

New Scotland Presbyterian Church
Worship for the Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost
(video link at <https://www.newscotlandpc.com/>)
October 25, 2020
The Rev. Holly S. Cameron

Prelude

Ryan Dwyer

“Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me”

Introduction

Welcome to worship at New Scotland Presbyterian Church. The flowers on the pulpit are given to the glory of God by the Dwyers. Thank you!

Call to Worship

John 14:23

Jesus said: Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.

Hymn

Choir

“Come Sing, O Church, with Joy!” #430 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Opening Prayer

O God, who alone can probe the depths of the human heart, send your Holy Spirit to rule and direct us according to your will, to comfort us in all our temptations and afflictions, to defend us from all error, and to lead us into all truth. Make us steadfast in faith, so we may increase in love and in all good works. Grant us the gift of humility so we may see our own faults clearly and refrain from judging our neighbor. Free us from the fears of the world that we may pass our time in trust and quietness. Forgive us, God of mercy, when we live only for ourselves and apart from you. Show us again how we can be agents of your love, and give us strength and courage to walk in your way so that we may know the joy of being a faithful disciple. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Beloved in Christ: Through the eyes of grace, God sees all that is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable in us. Let us accept God’s forgiveness, so that we may be free to live into God’s vision. Amen.

Old Testament Lesson Deuteronomy 34:1-12

¹ Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, ² all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, ³ the Negeb, and the Plain—that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar. ⁴ The LORD said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants’; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.” ⁵ Then Moses, the servant of the LORD, died there in the land of Moab, at the LORD’s command. ⁶ He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. ⁷ Moses was one hundred twenty years old when he died; his sight was

unimpaired and his vigor had not abated. ⁸ The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

⁹ Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses.

¹⁰ Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. ¹¹ He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, ¹² and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Kids' Time

For those unable to see the video, the children's sermon is about how when autumn arrives and the chlorophyll recedes, we see the true colors of the trees. When people get in difficult situations, we often see their "true colors" in how they respond. 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 that you made each one of us with different talents and different ideas so that we are never exactly like anybody else. Help us to find our true colors, so that we will always be a friend to those in need, and always stand up for what is right, and always be happy to be just who you made us to be. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Epistle Lesson First Thessalonians 2:1-8

¹ You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, ² but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. ³ For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, ⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵ As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; ⁶ nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, ⁷ though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. ⁸ So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.

Gospel Lesson Matthew 22:34-46

^{15 34} When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, ³⁵ and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" ³⁷ He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the greatest and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

⁴¹ Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: ⁴² “What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” ⁴³ He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying,

⁴⁴ ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet”’?

⁴⁵ If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” ⁴⁶ No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Sermon

What does a life of faith look like? We come to worship every week, to express our faith, and confirm our faith, and have our faith renewed. We come because our faith is important to us, because we want our faith to be an integral part of our daily lives. And so, as we consider how to live a life of faith, we look to our scriptures for guidance and understanding. But sometimes our Bible stories can seem too remote or too foreign to help us as we struggle with how to live out faith in our own time and circumstance.

Over the past several weeks, we’ve heard stories of the exodus, the call to Moses to free the Hebrew slaves from Egypt, and their subsequent adventures on their desert journey. Those stories show us that Moses lived a life of faith.

Each week we also read an epistle lesson from the books of the New Testament following the gospels. The epistles are letters that were written to early Christian communities, and many were written by Paul. Paul began founding new Christian communities after his conversion on the road to Damascus. In reading these letters, we see that Paul led a life of faith.

Each week we also read from the gospels, which tell us about Jesus, and his life of faith. But reading about Moses, or Paul, or Jesus may not always help us in trying to understand how we can lead a life of faith. After all, most of us are not called to lead a nation through the desert, or to travel around establishing new churches, or to wander the countryside with our friends healing the sick, feeding thousands, teaching from the scriptures, and performing miracles. Reading about other lives of faith is sometimes not all that helpful to us. Because we are not called to the same kinds of lives that they led, we cannot simply model our lives on theirs by doing exactly what they did. We are not called to live Moses’ life, or Paul’s life, or Jesus’ life. Each of us is called to live our own lives. But how do we live our lives faithfully?

The study of scripture is valuable to us, not because it gives us a blueprint on what “a faithful life” should look like, but because it gives us insight into what things were valuable to those who were faithful before us.

The Pharisees were men who took their faith very seriously. They spent their lives living, to the letter, all of the religious laws that had been pronounced over thousands of years. The entire purpose of their faithful lives was to know all the religious laws that existed, and then to obey all of them. They approached Jesus in today’s gospel lesson to ask him what he thinks is the greatest of all the religious laws. The Pharisees in this story are asking the same kinds of questions that we are asking: what does it mean to live a life of faith? In other words, if you are going to live a life of faith, which they were trying to do, then, they ask Jesus, which of the laws should you pay the most attention to, and which one do you want to be sure not to break?

Jesus tells them what some rabbis before him had said: that the greatest commandment is to love God – to love God with all your being: heart, soul, mind, and strength; and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself.

It sounds so basic to us. But Jesus is telling the Pharisees, and telling us, that the most important thing we do to live a life of faith is make sure that we are firmly grounded in our relationship with God. We need to look after that relationship, to make sure that it stays intact and alive. To take time, every day, to talk to God. To take time, every day, to listen for God. To find moments to reflect on the words of scripture, to step out into the world, and notice it and enjoy it and feel ourselves connected, as part of everything that God created. Regardless of what we do, whatever job we have, whatever our family situation is, how many friends we have, a life of faith always begins with our love for God, and a life of faith revolves around that love.

When we read the story of the exodus, we notice there are problems all along the way. The people are hungry, the people are thirsty, the people are sick of manna, the people want a statue to worship, the people are being bitten by snakes, and on it went. But, no matter how many problems came up in the desert, Moses always went to God with the confidence that God would be there. Moses did not always like the people who were constantly complaining, but he served them by going back to God, over and over again.

Paul went to city after city; sometimes he was brought before the authorities, sometimes he got thrown in jail, sometimes he had to sneak out of town in the middle of the night. But, no matter how many dangerous towns Paul came to, he kept his life focused on his relationship with God.

And we know that Jesus was always running afoul of the religious authorities, who did not like what he said and did not like what he did. But, no matter how unhappy those leaders were with Jesus, he kept his life rooted in his relationship with God, going off by himself to spend time alone in prayer.

Moses and Paul and Jesus all had their lives centered around the commandment to love God first, and, out of that love, each of them were led to serve the people around them. Moses found the courage to confront Pharaoh and to lead the people through the desert for forty years. Paul found the courage to continue to establish new churches, even while he was being accused of trickery and thievery, being run out of some communities, and going to prison in others. In the letter we heard this morning, he refers to the fact that he was with the Thessalonians only a short time before he was run out of town by those who did not like his work, or trust his motives. But Paul did not give up on the little community that he hardly had time to know. He wrote them this letter as an expression of love and support. The closing verses of today's reading say that he wanted not just to share the gospel message, but to share his own self with them. Because they had become very dear to him, he says that he feels toward them like a parent with a child. Paul's love for God clearly led him to love his neighbor.

Jesus tells us if we want to be faithful, then we need to do two things: love God, and love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

If we set our goal to love God, we have some good support – we can read the Bible, we can go to worship, we can find inspirational books and speakers, we can spend time in nature – there are so many ways for us to learn about God and learn how to be open to God's love.

But, if we set our goal to love our neighbor, I suspect we find it nearly impossible to do. Because people can seem so annoying. We want to love our neighbor, but we become angry that they are so slow to understand what is so clear to us; we become pessimistic that they never want to improve themselves; we become judgmental that they are focused on all the wrong ways of living; we become callous that they are more interested in their screens than in us.

Last week I said that all of us created by God are stamped with God's image. But we do not seem to always see that image in our neighbors. I've read a few social media posts where one person calls another everything but a child of God.

When we center our lives around the love of God first, we find our neighbors are indeed created in God's image, and that is what makes them lovable – we may not like all our neighbors, but we can love them in a special way, as God's own children. When we grow our roots deeper into God's love, we find that our neighbors do, indeed, have their shortcomings, and they also have their stories of love and pain, joy and sorrow, just like ours. When we see that we are not so different, we find we can love our neighbors in being kind, and respectful, and caring. We can do those things out of the love that God has shown to us.

Living a life of faith cannot be found in simply trying to follow a code of ethics, or doing particular tasks, or keeping a certain set of rules. Faith, Jesus reminds us in today's gospel, is about being in relationship. It is grounded in our devotion to God and our service to our neighbor. It is not about pondering the gospel message, but about sharing ourselves with one another.

With God's help, may we continue to grow deeper into genuine faith, listening always for God's particular call to us, keeping at the center of our lives the most important relationship of all, so that we may be the face of love for a broken world.

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

Song

"God and God Alone"

Choir

Prayers with Our Africa Partners

We share prayers with Westminster in Albany and three churches in Ghana; each month the five churches ask the others to pray for particular circumstances.

Pastoral Prayer

O God, we come to you with so many prayers of thanks. We thank you for air to breathe, water to drink, food to eat, clothes on our backs, roofs over our heads, and a warm place to sleep. We thank you for the colors of the trees, the songs of birds, the gentle flow of rivers, for sunrise and sunset. We thank you for all that is familiar and comforting, but we also thank you for all that is new and challenging. We give you thanks for the times when we are busy and feel useful, and for the times when we are quiet and can rest. We give you thanks for times of good health when we feel strong and capable, and we thank you for the comfort and strength we receive from others when difficulties come our way.

O God, we pray for all who are facing challenges this day: for all that are feeling lonely and isolated in trying to stay safe; for all who struggling with work that may never

come back; for all who put themselves at risk in order to keep their jobs; for all who find themselves drowning in the words of the media with no respite in your Word of hope. We pray for the leaders of cities and states and nations that they may find the ability to work for justice and peace.

We pray for all victims of violence: those who have suffered from natural disasters, those torn apart by crime, those who do not feel safe in their own homes.

O God of Healing, we pray for the sick and the dying, for those who are in mourning, for those who suffer with hunger, homelessness, addiction, mental illness, emotional illness, or spiritual illness. We pray for those who are in prison. And we pray for all those whom we have forgotten, knowing that nothing escapes your tender care.

Help us to live in the way of Jesus Christ. 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

"Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" #367 in the Presbyterian Hymnal

Offering

God invites us to live this life from a place of gratitude and joy. So, let us set aside our worries and fears, and notice all the gifts we have been given. Everything we have is a gift from God, and God asks us to share what we have for the benefit of all creation. So we ask God to open our hearts that we may give generously of our time, our talents, our energy, our efforts, and our money, so that we can be part of Christ's ministry in God's world.

We give thanks for our many gifts. Churches depend on the generosity of members and friends to support their ministries. October is a month with extra expenses because quarterly payroll taxes are due, so if you haven't given a gift in a while, or can give an extra gift, this is a good time to do that. 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. 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.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One.

Benediction and Blessing

As we consider how we will live this week, I invite you to find some time each day to notice the world around you – stand in a field, walk through a garden, smell a flower, touch the dirt, pick up some leaves. Do these things and be reminded that our God is a generous gardener, planting seeds of divine love around the world and in you. Nurture those seeds so that God’s love will blossom in your life. Go with the blessing of God, both this day and always. Amen.

Choral Benediction

Choir

You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,
and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you.
There’ll be shouts of joy and the trees of the field shall clap, shall clap their hands.
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and you’ll go out with joy.

Postlude

Ryan Dwyer

“Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me”