



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 8, 2022- Fourth Easter- Happy Mother's Day !

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 Words

Let me praise God who is my shepherd. In God's love I shall not be found wanting. Surely goodness and mercy shall be mine and I shall live in God's house forever.

Psalm Reading

Psalm 23

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God, who has created me and called me to be your flock: Be present to me, and amidst the snares of this wicked world protect my weakness with your never-failing love. Your son, the Shepherd calls my name, but I do not listen. I am indeed a very foolish sheep. Instead of following his path which leads to life I stray off on my own, and I get very lost. Forgive me, help me to amend my life and follow the One who loves me most. Open my ears that I may hear the voice of the Shepherd, Jesus. Wipe away my tears and grant me forgiveness. Hear now my prayers which I offer in the name of my Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

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 : Revelation 7:9-17

Second Lesson: John 10:22-30

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 us all good things. You sent us your son that we might know of your great love for all of us. 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, my eyes have not seen the resurrection, but your Holy Spirit is my witness. Make that Spirit present to me. Strengthen me for the resistance I encounter as I tell your story and make me faithful to the task of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. 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. I bring to you those I know who are struggling with illness and physical pain and injury. Give them healing relief. 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:

Christ the Lord is risen! He is risen indeed! Go in the name of the risen Christ!

Scriptures:

Psalm 23 Common English Bible (CEB)

- 1 The Lord is my shepherd. I lack nothing.
- 2 He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters;
- 3 He keeps me alive. He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name.
- 4 Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me. Your rod and your staff— they protect me.
- 5 You set a table for me right in front of my enemies. You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over!
- 6 Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live[b] in the Lord's House as long as I live.

Revelation 7:9-17 - Common English Bible (CEB)

9 After this I looked, and there was a great crowd that no one could number. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They were standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They

wore white robes and held palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out with a loud voice: "Victory belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

11 All the angels stood in a circle around the throne, and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell facedown before the throne and worshipped God, 12 saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and always. Amen."

13 Then one of the elders said to me, "Who are these people wearing white robes, and where did they come from?"

14 I said to him, "Sir, you know."

Then he said to me, "These people have come out of great hardship. They have washed their robes and made them white in the Lamb's blood. 15 This is the reason they are before God's throne. They worship him day and night in his temple, and the one seated on the throne will shelter them. 16 They won't hunger or thirst anymore. No sun or scorching heat will beat down on them, 17 because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water,^[a] and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

John 10:22-30 Common English Bible (CEB)

22 The time came for the Festival of Dedication^[a] in Jerusalem. It was winter, 23 and Jesus was in the temple, walking in the covered porch named for Solomon. 24 The Jewish opposition circled around him and asked, "How long will you test our patience? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

25 Jesus answered, "I have told you, but you don't believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, 26 but you don't believe because you don't belong to my sheep. 27 My sheep listen to my voice. I know them and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life. They will never die, and no one will snatch them from my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them from my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one."

Meditation:

Some of you will recall being awestruck when you first began studying our universe in junior high school science class. Among the incredible facts you discovered was that light travels at a speed of 186,000 miles – per second. That's right! In the blink of an eye, a beam of light can make it around our planet almost 8 times! So, if light can travel 8 times around the earth in a single second, how much distance does it cover in a year? If you said 6 trillion miles, you'd be in the right ballpark. It's mind-blowing to think about. Now consider this astonishing development reported by astrophysicists just in March of this year (2022). The Hubble telescope, which orbits about 340 miles above Earth, has captured an image of a star 28 billion light-years away! That's billion with a "B." And not 28 billion miles, but 28 billion light-years. To calculate that distance from the earth you need to multiply 6 trillion miles – times 28 billion years. The star, which astronomers have named Earendel, is said to be 50 to 500 times more massive and millions of times brighter than our sun. And if that doesn't impress you consider the fact that it is the farthest star ever detected.

Unless you are an astrophysicist -- and maybe not even then -- concepts as big as these are very hard to put into any kind of earthly perspective. For me, just thinking about our vast, infinite, and mind-blowing Universe takes my breath away. And it raises so many, age-old questions. What is my place in the universe? Where do I fit in?

From the Christian perspective, it is clear in the life and teachings of Jesus that our relationship with God is the most important thing in our life. Everything else -- our health, our work, our family life, our sorrows, and our joys – even our knowledge of the fundamental laws of the universe -- literally finds their meaning in our relationship with God.

A man was visiting some friends who lived in a large city. His visit had been prejudiced by frightening stories of big city living so he was prepared for the worst. But when he arrived, his first impression was formed by a view of the city from the top of its tallest building. Now equipped with this perspective, wherever he went through the city that marvelous view from the top went with him.

Jesus tells us in the Gospels that, "No one has seen God." Nevertheless, he used one image of God so often, that it is obvious that he wanted us to think about God in a certain way. He wanted to give us help in knowing who God is. He wanted us to view God from a certain perspective. He wanted to give us a view from the top. It is striking, therefore, to realize that in the four Gospels, God is described over one hundred and forty times by the word "Father." In the Gospels, Jesus uses a very special word for Father: "Abba." It is a word of endearment, expressing great love and intimacy. And, of course, when he taught his disciples to pray, he taught them a prayer that begins, "Our Father." This is the best-known and most used prayer in all of Christendom.

"My sheep hear My voice. I know them, and they follow Me. I will give them eternal life," Jesus says in today's Gospel Lesson (Jn. 20:27). We are in the Sheepfold of Jesus when our view of God is from the top. When our union with God is conditioned by everything in this life that speaks to us of love, we belong to the Jesus who offers us eternal life.

In the Gospels, Jesus describes His sheep with much tenderness. He knows them. He lays down his life for them. He keeps them together. The members of his sheepfold are ready to listen. They're ready to hear the unexpected. They're ready to take all the risks that following Jesus entails. They're ready to oust any preconceived notions of how it will affect their lives. They're ready to get rid of anything that might in any way keep them from moving toward the goal of eternal life. They're ready for an ongoing transformation from who they are to who they ought to be; from what they are doing to what they ought to be doing.

In Thornton Wilder's play, "Our Town," one of the characters says,

"I don't care what they say with their mouths -- everybody knows that something is eternal. And it isn't houses, and it isn't names, and it isn't earth, and it isn't even the stars. Everybody knows in their bones that something is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people who ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being."

That is what Jesus is telling us now. "I know My sheep ... they follow Me ... I will give them eternal life." Eternal life begins now for those in the sheepfold of Jesus who are in union with God in the bond of Love.

Today, we not only to listen to our Gospel message about the Love of our Good Shepherd but also we celebrate Mother's Day. In describing her own mother, the late poet Maya Angelou gives us this wonderful imagery. She tells us, "To describe my mother would be to write about a hurricane in its perfect power. Or the climbing, falling colors of a rainbow."

Oliver Wendell Holmes said this about motherhood: "Youth fades; love droops; the leaves of friendship fall – but a mother's secret hope outlives them all."

Novelist Gail Tsukiyama writes about the unbending love of mothers for their children. She says, "There's no bond so strong in the entire world. No love so instantaneous and forgiving."

Perfect power. Eternal hope. Unbreakable bond, indeed. Novelists and poets and great teachers can certainly express those thoughts today better than I can. But permit me to add that a mother's love can be likened to our discussion earlier of the Universe because it too is vast, infinite, and mind-blowing.

From another artist let us listen to a few lines from one of his great love songs. A song I would like to dedicate to all mothers -- past, present, and future.

Did you know that true love asks for nothing?
Her acceptance is the way we pay
Did you know that life has given love a guarantee?
To last through forever and another day

Just as time knew to move on since the beginning
And the seasons know exactly when to change
Just as kindness knows no shame
Know through all your joy and pain
That I'll be loving you always

As today I know I'm living but tomorrow
Could make me the past but that I mustn't fear
For I'll know deep in my mind
The love of me I've left behind
'Cause I'll be loving you always -Stevie Wonder –“As”

Let us go forth in union with God – a union conditioned by everything in life that speaks to us of love, always. And today, there is nothing that speaks to us of love better than the love of a mother.

Happy Mother's Day!