**10/11 SERVICE**

**Call to Worship** – **Emma**

ONE: Come to this place of worship and reflection:
**ALL: A place where we can worship God and grow in our faith.**ONE: Come to this place of extravagant welcome:
**ALL: A place where ALL are welcome!**ONE: Come to this place of safety and security:
**ALL: A place where it is okay to be who we are.**ONE: Come to this place of light, love and grace:
**ALL: A place where light shines in darkness,**

**love triumphs over hate and**

**grace always intercedes when we need it most.**ONE: Come to this place where God is taking us on a spectacular journey!
**ALL: We are here and we are ready! Let us worship God!**

*~ by Sarah Weaver* from <http://www.preachinginpumps.com/liturgy/call-to-worship-extravagant-welcome-church-community-this-is-my-fathers-world/>

**Scripture** – *Philippians 4:1-9 (NRSV)* **– Lori**

Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoicein the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think aboutthese things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

**Sermon– Emma**

An author I have loved, Tish Harrison Warren, tells a personal/confessional narrative in her book *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, that I resonated so much for me that I’ve adapted it for myself.

My wife, Sarah and I will have been married for 3 years next month. Over the past weeks and months of lockdowns, quarantining and coronavirus fears I am more convinced than ever before that I partnered with the right person. Perhaps the only person I would want to spend that much time with. And while she tells me that she feels the same, and I believe her…doesn’t mean that we don’t get into arguments with one another from time to time.

Actually, calling them arguments sounds a little too reasonable, like we were coolly debating opposing sides of an issue. Logical. Rational. Collected. The stuff that make marriage therapists proud.

But, ours are rarely that.

Because most often what we’re arguing about isn’t really what we’re arguing about. What we are actually arguing about is our fears, anxieties, identities, and hopes. We are grieving our current reality, our own limitedness and our inability to change the situation we find ourselves in, at every level. *And* we are arguing about the sharpness in our voices, and who interrupts whom, and how often, and about a passing comment I made this morning and a look she gave last night.

These are the patterns of, not just our martial life of that I’m sure, but also the patterns of family life in general. The truth is, I’m not mad that she didn’t hang up the wet towels in the bathroom this morning; I’m mad about the last three hundred times. Or, *more painfully*, it’s not that she’s mad about how I criticized something today, it’s how my pattern of criticisms, comment-by-passing-comment, bump up against her pattern of woundedness and defensiveness.

These patterns of life right now, have been under a unique and intense level of strain since March - with online learning, working from home, under layers of sweaty PPE, or in sectors that have had to furlough workers or lay them off - all that tiredness, stress and fear, have disordered our more healthy patterns of life. Making it harder to be patient and gentle and kind.

We’re human…it turns out…and global pandemics among the other crises we currently face, have served to amplify feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Making the struggle to “love our neighbors,” an almighty test…even in our own homes, and especially when we’re tired and off our games, or just want to be left alone.

These arguments, and many other instances like them, are where *human brokenness* is just so apparent. But, they can serve to remind me of why I need God. *We* need God and we desperately need the radiant vision of God’s kin-dom to daily remind us that our Creator has something entirely different in mind for our relationships with one another down here on earth.

The language about kin-dom is new, though it has been used for decades by feminist theologians, but the idea is deeply embedded in Judeo-Christian thinking about the transformation that God is doing within community and relationships. Kin-dom emphasized our inter-connectedness and our common dependence on one another. A point that coronavirus has made globally apparent. Authors that talk about kin-dom often draw on the Hebraic formulation of *shalom,* and how it lifts up the vision of peace and wholeness with justice through all creation.

I know that I profess big ideas about the beauty of *shalom* and, from a New Testament perspective, how Christ’s ministry of peace crashes into our world, but I still find myself squabbling and quarrelling my way through the day – with those I love the most. There’s a gap between where I am and where I want to be. And I have a sense, that this is true for you too.

One of the practices that I miss the most as we are not able to meet in-person, is the *Passing of the Peace*. It’s a practice, that for me, goes some way to bridging that gap. From the beginning, Christians have exercised this practice. It’s an ancient and significant gesture rooted in Scripture and embodies our identity as peacemakers in the kin-dom of God (Matt. 5:9; 2 Cor. 5:20), training our hearts, hands, and tongues in the ways of peace.

 “Peace be with you” is perhaps a greeting Jesus himself used with his disciples, we do have accounts in at least two Gospels of instances where he used it (Luke 24:36; John 20:19, 26). Not to mention, the apostle Paul opened many of his letters with the words “Grace and peace be with you” (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2).

In our modern congregation, we stand up and turn to our neighbors, or leave our seats, and speak the words, “The peace of Christ with you” and receive the words in turn, “And also with you.”

The gesture is simple, but the meaning is profound, and transcends the ritual itself. It taps into that radical vision of God’s Kin-dom…where everyone is welcomed in, everyone is valued, celebrated, called by name and loved. I like to think that it goes some way in bridging the gap (if only momentarily) between what we say we belief, and how we – so often – actually live.

When we extend our hand to another, we identify with Jesus, who extended his life to the point of death to make peace with humanity (Col. 1:20-21). What’s more, in the midst of divisions we symbolize our unity through handshakes and hugs (Eph. 2:14-21). Likewise, when we regularly pass the peace, we practice God’s call to make every effort to maintain the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

My Muslim friends have something similar to passing the peace, but it doesn’t only happen in the mosque. Muslims pass the peace wherever they meet, anywhere in the world. And no matter what language they speak—Spanish, English, Chinese, Malay—Muslims around the world pass the peace in Arabic: *as-salaamu ‘alaikum* ~ Peace be with you

There’s something else I love about passing the peace the Muslim way. It’s also sort of a code. In Islam, there are ninety-nine Names of God, or 99 words to explain who God is and what God does. Some of these include Gentleness, Generosity, Compassion, Love, Peace, Friend and Guide.

So, when a Muslim says *as-salaamu ‘alaikum* (Peace be with you), they are also saying,

Justice be with you,

Mercy be with you,

Compassion be with you,

Love be with you,

and God be with you.

This whole litany of blessing expands our own sense of what Passing the Peace means symbolically. And, for us Christians, it helps paints a more detailed painting of the kind of world and the kind of relationships God is envisioning in the Kin-dom.

As I read our lectionary passage from Philippians 4 this week, particularly verses 8 and the beginning of 9, I was struck with its liturgical cadence. It sounds like a blessing, but its more than just words. Just as how “Peace be with you – and also with you” are more than just words. They are aspirational, they are healing, they are practicing and rehearsing the way we want to live…despise our failings.

So, hear the words from Philippians 4:8-9 again, this time from the Common English Bible, which is a little closer to the Greek:

From now on, brothers and sisters:

if anything is excellent and

 if anything is admirable,

 focus your thoughts on these things.

All that is true,

 all that is holy,

 all that is just,

 all that is pure,

 all that is lovely, and

 all that is worthy of praise.

 practice these things.

 The God of peace will be with you.

In this exhortation, there are two lists. And at the end of the first, Paul invites us to “*think* these things,” and at the end of the second list he instructs us to “*practice* these things.”

Paul tells us to focus our minds on what is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise. But it is much more than just an exercise in positive thinking. Paul is holding two realities in view at the same time.

Yes, there is the immediate reality of a world in which human beings are constantly at war somewhere, betraying one another, brutally suppressing each other in order to get ahead, and so forth. This was true of the Roman Empire, and it is true today. Every day we hear and see a culture that focuses on what is false, dishonorable, unjust, impure, and shameful. And, given we too fail to live up to our own ideals, we may be forgiven for thinking that to act *hope*fully in such a world is unrealistic, even naïve.

But Paul also sees another reality, the Kin-dom reality, that is already here and still drawing near.

Paul is imploring the church in Philippi to train their minds on the virtues of God’s yet-coming Kin-dom. And we too can train our minds to think of this reality and act in way that is consistent with what God is doing. Thereby, live in a hopeless world *with hope*.

Paul promises that the outcome of these habits of heart and mind is “peace that surpasses all understanding.” Written from jail, by a man under threat of capital punishment at the hands of a brutal and corrupt regime, these are extraordinary promises.

My prayer is that we can experience some measure of Paul’s hopefulness and confidence in God, and in the Kin-dom that the church is still tasked with ushering in.

For, although it’s true that we are not physically together in the sanctuary, able to walk around, shake hands, bow our heads and extend ‘the peace of Christ,’ I encourage you to Pass the Peace of Christ in your own home, to yourself and to your family. Think on and meditate and practice peace and wholeness in every area of your life.

It’s true that we cannot yet sing, unmasked together with the choir and organ, but I encourage you to continue to think and practice singing songs of thanksgiving and songs of joy. Whether at home or in the car. Look up your favorite hymns and choruses on YouTube. Send and share music and lyrics to friends and family.

It’s true that we cannot yet be embraced by children with sticky hands or receive hearty handshakes as we eat snacks in the gathering area but think on how you might extend hope and love, comfort and reassurance to someone else this week. Someone you haven’t seen since all this started and practice radical hospitality through a phone call or text, a letter in the mail or facebook message.

These days we are still able to *think* on God’s Kin-dom and *practice* God’s Kin-dom. This divine reality has always been one that needs to get worked-out beyond the sanctuary. Truth, honor, justice, purity, and beauty need to be made real in *your* home and my home, on our city streets and in hospitals, in schools and home-offices, factories and restaurants.

Peace, hospitality and singing for joy are not just rituals we do in our in-person services but actions we take everywhere that connect us to God and to others, and through the power of Christ, work to heal a world that is broken. Yes, it’s all a bit messy. But Paul, while desperate and in prison, rested his hope and joy on it.

Maybe a challenge this week could be to sit and read the Paul’s entire letter to the Philippians. It’s short 4 chapters, has so much to teach us in 2020, when stresses are high, and worries and anxieties can easily overwhelm. It is overflowing with hope about the power of God’s radical vision of Kin-dom, to transform our everyday *thinking* and *doing.*

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

Do not worry about anything,

but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving

let your requests be made known to God.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved,

whatever is true,

whatever is honorable,

whatever is just,

whatever is pure,

whatever is pleasing,

whatever is commendable,

if there is any excellence and

if there is anything worthy of praise,

think about these things.

Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received

and heard and seen in me,

and the God of peace will be with you.” (Philippians 4:4-9)

Amen

**Benediction & Commission** *based on Philippians 4:4-9* **– Emma**

Be glad in the Lord always!

Focus your thoughts on all that is true,

all that is holy, all that is just,

all that is pure, all that is lovely,

and all that is worthy of praise.

And the peace of God—

peace that goes far beyond anything we can comprehend—

that peace will guard your hearts and minds

as you live in Christ Jesus.

So go from here with confidence and joy,

to serve the Lord and

extend an extravagant welcome to all.

*~ adapted from* https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2011/09/benediction-philippians-4-1-9.html