**Worship Service - September 7, 2020**

Musical Selection, Call to Worship

Lord You're welcome into this holy place

Lord You're welcome into this house of praise.

Lord You're righteous, glorious, worthy of our praise

Lord You're welcome into this holy place.

Lord You're welcome into this holy place

Lord You're welcome into this house of praise.

Lord You're righteous, glorious, worthy of our praise

Lord You're welcome into this holy place.

Good morning brothers and sisters. Since we have confidence to enter this most holy place, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through that curtain that is his body, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart, and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, and having our bodies washed in pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the day approaching.

Lord You're welcome into this holy place

Lord You're welcome into this house of praise.

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Henry Cooke IV, Deacon

Wow! God be praised that we’ve got such a wonderful crowd. Two weeks ago, we tried something new and a little different - I think we had 15, 16 people - at the end of which Louise Thompson said, “can we do this next Sunday?!” Well, we didn’t do it next Sunday, but here we are this Sunday, twice as many, twice as strong, with music to boot! And, Pastor MaryLou. [Applause]. On behalf of the deacons of this church, I welcome you! And this is awesome. Wherever you are in your journey, as we say, you always have a home here with us. I remind you that the needs of the church continue. We will be taking offering. The deacons continue to serve the community that we all love by providing assistance to those in need. So if you can spare a little bit for the deacons fund, we certainly appreciate that too. With that, I turn it over to MaryLou and the choir.

Rev. Dr. Mary Louise Gifford, Pastor

Hi everybody!! Good morning!! [Responses from congregation]. Good morning band, musicians, vocalists. It’s so good for us to be together this morning, to be outdoors on this glorious Sunday morning! Could we have asked for a better day?! [No!] Could we have asked for a bigger crowd? [No!] We are just right! We are right-sized for what we are doing today! For we are here to worship our God with one another. We are here to sing God’s praises and to be together. Although socially distanced, we are together as one heart, one mind. We are the church.

I thank all of you for being here today, coming out on this glorious morning, and being mindful of the distancing guidance that we are given. So we’re grateful to everyone who has taken part in any small or large way to help us continue to be together this morning. Let us pray.

*Oh Lord Jesus said, “come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. This is the commandment of the Lord. The Lord says that we must love one another as God has and continues to love us.”*

Musical Selection

He is exalted

The King is exalted on high

I will praise Him

He is exalted, forever exalted

And I will praise His name

He is the Lord

Forever His truth shall reign

Heaven and earth

Rejoice in His Holy name

He is exalted

The King is exalted on high

(repeated)

Prayer

*Holy spirit, Lord and giver of life. You have called us here this morning, gathering us from the North, the South, the East, and the West. You bring us together as one part of the body of Christ. While we live now in a nation that is divided and filled with political strife, you gather us, not in the name of all that, but in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who is our risen Lord and savior, asks us to rise above. Rise above the strife that has settled into our political system. Rise above all the hatred and the violence. To rise above. To seek that compassionate spirit within each one of us. That compassion that Christ calls us to. You call us to this time of praise, thanksgiving, and worship, for the very breath of life that you have put into each one of us. Lord God, may we not take it for granted. And as we come before you, invited into your presence, and welcoming you into ours, together now, we pray:*

*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,*

*the power, and the glory,*

*For ever,*

*Amen.*

Our offering will now be gratefully received.

Musical Selection - with audience participation

Though my tears may fall

My song will rise, my song will rise to You

Though my heart may fail

My song will rise, my song will rise to You

While there's breath in my lungs

I will praise You, Lord

In the dead of night

I'll lift my eyes, I'll lift my eyes to You

When the waters rise

I'll lift my eyes, I'll lift my eyes to You

While there's hope in my heart

I will praise You, Lord

The joy of the Lord is my strength

The joy of the Lord is my strength

In the darkness I'll dance

In the shadows I'll sing

The joy of the Lord is my strength

When I cannot see You with my eyes

Let faith arise to You

When I cannot feel Your hand in mine

Let faith arise to You

God of mercy and love

I will praise You, Lord

Oh You shine with glory Lord of light

I feel alive with You

In Your presence now I come alive

I am alive with You

There is strength when I say

I will praise You, Lord

When sorrow comes my way

You are the shield around me

Always You remain

Like courage in the fight

I hear You call my name

Jesus, I am coming

Walking on the waves

Reaching for Your light

Prayer

*Gracious God, we thank you, for your lamp is a light to our feet, and your holy spirit breathes deep within us and all around us. As our friends like to say, we believe in the worth and dignity of every human being. We believe in caring for one another and caring for our nation. Holy God, we’ve brought our joys to you today, and we bring our deepest concerns. We pray for all who suffer. We pray for all who strive to tell the truth, to find the truth, to search their own hearts for that truth, that truth of Jesus Christ which lies deep within every single beating heart. May your presence be known and felt by everyone here this day. And as we reverberate out onto the airwaves, may the truth be known. May the truth of honesty and humility prevail. Holy God, we ask you now to just lead our path, guide our feet, to help us to do the next right thing, especially when we feel overwhelmed by so much need around us, so much change that must happen, that we are told that this is the moment for change to happen. Oh holy God, help us to do the next right thing, and then the next right thing, all in your holy name. Amen.*

Scripture - Ellen Mitchell, Deacon

Good morning! I’m deacon Ellen, and today’s scripture reading is from Matthew 7, verses 1 through 5.

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. 3 Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? 4 Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye.

Sermon: The speck and the log, Pastor Gifford

How much do you love that reading?! Judge and you shall be judged! By the measure that we judge other people, we also will be judged. You know, so much of our Bible - and particularly our Gospels, and these parables, and Jesus’ story, and the mission of his life - is very, very serious. It has a serious tone; often it has a life and death tone to it. But today, today my friends, I think Jesus is being funny! It strikes - you just gave me a curious look, Marjie - I think Jesus is being funny in this scripture today. And that’s why I love this so much. Because I was watching a YouTube video of this scripture one day. And it was Jesus out there - this whole section is part of the larger Sermon on the Mount - and so Jesus is out there with the crowd, and he’s got people of all different ages, children, parents, some eating, some relaxing, but everybody listening to him. And then he tells them this story. And his illustration for this story is what I found really funny, and why I think Jesus had a great sense of humor.

He takes a log from the ground. I didn’t have a log. So I just took this here [holds up a large staff]. And he says to his friends, he says, “look, take the log out of your own eye! Take the log out of your own eye before you criticize anybody else! Before you try to take the speck out of their eye if you think they’re doing something that isn’t right.” But “take the log out of your own eye,” he said. And it’s funny, too, because, you know, the crowd laughed. How often do we see the crowd laughing when Jesus is giving a lesson? Well, I just found this particular scripture to be very humorous, and I loved seeing that side of Jesus.

You know, up until probably the 1980s, I don’t think I had ever seen a picture of Jesus smiling. They were always very very serious - and beautiful, beautiful! But very very serious. The only place I think we might have seen a hint of Jesus’ joy and happiness on his face [was] when he was with the little children. Or when he was finding that lost sheep. It’s a different face on Jesus. But I think it was probably around 1980 - some of you might know better than me on this particular date - that we started seeing laughing Jesus. I think the artist that was most famous for painting laughing Jesus was a man named Cook - you know who I mean, yeah! The laughing Jesus.

It kind of got me thinking, this is a different glimpse of Jesus. That even in challenging times, he found a way to get his message across that really reached the people. Reached the people when perhaps, in that moment, he realized, *wow. This is all really serious. And I came to Earth with a serious mission. But also, if I have come to love people, and show them how to love one another, I also need to play with them.* And so, I think today was one of those days, because the crowd laughed as he did this kind of silly thing with them. Wouldn’t you like to see that side of Jesus sometimes? The side that - he’s smiling at you, and just saying “Carla, I love you so much!” And “Angela, I’m happy and I want you to be happy!” And “Paul, enjoy this life!” Yes, there will always be challenges, but let’s lift up the joy as well! And how we can experience and express that joy and that - if I might say - that silliness of Jesus, because what he did was so absurd. To take that giant log and put it in his eye.

But his message was not lost. His message wasn’t lost. If I see a speck on Debbie over there, and I go to pick that speck off of her, while I have specks all over me, what good is that? He’s saying, “sweep your own side of the sidewalk.” Anybody that’s in a 12-step program knows that expression. Sweep your own side. Because that’s about all you can do. We’re really not put on this Earth to judge other people and correct other people. There’s someone in my life who - I really think she thinks it’s her job to correct everybody. Man it drives me crazy! Do you like it when you pronounce a word, maybe wrong, like croissant? How many times can you pronounce that word? Or sconce or scones? One you put on the wall, it’s a light, and the other one you eat? I can take constructive criticism, but I don’t like being corrected on how I say a particular word. So I think that that particular person that we’re speaking of maybe ought to take the speck out of their own eye - or the log out of their own eye I should say - before they start picking about how we pronounce words. And I’ll tell you, when I’ve traveled, and been asked to say the Lord’s prayer, you wouldn’t believe the reaction I get when I say “Ah Fathah.” [Laughter]. Right? Some of you have had that same experience! “What happened to the Rs in Our Father?”

I think the message here from Jesus today is we have to take situations and circumstances seriously. But we can do that in a light heart. We don’t need to stoop to the level of others who would put others down. We don’t need to stoop to that. Jesus tells us to take that high road. To the best of our ability, we are asked to walk a mile in somebody else’s shoes. What is that like? To be, let’s just say, Jacob Blake’s 3 sons. What is it like to be them? Let’s put ourselves in their shoes for just a minute. Because those 3 boys are everywhere in the United States of America. Those 3 boys are in our neighborhood. Those 3 children live right here in Randolph, in Weymouth, in Boston. They are everywhere who have suffered traumatic incidents in their lives. What is it like to be in their shoes? And how will they grow up? How is this going to affect them for the rest of their lives?

I want to say again thank you to Dave Henkelmann for bringing his series to us on racism, and really helping us, and I think there were 19 or 20 of us on those calls. Is he gone? Where are you? [Applause]. Keeping it in the forefront. And our Mission Board, who had the *courage* to put our Black Lives Matter sign up on the front of our church. The *courage* of our congregation to have our rainbow flag hanging outside of our church. This takes courage, it takes guts. And that’s what God is asking us to do, is: do it! This is the moment for change in our country. This is the moment. And who knows when it will present itself again. God willing, not in our lives, we won’t need to be seeing what we’re seeing on the news. God knows, we’ve seen a lot.

I heard somebody say one time about taking situations seriously, but not to take ourselves quite so seriously. To “wear life like a loose-fitting garment.” Like I’m wearing a loose-fitting garment today. Wear it with a little bit of ease, and a little bit of grace, and a little bit of prayer, and a little bit of company. All these aspects that we can bring into our lives so that we don’t take it all quite so seriously. Comedians are paid to take serious situations - and more often than not, political situations - and make light of them. They get a message across - and it’s of course through comedy and sarcasm and whatnot - but some people actually make a living on the absurdities of life. I think about Jimmy Fallon, and Seth Meyers, and Jimmy Kimmel, and all of those. But even going back, I think about Carol Burnett, how she would lighten the mood - take ordinary situations in life and really put a spin on them. As well as George Carlin - he takes absurdities of life to a whole new level!

Going back now, to judging others, and we will be judged. In another 12-step program - some of you have heard me say this before, the Al-Anon program - they say “when you’re pointing one finger out at somebody else, you’ve got 3 fingers pointing back at you.” It’s *this* that we need to look at. We need to look inside ourselves. And say *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Sometimes it’s hard to look at ourselves. Especially if we are not 100% thrilled with our behavior in the past. Especially if we maybe have hurt some folks. However, what I want to say is, we need to also look at how we have hurt ourselves. Many people judge themselves without mercy. Without mercy. This is a time I really have focused a lot of my attention in my prayer time on what needs to be changed in me. Not so much what needs to be changed in other people, but needs to be changed in me.

I hope that during this pandemic, during all this time apart, I hope that you’ve been finding new ways to pray. New ways to walk with God. To walk in the light of his spirit. To walk in the light of his spirit. To get out if you can, outdoors, and just enjoy nature. If you can, take a walk. Or, if you can’t get out and take a walk, then really just simply sit by a window and listen. Because it’s amazing what those birds sound like at 5:00 in the morning isn’t it? It’s amazing what we can learn from nature all around us. Because nature is another place that we need to think about the judgment. Maybe the judgment that we had when we were growing up is: everything is fine! Or maybe not, but about the planet, we were pretty well assured that our planet was okay. And then it started getting destroyed little by little by little. Once again, now we can do something about it.

I was with a friend the other day, and we went out to one of those outdoor restaurants for lunch. And the waitress is automatically giving us those plastic straws. And I said “no thanks, no straw for me.” And my friend was like, “why don’t you want a straw?” And I think it’s because of the sea turtles, isn’t it? They’re all winding up in the ocean I think. So I guess my message to you today is basically just to say, Jesus is kind of a little bit funny today. And I like this parable, and I hope that you do it. It does go on and on, verses 6 and on, which I’m not going to preach about today, because Dave is going to take those, on October 11th, about the Golden Rule, so I don’t want to go into those verses today. I want to save those for Dave.

So I guess I’ll just close with that, and say that I’m really so glad to be able to be with you today. I haven’t had a live microphone in 6 and a half months, or whatever it is, so I hope I haven’t overwhelmed you with all of this today. But I want to say that God has a call for each and every one of you. And this is a moment when you can heed that call. What is God calling you to change in you so that you can help change the world, change the environment, change the political climate, change the schools that have to wrestle with *do I send my kids back to school or don’t I?* This is a moment for us to think about these things, for us to think about these things, for us to dig deeply into our own hearts and be guided by God’s holy spirit. And if we are quiet long enough, we will hear what God wants us to do, and us to be. So friends, we must take the log out of our own eyes, look at ourselves, look at our own lives, before we take the speck out of someone else's. It might require solitude. It might require a time 30 minutes a day to just sit with God and to listen to what’s coming to you. There’s a song that says “listen, listen, listen, to my heart song.” Listen to your heartsong, because it is God almighty singing to you. Amen.

Service of Holy Communion

So our Lord Jesus said “I am the bread of life. You who come to me shall not hunger. And you who believe in me shall never thirst.” My friends, we come to our communion this morning, not because of our own goodness, but because of God’s goodness. God invites us to his table, invites us to partake in the living body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We come before him now. In your bulletins, we come before him with our prayer of confession. If you would pray with me, please.

*Merciful God, we know that you love us and that you call us to fullness of life. But around us, and within us, we see the brokenness of our ways. Our successes leave us empty, our progress does not satisfy, our prosperous land is not the promised land of our longing. Forgive our willful neglect of your word, our insensitivity to the needs of others, and our failure to feed the spirit that is within us. Through Jesus Christ, our redeemer, Amen.*

Friends, our faith tells us, that when we do err, and we bring that before God, we are forgiven. So, be assured that our sins and our transgressions are forgiven by God almighty. Each day is a brand new day to wake up, to start again, to love and serve the lord. I have a photograph on my refrigerator - one of you might have posted it on FaceBook, I don’t know - it has a picture of a rabbit walking away. And it says, don’t look backward, you’re not going that way. I love it! I love it.

Let us pray. *Eternal God, who has created the heavens and the earth, giving breath to every living thing, we thank you for all the gifts of creation, and for the gift of life itself. We thank you for making us in your own image, and for forgiving us when we act as though you have no claim on us, and for keeping us in your steadfast care. Together, now, we rejoice in Jesus Christ, the only one eternally begotten by you, who was born of your servant Mary and shared the joys and sorrows of life as we know it. We remember Christ’s death, we celebrate Christ’s resurrection, and in the beloved community of your church, we await Christ’s return at the end of history. We take courage from the abiding presence of your holy spirit in our midst. We offer you our praise for women and men of faith in every age, who stand as witnesses to your love, and justice. With all the prophets, martyrs, and saints, and all the company of heaven, we glorify you.* Our communion table is ready.

We come to this table not because we must, but because we may. And all things are prepared now. So together we remember that on the night of his desertion and betrayal, Jesus gathered with his friends in an upper room. He gathered with his disciples, and he to took the bread from his plate, and he lifted it before God, asking God’s blessing upon it. And he broke it, saying these words to his friends, his disciples. “This is my body, broken for you. Take,” he said, “ and eat from it, all of you. And as often as you do so, do so in memory of me.

And then, when the supper was over, likewise, Jesus took the cup. Once again, he raised it before God, and he asked God’s blessing upon it, saying these words: “this is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of your sins, and for the sins of all people of all time.” He said, “this is the new covenant, the promise that I make for you, with you. You are forgiven. You are forgiven.” So together, we eat and we drink together, the body and the blood. The new covenant to new life in our Lord Jesus Christ. Take and eat, take and drink, together now.

Musical Selection - He is Lord. Mary Bonish, soloist

Emptied of His glory

God became a man

To walk on earth in

Ridicule and shame

A Ruler yet a Servant

A Shepherd yet a Lamb

A Man of Sorrows agony and pain

He is Lord He is Lord

He is risen from the dead

And He is Lord

Ev'ry knee shall bow

Ev'ry tongue confess

That Jesus Christ is Lord

(repeated)

Benediction

Friends, as we conclude our worship service this morning, we are so grateful to be able to gather together in God’s holy name. We praise God’s name in all things. And we show our love to God by the way that we live our lives, the way that we serve our holy one, the way that we challenge ourselves to continue to grow and to change and to be that change that God wishes to see in our great big beautiful world. Go in peace now to love and serve the world, and you may be seated again for our final closing hymn Amen.

Closing Hymn - Dave Sproules, soloist

O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder

Consider all the worksThy Hands have made

I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder

The power throughout the universe displayed

Chorus:

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee

How great Thou art, how great Thou art

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee

How great Thou art, how great Thou art

When through the woods and forest glades I wander,

I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;

when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur

and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze

(Chorus)

And when I think of God, His Son not sparing

Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in

That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing

He bled and died to take away my sin

(Chorus)

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation

And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart

Then I shall bow with humble adoration

And then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art

(Chorus)