

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for the Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
August 23, 2020
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

“Rock of Ages”

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church. The roses on the pulpit are given to the glory of God in honor of two births in our church family: the first is for Parker John, great-grandson of Ann, his grandparents are Dawn & Jack, and parents are Jessica & Eric. The second rose is for Joel Jonathan, great-grandson of Evelyn, his grandparents are Debbie & Bob, and his parents are Christina and Jonathan. Congratulations to both of those families!

Call to Worship

Psalm 100:1-2

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness. Come into God's presence with singing!

Hymn

Choir

“Forward Through the Ages”

Opening Prayer

O God, you are the light of hearts that feel you, the life of souls that love you, the strength of thoughts that seek you. When we turn from you we falter; when we turn toward you we rise; and when we abide in you, we stand secure forever. You call us to live as one and to honor each other's gifts, yet we divide ourselves into categories, separating one from another. You call us to freedom and rest, but we toil at endless tasks and impose labor on others. You call us to love and serve you, but we serve the gods of profit and production, believing they give us worth. In reality, our ceaseless striving smothers our souls, and swallows us alive. You have taught us that all our deeds without love are worth nothing. As we gather for worship this day, pour into our hearts your most excellent gift of love, the very bond of peace and all goodness. Redeem us, transform us, and renew us, that we may discern your will for what is good and pleasing for all. Take away the power of sin and allow us to find our joy in your presence. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Sisters and Brothers in Christ: the promise of scripture is that mercy and love surround us always. Our Creator cherishes us, heals us, and offers us the grace we need for new beginnings. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Gospel Lesson Matthew 16:13-20

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” ¹⁴ And they said, “Some say John the

Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”¹⁵ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.”¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”²⁰ Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Kids' Time

For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is the story of Jesus giving Simon the nickname "Peter," which means "Rocky" in English. Rocks are sturdy and strong, and Jesus knew Peter would be able to teach many people about Jesus. I wonder what nickname Jesus would give you? Now it's time to see the photos that remind us of God's love and hope and joy. { photos. }

Keep sending us your photos so we can share them in the coming weeks!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sending your son Jesus to teach us about your love. Thank you for his disciples that started all the churches. Help us to see others as you see them, and help us to share your love with everyone. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Song

Choir

“Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land”

Old Testament Lesson Exodus 1:8 – 2:10

⁸ Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” ¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. ¹³ The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

¹⁵ The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.” ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?” ¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.” ²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. ²² Then Pharaoh commanded all his

people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

2 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. ³ When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵ The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said. ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" ⁸ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰ When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

Sermon

Our perception of the world affects everything we do. It affects how we make our choices, and how we react to what is happening around us. So it matters whether we think the world is a warm, wonderful place, brimming with excitement and adventure; or a scary place, filled with danger and terrible situations lurking around every corner; or a sad place, filled with loneliness and pain and suffering. Sometimes we get so locked into our own vision of the world, we feel there is only one way to react, only one choice we can make, only one acceptable way to be. But when we can see the world from a different perspective, we discover there are other choices and other ways.

In today's Old Testament lesson we see people making a whole variety of choices, based on their different world views. The last stories in the book of Genesis are about the life of Joseph. We heard some of his story in the last couple weeks – how he was favored by his father but so hated by his brothers that they threw him in a pit where he was then captured by bandits and taken as a slave to the land of Egypt; how he ended up in prison and then became part of the royal household because he was able to interpret dreams; and how he eventually reconciled with his family, and brought them into Egypt where they settled. Today we begin the next book, Exodus, and we learn the king of Egypt has died, and Joseph has died, and a number of generations have passed, so that the Israelites first established by Joseph's family have become numerous in Egypt – so numerous that the now-ruling pharaoh has decided to enslave them.

This new Pharaoh's view of the world was clearly one filled with political backstabbing, and threats, so he was suspicious and decided to squash anything that looked like it might be a threat to his power. So he ordered the Hebrew people into forced labor, but after some years, he found that the people were still flourishing. Their slavery had not decreased their numbers, and their spirits had not been broken, so Pharaoh issued a new directive to the midwives: that they should kill all Hebrew boys as they

were being born. His view of the world seems to be darkening; so much so that even newborn babies were seen as a threat to his position and power.

But the midwives had a different view of the world – one where new life is seen as a precious gift, not as potential enemies, so they made choices in defiance of the pharaoh's orders. Shiphrah and Puah chose not to kill the babies they helped to deliver. Their view of the world may have been more optimistic than pharaoh's, but still, they were not naïve. They understood pharaoh's power, so when they were called before him, they lied and told him of course they wanted to carry out his directive; but they were not able to kill the newborns because the babies came before they could get there.

Pharaoh's view seemed to get more paranoid still, so he issued his order to the entire nation that all the Hebrew boys should be killed. Forget trying to do this in a quiet manner with some memos to the midwives, now he made a public decree for the whole land that the lives of the Hebrew babies were a blight to be removed by whatever means possible. And the people apparently were convinced by Pharaoh's suspicious view, because we have every indication that his decree was carried out.

So, we have an idea now about Pharaoh's world view, and the midwives, and the public at large, when we are introduced to yet another view. A story of a Levite man and woman who marry and have a baby boy, and successfully hide him for three months. Their view must be one of hope and trust that miracles can happen, because the baby's mother set him in a basket on the river and believed that his life would somehow be spared. The baby was discovered by Pharaoh's own daughter, whose view of the world is not entirely clear. But she must not have seen the Hebrews as the threat her father did, because she recognized that the baby was Hebrew boy, but she ignored her father's declaration and chose to keep the baby and raise him as her own.

Our perceptions of the world affect the choices we make. And when we've established our view of the world, we start to limit our choices. We get fooled into thinking that our vision is the only vision; that our perception of the world is reality. But it is not. Because there is a vision and a reality beyond anything we can comprehend. God created the world, and God has a vision of the world: a view of reality that we can never fully grasp. And that vision, God's reality - God's will - can never be completely covered up by our plans or our visions or our understandings.

A few weeks ago we had the parables about the kingdom of Heaven, where we hear that "The kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed; or like yeast in a loaf of bread." They seem to be about big things coming from small beginnings. But I wonder if they are also about how some things accomplish their purpose in a way that is hidden from human eyes – how a mustard seed goes about growing into a bush underneath the soil, where we cannot see it taking root; how yeast causes a loaf to rise, even though we cannot see it at work. I wonder if God's vision is like that: working itself out all around us, and somehow hidden from our view.

When Pharaoh looks out, he sees a world of threat, so he issues his command to kill all the baby boys. When the decree is in effect, I'm sure the Hebrew people look at the world and see a land of horror and evil as their offspring are being ruthlessly slaughtered. And the people who allow it, who do not stand up and protest, maybe see the world as brutal place, where injustice happens, but what can you do, you just have to learn to live with it. Or maybe they see the world as a place where a few people have power and the rest of us just need to hunker down and protect ourselves so that we are

not the next target. Each of these views is valid and real; but, real as they are, they are not the whole of reality. For God's vision is also a reality in this world; it may feel hidden at any given moment, but still the Kingdom of Heaven is here and is at work in the world.

In this story, God's plan was working its way through all the realities of the Egyptians and the Hebrew slaves, unstopped by Pharaoh or his henchmen. A savior for the Israelites was born, and kept from the slaughter for three months. And when the baby was rescued, God's vision worked its way into Pharaoh's own household, through the vision of his daughter, who chose a different vision of reality from her nation and from her own father.

The challenge of our faith is to determine which voices we are listening to, which ones are shaping our view of the world. Our certainties about the world can change in an instant. One change in leadership, one doctor's visit, one phone call, can turn our world upside-down and change everything we thought about the world. There is much in this world that we cannot control, and there is much in this world that we may never experience firsthand. And that is why it is valuable to hear the perspectives of other people.

I've been interested how, in recent years, we have seen the retelling of famous stories, to try to see a different perspective. For example, many of us grew up with the story of "The Wizard of Oz," where Dorothy is the hero, so we learn the story from her point of view. But in the popular musical "Wicked," the same story gets told from the perspective of the witches, which makes the story look quite different. Many modern novels also use this device, to tell some chapters from the viewpoint of one character, and other chapters by a different character, to see there are multiple experiences of the same reality.

Some of us are reading a book right now called "Waking Up White," written by a woman raised in a prominent New England family, how she grew up seeing one reality of life and began to see the perspectives of people who grew up very different from her.

The stories of scripture give us the opportunity to see from many perspectives. The Pharaoh decides when the world is out of control, it must be the fault of the slaves – if they could be eliminated, then all would be well. I wonder if there have been times when we have blamed someone else for our unhappiness – believing if they would just shape up, then our lives would be better?

The Pharaoh also felt threatened by a group different from him. I wonder when we have been faced with that feeling – that if someone else got what we wanted that we would be harmed – if a colleague got that promotion, or a friend won that love interest, or another buyer got that house, then we would feel cheated?

The midwives and Pharaoh's daughter act against the orders of the king. When is it acceptable, if not mandatory, for individuals and congregations to disobey the rules of the land? What are the higher values that transcend human rules and laws that come and go and change through time?

The midwives, and Moses' parents are not part of the ruling class of their time, but they understand the will of God. In what ways do we hear God speaking from the margins of society, and what message do we hear?

Moses' mother fashions a basket to keep him safe and dry that will hide him among the reeds of the river. How do we watch over our children, to keep them safe

from the violence of the world?

Miriam watches over her baby brother, making sure he is cared for. In what ways are we watchful and compassionate for those in need?

So many perspectives in the same story.

I visited the Alamo a couple years ago, and I remember a placard there that said something like history is not just one story to be passed down through the generations. There are always many stories happening simultaneously, and hearing stories from many perspectives helps to shift our view of the world.

It's not always easy. And it's not always comfortable. That's the thing about seeing another perspective – it can move us to a place where we are not so sure anymore. But growth comes through pushing our sometimes-too-comfortable boundaries. And our faith is not about keeping us comfortable.

As people of faith, we believe the world belongs to God. God's view challenges all the voices and views of this world. We are called to listen to the many stories of God's people, knowing that God's vision of reality is bigger than our view of reality.

As people of faith, we believe, no matter what circumstances we are living in, God is still at work, calling faithful people to listen, to learn, to resist when necessary, and to keep caring for the most vulnerable. God's vision is working all around us; let us pray that it will also work through us.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Generous God, we give you thanks today for your many gifts at work in our community. We do not all have the same view, but you have provided many talents that we might serve and receive from one another. Thank you for those who use their gifts for the benefit of others. Thank you for encouragers, for generous givers, for diligent leaders, for compassionate listeners, and for essential workers. Thank you for those able and willing to bake and cook, build and paint, sing and teach, mow and garden; for those who send cards and make phone calls. Thank you for elders and children and all ages in between. And thank you for the spirit of Christ who calls us to live and work together in harmony.

God of salvation, bring freedom to those who are oppressed and enslaved in our world. As you brought forth Moses to lead your people out of slavery and to the promised land, call out leaders to help wherever people are denied their freedom.

God of grace and mercy, hear our prayers for those in need. We long for your peace and pray for all in harm's way. We pray for the hungry and homeless, for the sick and the dying, for the confused and hopeless, for those in prison, and those imprisoned by addiction. We pray for those who are victims of circumstances that are out of their control: for victims of violence and domestic violence, for those whose lives have been devastated by storms and wildfires.

Holy God, help us to reach out in compassion and caring so that your love may be offered to those who are unmoored from their security; guide us to follow, more and more, in the way of Jesus. And hear us as we say the prayer he taught us:

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

debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Hymn

Choir

“My Hope Is Built On Nothing Less” verses 1, 2, 3 #369 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Offering

Friends, scripture teaches us not independence, but interdependence. These times have reminded us that none of us can live all on our own. We are partners in making sure we all get through this difficulty, and to the other side. We are strengthened in supporting each other. We share our gifts so we all get what we need. Let us combine our offerings to do Christ’s mission in the world.

We give thanks for our many gifts. Churches depend on the generosity of members and friends to support their ministries. If you are able to mail in an offering, or give online at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>, we are grateful. If all you can do is offer prayers for the church, we love you for that gift. Whether it’s money, time, attention, a phone call, a text, an e-mail, a smile, a decoration in your window or yard – there are so many ways we can reach out to others and know we are not alone. We are blessed to be able to connect to one another and to love one another. We are in this together. Thank you for your generous giving!

Song of Praise

Ryan Dwyer

These are probably the most-sung lines in the last 300 years, so here are both the traditional words, and another variation:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above, you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

To God, all glorious heavenly Light,
to Christ revealed in earthly night,
to God the Spirit now we raise
our joyful songs of thankful praise.

Benediction and Blessing

Hear again these words from St. Paul, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” Go into this week, trusting that God’s transforming power is at work in your lives. And may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope, both this day and always. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

May the good Lord bless and keep you, whether near or far away,
May you find that long awaited golden day today.
May your troubles all be small ones, and your fortunes ten times ten,
May the good Lord bless and keep you ‘til we meet again.

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

“Rock of Ages”