

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for the Seventh Sunday After Pentecost
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
July 11, 2021
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

“Sonatina, Andante” by Clementi

Ryan Dwyer

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church!

Call to Worship

from Psalms 24 and 46

The world belongs to God, the earth and all its people. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Hymn

“Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty” #482 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Choir

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendor of creation and in the beauty of human life. Touched by your hand, our world is holy. Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us, to share our blessings with our sisters and brothers, and to experience the joy of life in your presence. Free us from the belief that our security rests in material things rather than your spiritual blessings. In your grace and mercy let us be inspired and challenged to live up to our high calling as those who share ministry with your son, our Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Dear friends in Christ, God’s love and mercy surround us always. We are embraced by a love that has no boundaries, and offers us a new beginning, so we are free to share that love with the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Epistle Lesson Ephesians 1:3-14

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹ he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹ In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who

accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹² so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³ In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Kids' Time

For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about how the Bible says we are adopted by God, so we are one big family. There is moss that grows from Oregon to Alaska, and it has the same DNA, so it is one family helping provide water for plants, insects, and animals, for over 2,500 miles. God has put us into families so we can help the people and the world around us. We are all connected. Now it's time to see the photos of things that make us smile! {photos.}

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for giving us this beautiful world with so many different kinds of trees and flowers, and gardens and deserts, and mosses and plants, and mountains and oceans, and birds and fish and animals. When we learn more about them, we find out we are all connected. Help us to take care of this world you made, and to appreciate the ways that we are one big family. Help us to always be friends of Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

Gospel Lesson Mark 6:14-29

¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²² When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." ²³ And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." ²⁵ Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶ The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Old Testament Lesson Second Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

¹ David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. ² David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. ³ They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart ⁴ with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. ⁵ David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

¹² So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; ¹³ and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. ¹⁴ David danced before the LORD with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. ¹⁵ So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

¹⁶ As the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷ They brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and offerings of well-being before the LORD. ¹⁸ When David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the offerings of well-being, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts, ¹⁹ and distributed food among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people went back to their homes.

Sermon

We live in a time where media dominates everything in our world. Our lives are filled to overflowing with words and images from television, and computers, and tablets, and phones. There are screens everywhere – from doctors' offices, to car washes, to the back of airplane seats. It's been said that each of us now lives our lives as though we were the star of our own movie. The music we remember from particular events is called the soundtrack to our lives. But if we are the stars, who is it that we are performing for?

Who is the audience, watching our individual story unfold? Who is it we seek to please? For most of us the first audience we have is our parents. They watch our every move: our first tooth, our first steps, our first words. As we grow up, we still look to please them; I'll never forget my sister's first ballet recital, when she was about four years old. Her class came on stage to perform their dance, and as soon as she saw us, her family, sitting in the second row, she immediately left her place and rushed to the edge of the stage to tell us that she was going to be a flower in the next number. Keeping her class and her teacher happy, by staying in line, was not nearly as important to her as pleasing her parents.

Most of us as we get to our teen-age years decide pleasing our friends is far more important than making our parents happy. We would rather do anything than be seen in public with one of our parents, and we try to keep them from seeing what we're

doing with our friends, most of the time. Our peers become the audience we focus on when we're teenagers. Later on as adults, we realize that our children are watching us, watching what we say and how we live, and so we often try to set an example for them to follow. The audience we have, the audience we are playing to, affects the performance we give – in other words, how we act depends on who we think is watching us.

Two of our scripture lessons today are about performances: both happen to be about dancing. Many of you know that I grew up in Alabama, part of the Bible belt, where many of my more conservative Christian brothers and sisters, at that time, strongly believed that dancing was a sin. I knew many Southern Baptist and Church of Christ kids who could explain why drinking, smoking, swearing, and dancing were all part of the same immoral behavior. And though I never quite understood their reasoning, I realize that today's gospel lesson could be used as an argument to support their position against dancing: because Herod's daughter danced, and John the Baptist got his head cut off. I can see where that would give dancing a bad name.

In the Old Testament lesson, we heard about David dancing as the ark of the covenant was brought to its new home in Jerusalem. In the verses we did not hear, at the end of the story, one of David's wives, Michal, came to him to ask why he had been dancing; as we heard, she had been watching him out of the window, and she said to him that what he had done was vulgar. Maybe there was a little bit of the conservative Christian element in her, even back then.

David defended himself against her accusations that he had acted improperly: "I danced before the Lord," he told her. The text tells us that he "danced before the Lord with all his might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals, with leaping and shouting and the sound of a trumpet." This was clearly not a quiet, low-key event. David pulled out all the stops as he celebrated the arrival of the ark. He danced and sang with self-abandonment, because Jerusalem was now going to be the center for all worship. With all of the excess of this event, and even with the criticism from Michal, we do not have the sense that David's dancing was inappropriate.

This is in contrast to the dance of Herod's daughter, which sounds completely inappropriate. And the main difference, I think, is not the style or type of dance, the difference is the audience. David's dance was meant for God – to celebrate a wonderful event of worship. The dance of Herod's daughter was meant for the king and his officers – clearly a dance to entertain and captivate them, with no thought for God or any higher joy. And, in fact, the dance worked: when she was done Herod thought only of his own pleasure and the power he could use to show off; he offered to do anything that the daughter asked him to do – including murdering a holy man, a man, the scripture says, that Herod respected and even protected.

The dance of Herod's daughter is tainted because it is meant simply for the pleasure of his cronies. The dance of David is not vulgar, he says, because it is meant for the pleasure of God. And isn't this still true today?

The gifts we are given we can use for the pleasure and glory of God, or we can cheapen them by using them simply for basest form of entertainment, for the number of "likes" or the numbers of "retweets." We always have a choice; we always have to decide who is the audience we are performing for.

We know our families and friends watch us, and with social media there are lots

of other followers who can tune in and see what we are sharing, but I wonder if we remember that God is watching us too?

That does not mean there should be no laughter or joy or pleasure in what we do. Sometimes I wonder if we are too often like David's wife, believing that God wants us only to be solemn and quiet in our living and in our worship for God. I have been so blessed to travel to other places, and it has been amazing to worship in other countries, where it is expected that everyone in the church will stand up to sing and clap and dance – in Ghana, everyone dances up the aisle to bring their offering to the altar.

All the churches I've been part of in my growing up years and as an adult live up to the old saying about being "the frozen chosen." Most of our churches train us to leave all evidence of love, of passion, of joy outside the church doors. As though God did not create them. As though God does not delight in the abandonment we show as young children, when we can still run to the edge of the stage, to call out our excitement over what we are doing and what is about to happen; to dance with no more thought than it will make our parents happy.

We been through a terrible time of uncertainty and fear and isolation through this pandemic. It is hard to remember that God does not expect us to be in that place forever. We are so lucky or fortunate or blessed to be living in a place where the numbers are low. When I look at the numbers every day and see the downward slope of those graphs which are almost back to zero right now, I feel like dancing and singing to the Lord in gratitude. We do not know how long we will be in this place of low numbers. We do not know how long it may last, which is why it feels all the more important to celebrate while we can. Remember some of Jesus' critics asked why Jesus and his disciples ate and drank and celebrated life, and Jesus said it is not appropriate to mourn at a wedding. The days will come when the circumstances of life turn again, but all of life is not meant to be lived in solemnity or worry.

David danced before the Lord with all his might, knowing that God was the only one in the audience who mattered.

The 20th-century monk, Thomas Merton, said it this way:

What is serious to mortals is often very trivial in the sight of God, and what in God might appear to us as "play" is perhaps what God takes most seriously. If we could let go of our own obsession with what we think is the meaning of it all, we might be able to hear God's call and follow God in the mysterious, cosmic dance. For the world and time are the dance of the Lord, and we cannot alter the reality of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not. The fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance.¹

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

Song
"Holy Ground" by Davis

Choir

Pastoral Prayer

O God, in the spirit of hope, and trust, and thanksgiving, we join with you to offer up our prayers for the world, and the church, and our community. We are grateful for all the blessings we can name. When we take the time to count them, we are overwhelmed by your grace. We pray that our blessings will make us humble to keep our hearts open, so they may live in your peace and your goodness.

We pray with you for the difficult realities of this world: we pray for governments and the leaders of governments that they may care for all your children, we pray for places struggling with conflict and warfare; we pray for people caught up in racial and religious hatreds; we pray for those in poverty; we pray for situations of injustice. We pray for the victims of violence of any kind, whether it is combat, or crime, or domestic violence. We pray that our sorrows may be transformed by your vision, that in all of these places, they may grow into conditions that bring renewed life.

We pray for the difficulties of the Christian Church: for its loss of identity; for the failures of its leaders; for anxiety about its future. May all our concerns be transformed into glimpses of your vision, and a renewal of compassionate and deeper faith.

We pray for the difficulties of our community: for those who are sick; for those who are lonely; for those who are filled with worries; for those who are mourning; for those who are hungry; for those whose lives are clouded by addiction, or depression, or imprisonment; for those who are seeking meaningful work. May all brokenness be transformed by our active care and participation in your healing presence.

Point us, O God, towards actions, however small they may seem, that lead to a more hopeful future for ourselves and your world. Help us to follow in the way of Jesus.

As we seek to be Jesus' faithful disciples, 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

"Amazing Grace" #280 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Offering

Friends in Christ, hear the words of scripture: Give generously, for your gifts will return to you later (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

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 our church website <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>, we are grateful for your financial support. July is a month with extra expenses since quarterly payroll taxes are due, so if you haven't given in a while or are in a position to give a little extra, this is a good time to do that. If all you can offer are your prayers, please know how much we love you for the gift of that spiritual support. We are blessed to do God's work in a broken world. Thank you so much 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.

Praise God who loves us, great and small
Praise God who hears our faintest call
The Sovereign Lamb redeemed the fall
Praise God the Savior, Lord of all.

Benediction and Blessing

Friends in Christ, We have been adopted in the family of God, and blessed with every spiritual blessing. So go forth in grace, holy and blameless, to share God's love with the world. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

"May God's Blessing Surround You" by Barrows

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

"Sonatina, Andante" by Clementi

Sermon Note:

¹ Thomas Merton, "New Seeds of Contemplation," Copyright 1961 by the Abbey of Gethsemani, Inc.; reissued 2007 as New Directions Paperbook, p. 297.