

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for the Sixth Sunday After Pentecost
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
July 4, 2021
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

“America the Beautiful” by Ward

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church. There are a couple of announcements before we begin.

First, we have our summer chicken and rib BBQ coming up on Tuesday, July 13. The dinner is take-out only, and you can come pick up your dinner here at the church from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. that day. Chicken dinners are \$14, and rib dinners are \$15. You can place your order now by going to our website, www.newscotlandpc.com and filling out the form there. If you would rather avoid the computer, place your order by calling the church office, 518-439-6454, and we will call you back to confirm your order.

If you can volunteer to work the event, please be in touch with John Griffin, who is co-ordinating, so he knows there are enough volunteers.

We also have flyers that can be posted around town or given to your neighbors, just stop and pick them up from the table in the church lobby.

Second, since it is the first Sunday of the month, we will be celebrating communion in this service, and you are invited to gather elements so you can participate at home. Jesus sat at a dinner table with his friends, and used elements common to them: bread and wine. You are invited to use elements that are common to your table – bread or cracker or chip; and juice or wine or other drink, even water will do. You might set these on a special cloth and include a candle or flower or something to indicate you are welcoming a guest to the table. You may add a photo of someone you love to be part of the circle. Take a moment, if you haven't already, to gather those elements.

Call to Worship

from Luke 8:15

Blessed are those who hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and produce fruit with patience and perseverance.

Hymn

Choir

“Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” #281 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Opening Prayer

Holy God, we confess that we do not always want to hear what you have to say. We are quick to rebuke, and we are easily offended. We fail to believe in your promises, and trust in our own wisdom rather than in yours. Forgive us, and help us to follow you, for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Dear friends in Christ, our God invites us, over and over, to turn away from the slick words and quick fixes of our culture and turn instead to the everlasting Word that provides real answers, and real security, and real peace. The love of God enlightens our darkness, heals our brokenness, and offers us a new beginning. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Gospel Lesson Mark 6:1-13

¹ He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house." ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Kids' Time

For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about how Jesus sent his disciples out with no supplies and told them to trust God that people would be welcoming and help them get what they need. We can remember that we do not always have to take care of everything ourselves, but we can trust God to provide for us, and we can be welcoming when God sends other people to us. Now it's time to see the photos of things that make us smile! {photos.}

Prayer: Dear God sometimes it feels like I have to do everything all on my own, and I have to take care of myself by myself. Help us to remember that you have given us family and friends so that we do not have to be alone, and that there are friends for us that we haven't even met yet. Help us to trust you and to be welcoming to others. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Epistle Lesson Second Corinthians 12:2-10

² I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. ³ And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—⁴ was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat. ⁵ On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will

not boast, except of my weaknesses. ⁶ But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me, ⁷ even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. ⁸ Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, ⁹ but he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. ¹⁰ Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Sermon

Imagine standing before a great gathering of sophisticated and wise people, and being asked to make a speech about goodness, beauty, the meaning of life, the point of history, and the nature of Almighty God – and the only material you have at your disposal is an account of a humiliating, bloody execution at a garbage dump outside a rebellious city in the Middle East. It is your task to argue that this unappealing story is the key to everything in life, and to everything we know about God.¹

This was Paul’s task when he was in the city of Corinth. To the population of this worldly, cosmopolitan city of the Empire, Paul had to proclaim that this whipped, bloodied, scorned, and convicted Jewish man from Nazareth, was God-With-Us.

As Paul said, he had his work cut out for him because preaching about the cross “is folly to those who are perishing;” it is foolishness and stupidity. A cross is no way for a Messiah to save the world. Yet, Paul was clear that there was no other message, because, whether it makes sense to us or not, “it pleased God through the folly of what we preach, to save those who believe” (1 Cor 1:18, 21).

Because the message sounds foolish, Paul says that he preached in a way that was foolish. When he came to the city, he did not talk about God with lofty words, or deep pronouncements. Rather, he says, “I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” In his weakness and fear, Paul showed these worldly city-dwellers that the faith he lived was not based “in the wisdom of [humanity], but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:1-5).

Paul says he talks the way he talks, and lives the way he lives, not based on the ways of human society, but based on what he has discovered about God. God has come as a crucified Messiah.

In today’s language, we would say a “crucified Messiah” is an oxymoron. The Messiah is one who comes to save people, to overthrow the inadequate governments that we have now, to crush the nations that are trying to take over the world, to set everything right so that peace and justice come to the whole earth. If your Messiah gets crucified, then, by definition, he is not the Messiah.

Paul knew that a crucified Messiah made no sense to anyone. But, rather than avoiding the scandal of the cross, or attempting to sugar-coat its absurdity to make it more palatable, Paul made his speeches through “weakness,” “fear and trembling” – not a great stance for a public speaker.

Paul spoke of foolish things in a foolish way, so that, if people were convinced, it would be only by “the power of God.” Paul talked the way he talked, and walked the way he walked, so that nothing happened by his human power, but everything happened by God’s power.

For God the Father to allow God the Son to be crucified, dead, and buried, means God is pushed out beyond the limits of human expectation or human help – pushed out beyond human expectation, because none of us expect a savior who gets himself killed; and pushed out beyond human help because hanging from the cross, in humiliation and utter defeat, and death, there is nothing we humans can do to change it. There is nothing to make the story of Jesus come out right, except the power of God.

Paul says, forget human reason, common sense, or clever arguments; if you are to believe this unbelievable story, it will be because the power of God opens your heart to hear the truth in the absurdity. He says, “we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the [faithful] and foolishness to [unbelievers], but to those who are called, Christ [shows] the power of God and [and is] the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor 1:23-25).

And then Paul talks about his “thorn in the flesh.” We do not know exactly what his disability was. But Paul says he labored with this physical problem for a long time. He prayed to be delivered from it. But he was not. He was forced to bear his physical burden without relief – just as Jesus bore his cross without relief.

Paul’s unrelieved “thorn in the flesh” is a challenge to many contemporary presentations of the Christian faith. The most popular Christian preachers say that, if we decide to live a life of faith, then everything will get better. We will be happier, our marriages will improve, our kids will straighten up, we will get better jobs, a secure retirement, and, in general, just be more successful in life.

I don’t know why we cling to this idea that God is like a big boss in the sky, handing out favors to his pets. But, it is still popular.

Some years ago, I attended the Albany Prayer Breakfast, where the speaker was Ruth Graham, daughter of the famous evangelist, Billy Graham. Now, if God were handing out favors, don’t you think Billy Graham and his family would be near the head of the line? Yet Ruth talked about the fact that in her life she had to deal with her husband’s infidelities, two divorces, a daughter with two unplanned pregnancies, another daughter with bulimia, a son with a drug addiction, and many other difficulties.

Paul’s testimony tells us straight out: faith in Jesus sometimes delivers us from our sufferings – and sometimes does not. Just as Paul dealt with his thorn in the flesh, he tells us that, sometimes, Jesus does not protect us from our pain, but instead gives us a way through the pain.

Paul says he prayed three times to be delivered from his “thorn in the flesh” but he was not (2 Cor 12:8). And through it all he learned a great truth – that God does not take away all of our pain, rather, God gives power in weakness, strength in difficulty, and love in the midst of suffering.

A crucified God is known not only for what God does, but also for what God does not do. A crucified God does not always deliver us from our times of pain, but stands with us in our pain. No matter how severe our “thorn in the flesh,” our crucified God has been there before and meets us there. So we are able to say, not that we have been unburdened, but that we have discovered the same truth that Paul knew.

Paul would have a difficult time in our contemporary mega-churches, where Christian faith is presented as a technique for us to get more of what we want. Paul's message about the cross says that Jesus Christ, our crucified Messiah, is not about our getting what we want, but about God getting what God wants. The truth of our God is that even in the midst of our pain, our difficulties, and our disappointment God promises us: "my grace is sufficient for you; my power is made perfect in weakness" (12:9).

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

Song

Choir

"The Battle Hymn of the Republic" by Howe

Pastoral Prayer

God our creator, you made all things in your wisdom, and in your love you give us life. We pray for the whole creation, and ask that you will overthrow evil powers, right what is wrong, feed and satisfy those who long for justice, so that all living beings may freely enjoy the earth you have made, and joyfully sing your praises.

Eternal God, you sent us a Savior, Christ Jesus, to break down the walls of hostility that divide us. Send peace on earth, and put down greed, pride, and anger, which turn nation against nation and neighbor against neighbor. Hasten the day when conflicts and battles will end. Remove all hate, and suspicion, and prejudice from us and from all people, so that we may be reconciled with those we fear, resent, or threaten; and live together in your peace.

Merciful God, you bear the pain of the world. Look with compassion on those who are sick or suffering, or full of sorrow; comfort them by your presence, and give them your healing. Lift up the depressed, soothe the grieving, calm the anxious, stand with all victims of abuse, awaken those who hurt themselves and others through the use of any drug, befriend those who are lost or locked away. Keep us faithful, O God, that we may reach out to any who are in need.

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.

Communion

Today we celebrate the Lord's Supper with elements we have prepared. In this sacrament, we invite the Lord to all our tables, and he becomes our host, so, no matter where we are, we are all gathered at the Lord's Table. He feeds everyone who is hungry, so all are welcome at this meal.

The Great Thanksgiving

Let us lift our hearts to the Lord, and offer our thanks and praise. Let us pray.

It is truly right and our greatest joy to give you thanks and praise, eternal God, creator and ruler of the universe. At your word the earth was made and spun on its course among the planets. Your hand formed us from the dust of the earth and, by your Holy Spirit, you breathed life into the human form. You set us among all your creatures to love and serve you.

When we were unfaithful to you, you kept faith with us, your love remained steadfast. You promised yourself in covenant with Abraham and Sarah, told us your purpose in commandments through Moses, and called for justice in the cry of the prophets. In the fullness of time, you sent your Son to live among us, sharing our joy and sorrow.

Therefore, we praise you, joining our voices with angels and archangels, and with all the faithful of every time and place, who forever sing to the glory of your name:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest, hosanna in the highest.**

You are holy, O God of majesty, and blessed is Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. He came with healing in his touch, and was wounded because of our sins. He came with mercy in his voice, and was mocked as one despised. He came with peace in his heart, and was met with violence and death.

By your power he broke free from the prison of the tomb. He is risen to rule the world, and is still the friend of sinners.

Remembering your mighty and merciful acts, we take our bread and our cups, from the gifts you have given us, and celebrate with joy the redemption won for us in Jesus Christ. With thanksgiving we offer our praise, and we offer our very selves to you, to be a living and holy sacrifice, dedicated to your service. Great is the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.**

Gracious God, pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon your gifts, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be the communion of the body and blood of Christ. By your Spirit make us one with Christ that we may be one with all who share this feast, united in ministry in every place. As this bread is Christ's body for us, send us out to be the body of Christ in the world.

Help us, O God, to recognize our Lord in the breaking of bread, and to see and serve him in all whose lives are broken. Give us, who are fed at his hand, grace to share our bread with the hungry, and with the hungry of heart. Keep us faithful in your service until Christ comes in final victory, and we shall feast with all your saints in the joy of your eternal realm.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory, praise, and honor are yours, eternal God, now and forever.

Amen, amen, amen.

Breaking the Bread

{Break your bread as these words are said.}

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, sat with his friends at a dinner table. He took bread, blessed it, and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

{Pour your drink into a cup, or, if already in a cup, lift the cup as these words are said.}

In the same way he took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, which is poured out for you, and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

{Lift up the bread and cup.}

These are the gifts of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Take; eat the bread of heaven, and drink and the cup of new life.

Prayer After Communion

God of grace, you renew us at your table with the bread of life. May you strengthen us in love, and help us to serve you in one other. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Hymn

Choir

"Just a Closer Walk with Thee"

Offering

Friends in Christ, let us be part of the great hope of God for the world, living and giving in generosity and faithfulness.

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 Christ, all creatures here below;
Praise Holy Spirit, Comforter;
One God, Triune, whom we adore.

Benediction and Blessing

Friends in Christ, God says, "I am sending you out in love. My love is the only treasure you need. So, spread that love in your speaking, and show that love in your living. Color this world with my love." So, go into the world that God loves, believing that changes for good are possible. And may the love of God go with you, and all those whom you love, both this day and always. Amen.

Choral Benediction

"May God's Blessing Surround You" by Barrows

Choir

Postlude

"America the Beautiful" by Ward

Ryan Dwyer

Sermon Note

¹ Much of this sermon is from the writing of the Rev. William Willimon, in Pulpit Resource, Vol. 40, No. 3, July 8, 2012.