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples" (Jn. 15:5,8).

Then, in the following few verses, Jesus gives us the formula for bearing much fruit -- His success formula:

"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:12-13).

It comes down to this: God measures human success according to the level of our obedience to God's great commandment of love. God identifies human success with our willingness to carry out the simple ministry of helping others, caring for others, sharing with others. Jesus did not say that this is the whole of Christian life. He said that this is where it develops. This is the fruit of all the effort, the fruit of all the worship, the fruit of all the Bible study, the fruit of all the theological probing.

"My Father has been glorified in your bearing much fruit and becoming My disciples," Jesus tells us in today's Gospel Lesson. If we are, in fact, true disciples of Jesus and living fruit-bearers of Jesus' Gospel of Love, it is because we have learned the great secret of the Christian life: to praise God and thank God in everything!

C.S. Lewis loved books. Someone once asked him if there would be books in heaven. He replied that the only books in our heavenly libraries would be the ones we had given to others. "Nothing that you have not given away will ever really be yours," he said. Our Lord believed this to be true not only of things we possess in life but of life itself. It was He who told us that to have life; we must be willing to lose it; to truly possess it, we must fling it away.

It has been said that love is a basket with five loaves and two fishes: it's never enough until you start to give it away. Someone has written the fable of "The Old Man" in which a small boy, with arms full of books, is walking past a park. He sees an older man sitting on a cold bench, huddling under a thin coat. "How difficult it must be," the boy thought, "to be old and sitting on a cold bench on a windy day like today." Then he turned to get a better look at the older man with the unshaven face and the battered cap. The old man saw him and, lifting his head, asked, "Yes?" The small boy stammered, "I just thought ... I wondered ... I mean do you need ... you look so ... I just thought ... might I ... can I help you?" The older man smiled a warm and friendly smile -- a loving smile. "You already have," he said.

Whenever you ask God to help you, it is well to remember that God already has. The Good News about God is that God has first loved you and wants you to have life and have it abundantly. But God has given you freedom of choice -- freedom to say "Yes!" or "No!" to the abiding love that comes from God. You can come under God's Rule, or you can back away. You can obey God's great commandment of love, or you can disobey. You can follow Christ, or you can go your own way. "He who obeys the commandments he has received from Me is the one who loves Me," Jesus said. The consequence, or the fruit, of freely choosing to say "Yes!" to God is love. Obeying God is learning how to love!

Don't just talk about it! Forget your good intentions! All the talk and good intentions in the world are of no account if you're not willing to get on with it. Do it! "Do God's Will as I have revealed it to you," Jesus said. But He doesn't leave you hanging there. He continues to give you help. He holds before you the joy of obedience. He promises you that if you follow Him, you will experience the wholeness of life. You will become the tree that bears rich fruit -- rich fruit in abundance.

Jesus is telling you that obedience to God's Will -- doing what God commands -- is the only way to succeed in life. We say these things -- week-after-week, we say them in various ways -- but how often do we act on them?

Maybe this is the week that we change all that ? We all have good intentions toward other persons. We intend to forgive; we intend to forget, we intend to reconcile, we intend to communicate, we intend to donate, we intend to serve, we intend to commiserate, we intend to empathize, we intend to visit, we intend to support, we intend to help, we intend ... we intend ... we intend. This week let's forget all those good intentions, except one. And then just do it!