

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for the Eighth Sunday After Pentecost
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
July 18, 2021
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church. A couple of announcements before we begin.

First, thank you to everyone who supported our summer chicken and rib BBQ – even though we had some leftovers, everything was sold by the next day, and we thank everyone for being part of the effort!

Second, next week we begin our annual joint summer worship services with First United Methodist Church next week. On July 25 and August 1, we all be worshipping at the Methodist Church. They have a traditional service at 9:30 a.m. and a contemporary service at 11:00 a.m., with coffee hour in between. The Rev. Holly Cameron will be leading both services for those two Sundays. The Methodist Church live-streams their Sunday services on their FaceBook page, so if you cannot join us in person, you can see the service live, or catch the recording later.

Then August 8 and 15, we will all be worshipping at New Scotland Presbyterian at 10:00 a.m., and Methodist Pastor Quincie Yamin will be leading worship on those two Sundays. We are looking forward to worshipping with our friends and neighbors!

Call to Worship

Colossians 3:17

Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Hymn

Choir

“From All That Dwell Below the Skies” #229 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Opening Prayer

God of grace, we love you with our prayers and our songs, but we do not always show that love in our words or actions. You have called us to care for your people around the world, to share what we have, and to reflect your love. Forgive us, O Lord, when our love for you is shallow, when our love for our neighbors is empty, and when our love for ourselves cannot be found. Redeem us, O God, with the same power that raised Jesus from the tomb. Make us one humanity, at peace with ourselves, with each other, and with you. Bless us with your mercies that we may know your steadfast love, and share that love with the world. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Dear friends in Christ, wherever we have gone, God has been with us, and God continues to go before us in wisdom and truth. God’s love and mercy surround us always, and offer us a new beginning. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Epistle Lesson Ephesians 2:11-22

¹¹ So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the uncircumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—¹² remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵ He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Kids' Time

For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about how sometimes we don't like what is happening and want to be far from God, and sometimes even if we want to be close to God, it can feel like God is far from us. The scripture promises that even if we have been far from God, the love of Christ is always beckoning us and drawing us closer to God, so that God can embrace us and surround us with love. Now it's time to see the photos of things that make us smile! {photos.} For the next six weeks we will be having joint worship services and guest worship leaders, so we will not be recording worship. Thanks to everyone who has sent in photos for the last 16 months, as well as to our choir for their musical gifts, and Brenda for providing flowers for the pulpit, and to Kat who filmed and edited and uploaded all our video worship services!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for loving us so much that you are always calling to us, and wanting us to be closer to you. Help us to hear your words and your whispers to us, so that we may feel you close to us, and follow in the way Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson Second Samuel 7:1-14a

¹ Now when the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ² the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” ³ Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you.”

⁴ But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵ Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶ I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷ Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the

tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"⁸ Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel;⁹ and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth.¹⁰ And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly,¹¹ from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house.¹² When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.¹⁴ I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

Gospel Lesson Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.³¹ He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them.³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat.⁵⁴ When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him,⁵⁵ and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.⁵⁶ And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Sermon

I wonder how we, who are in the habit of worshiping every Sunday, think about God, how we experience God, how we relate to God. When we come for worship, is it because we feel connected to a church, or is it because we feel connected to God?

I grew up as a faithful church-goer, went to Sunday School, sang in the choir, was part of the youth group. Even when I went away to college, I found a church and got involved in the student group there. But in all those years of church I'm not sure I ever thought of myself then as being in a relationship with God.

In my first year of divinity school, I took a class on prayer where the professor kept instructing us about "going within" to pray. And I did not have any idea what he was talking about. Fortunately, I had a good friend in the class who felt the same way. Our conversations went something like this: "What does he mean 'going inside ourselves' to find God?" we would complain to one another. "God isn't inside, God is out there!" And the other one would say, "Yeah; I know. When I pray, I know who I'm praying to: a big, old man in the sky. Out there!" We were clear on how we related to

God: we addressed God when we were either really happy – “Thank you, God, for this wonderful thing!” or really miserable – “Please, God, please, please make this thing better!” Today’s scripture passages remind us that God’s people have often related to God in just those ways.

The Old Testament lesson is part of the series of stories about David’s progression in becoming the king of Israel. He first became known when he slayed the Philistine giant, Goliath, and then grew in popularity as he continued to be a successful warrior. He conquered so many enemies that Israel declared that he must be chosen by God, and so they crowned him as their king. Last week, we hear of David bringing the Ark of the Covenant, which holds the tablets of the Ten Commandments, into Jerusalem. This week, he declares that he will replace the tent that has always sheltered the ark, and build God a house.

Things had been going well for David and he was feeling great – so great that he wanted to say, “Thank you, God, for these wonderful things.” David’s way of saying ‘thank you’ was to build a house where God could live. God, of course, declined the offer. I wonder if David even realized exactly what he was proposing, if he was conscious of his desire to sort of lock God up – if David built a house for God, then David would always know where to go to find God, because that’s where God would live. God would be confined to that house. God told Nathan to remind David that God had been with the chosen people no matter where they had traveled: through 40 years of desert wanderings, and in all their battles against their enemies, wherever they found themselves, God had been right there with them.

In the gospel lesson, we see people on the other end of the spectrum. They were needy, they wanted someone to help them in their troubles. Jesus and his disciples had been teaching and healing throughout the countryside; and the disciples had just returned from their mission where Jesus had sent them out two-by-two to teach and heal. They had been very successful offering their ministries, and were coming back together to be with one another. Jesus suggested they needed to go off by themselves to rest and recover from all their hard work. But they had become so popular that everywhere they went, they were followed by crowds of people. So, Jesus got them into a boat to cross the lake and get away from the crowd, but the crowds saw where they were headed, ran around the shoreline, and actually beat them to the other side. When the boat got to the shore, there was still a crowd of people waiting for Jesus and his disciples.

The crowds were in that desperate place of, “Please, God, please, please make this better!” They were in need, and so Jesus had compassion for them; he stayed with them and taught them and healed them. And he even fed them – in the verses that were skipped in today’s reading, Jesus took the loaves and fish and fed five thousand hungry people. In his compassion, he stayed with people, wherever they needed him.

I am fascinated by the consistency between these two stories: God is with the people wherever they need God to be. God reminded Nathan: I have been with my people through all of their wanderings. And Jesus had compassion on the crowds; no matter how they interfered with his plans, he stayed and ministered to them until they were ready to go back home.

So, here we have this Old Testament story of God saying, “I’ve always been with you,” and this New Testament story of Jesus being with people and staying with them.

So, I'm not sure how I got through my whole childhood and young adulthood going to church and hearing about God, and hearing these very stories, but still believing that God was somewhere "out there" removed from me and my life, when so much of the Bible tells us how God is right here with us, no matter where we are.

Certainly God's people have always had a tendency to try to lock God up, to confine God to one place. There's a strong desire in us that wants to know where God is so that we have some control: we can get to God, if we need to, but otherwise we can go about our daily lives, taking care of ourselves. And when things are going well, we might remember to call out as we pass that separate place where God lives, "Thank you, God."

But throughout the Bible and all history, God has been calling us away from just relating to God as something separate from us, and calling us to be into relationship with God. Calling us into a relationship where we recognize that God is with us, all the time—yes, when we're really happy, and yes, when we're really miserable, but even through all the mundane stuff in between. God calls us to be in a relationship like when we first fall in love, and want to spend all of our time just being with that person; God calls us to be in a relationship like when we have our first child, and want to spend all of our time staring at that fascinating new life.

As Christians, we say we want to follow the Spirit of God, the one that helps us see the beauty and love that is in the world. But we also are soaked in messages to follow the ways of the world – the message that say we have to do more, be more, work more, try harder, take care of ourselves.

Jesus knew this struggle of human life; he was followed wherever he went, and there were always more people who needed to be healed of one thing or another. Jesus is talking to all of us who seem to have no time to think, to meditate, to ponder, to wonder, to pay attention, to pray—he is talking to us when he says, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."

I have been fortunate enough to go on retreat in the desert, and it is a place that offers the opportunity to listen deep within. There is no noise besides the wind, no presence besides the spirit, no company besides the plants and a few animals.

In the desert there is a chance to see what is really happening in our hearts – whether they are filled with peace or fear. In the desert you can hear the words in your own head, you can hear the silence you create, you can be aware of the movements of your own body.

Jesus calls us to deserted places, to desert places, so we can know ourselves, for when we know ourselves, then we know what God means for us to do in the world.

One professor at Union Seminary says: the world is in such a precarious situation that we need constant movement in and out of the desert, which we do by our spiritual practices. Our work as Christians in the world is fundamental to the lives of those who are the least of these: the sick, the homeless, the beggars, the poor, and the very earth. Agribusiness has taken the land and destroyed its variety to raise only one plant or one animal; the sea is full of plastic and garbage, and overfishing depletes the variety of life of the oceans.

We need the fruits that come from time alone with God, if we are to truly minister to the places most in need.

We have much to do, Jesus says; and we see how much he did. But, he also

knew he needed times to stop, and so he would go away to those deserted places to discover again what God was saying.

As people of God, we are called to discern the spirit of our times to see where the Spirit of God lives in us and around us. We are called to listen for what the Spirit is asking us to do. If we do not have daily spiritual practices, of stepping back from the world – by reading scripture, journaling our thoughts, going for a walk, praying, sitting in silence – if we do not have moments where we pause and stand alone with God, we cannot do what God needs us to do, and we cannot be all that God calls us to be.

I read once that, “a heart without action is ineffective, and an action without heart is empty. Jesus calls us to have a compassionate heart and to do actions of justice.”

The scriptures remind us that God is always with us. God is waiting for us to recognize that there are no walls between us, and there are no walls we can build between us. If we take time to be drawn into the deserted places, to be rooted in scripture and prayer and listening for God, we, too, can across the lake, and see where God is headed and run ahead and get there first, where God will meet us again ready to talk to us, to feed us, and to heal whatever needs we have. No matter where we are in our lives, God is always there.

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

Song

Choir

“May Your Kingdom Come” by Dearman

Pastoral Prayer

God of all life, we give you thanks for the bounty and beauty of this world. We give thanks for the long days of the summer season, and for the delicious variety of fruits and vegetables and flowers and plants. We give thanks for celebrations of birthdays and anniversaries and graduations and reunions. We give thanks for the rains that support all of life, and for everything that brings joy and light to our hearts.

O God, you taught us to pray not only for ourselves but for your world and for people everywhere. We pray for your church around the world, that we may be inspired with your power, unity, and peace. May all who trust you obey your Word, and live together in love.

We pray that you will lead all nations in the way of justice and goodwill. Direct those who govern to rule fairly, maintain order, uphold those in need, and defend oppressed people; that this world may claim your rule and know true peace.

We pray that you will awaken all people to the danger we have inflicted upon the earth. Implant in each one a reverence for all you have made that we may preserve the delicate balance of creation for all coming generations.

Comfort and relieve, O Lord, all who are in trouble: those who suffer with sorrow, or poverty, or sickness, or worry, or loneliness, or grief. We pray for those who have been hurt by the violence of nature, or the violence of people. Bring healing in body, mind, or circumstance, working in all, by your grace, wonders beyond all we may dream or hope.

Give us, who long to live in your Way, faithfulness and courage that we may offer your hope to all the people we meet. Point us, O God, towards actions, however small they may seem, that lead to joy and peace.

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

"I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say"

Offering

Friends in Christ, hear the words of scripture: the one who sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will reap bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6).

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

Benediction and Blessing

Friends in Christ, Go in peace to love the Lord your God with heart soul mind and strength. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

"May God's Blessing Surround You" by Barrows

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer