

Welcome and Announcements: August 30, 2020

Next week, worship will be via Zoom and we will have a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing elders. The slate being presented by the nominating committee is: Roger Cole (3 year term), Vicki Neely (3 year term), Terry Alexander (2 year term).

Prelude: *Take Up Thy Cross*

Take up your cross, the Savior said, if you would my disciple be; Take up your cross with willing heart, and humbly follow after me.

Gathering Around God's Word

Opening Prayer: (A Confession)

Merciful God,
You call us to follow;
to turn away from our own selfish interests,
and to take up our cross and follow after You,
even if the path is difficult to see,
or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves.

Forgive us for being so quick to question
and so hesitant to follow.
Help us to see with the eyes of faith,
rather than from our own human point of view.

Teach us to follow without fear,
knowing that You are always with us,
leading the way.

Opening Hymn: *O Sing a Song of Bethlehem*

1. O sing a song of Bethlehem, of shepherds watching there,
And of the news that came to them from angels in the air:
The light that shone on Bethlehem fills all the world today;
Of Jesus' birth and peace on earth the angels sing alway.

2. O sing a song of Nazareth, of sunny days of joy,
O sing of fragrant flowers' breath, and of the sinless Boy:
For now the flowers of Nazareth in every heart may grow;
Now spreads the fame of His dear name on all the winds that blow.

3. O sing a song of Galilee, of lake and woods and hill,
Of Him who walked upon the sea and bade its waves be still:
For though, like waves on Galilee, dark seas and trouble roll,
When faith has heard the Master's word, falls peace upon the soul.

4. O sing a song of Calvary, its glory and dismay;
Of Him who hung upon the tree, and took our sins away:
For He who died on Calvary is risen from the grave,
And Christ, our Lord, by heaven adored, is mighty now to save.

The Word of God

Scripture: Matthew 16:21-28

Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

21 From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. **22** And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” **23** But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

The Cross and Self-Denial

24 Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. **25** For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. **26** For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?

27 “For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. **28** Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

Commentary from The New Interpreter’s Study Bible (Warren Carter):

Jesus’ death has implications for discipleship. They, too, must walk the way of the cross. To deny oneself is to turn from whatever hinders faithful and lived commitment. Disciples identify with Jesus and all who challenge the empire. They must not be intimidated into compliance and accommodation. Saving one’s life means not confronting the injustice of the present, but settling for safe self-interest. To lose one’s life is to embrace the alternative practices and community that embody God’s empire. Decisions about present discipleship have eschatological consequences. God’s justice will prevail over all, including Rome.

This way of life is the way of the cross. This image should not be trivialized to refer to some little burden or inconvenience. Rather, it denotes the shame, pain, social rejection, violence, humiliation, and marginalization of crucifixion. Rome crucified those who threatened its control over society, such as traitors, violent criminals, and foreigners. The cross divided citizen from non-citizen, the accepted from the rejected. To take up the cross is to identify with those who

threaten the empire. It is to refuse to be intimidated into compliance. It is to be at cross-purposes with imperial commitments. And it is to recognize the limits of Rome's power that could not keep the crucified Jesus dead!

Sermon: To Identify with Those Who Threaten the Empire

The Rev. Kerra B. English

Responding to God's Word

Prayer of the People and the 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.

Offering: Commitment

Response: *Doxology*

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him, all creatures here below;

Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Sending Us Out to be God's Word in the World

Closing Hymn: *Fight the Good Fight*

1. Fight the good fight with all thy might;
Christ is thy strength and Christ thy right;
Lay hold on life, and it shall be
Thy joy and crown eternally.

2. Run the straight race through God's good grace,
Lift up thine eyes, and seek Christ's face;
Life with its way before us lies,
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.

3. Cast care aside, lean on thy guide;
God's boundless mercy will provide;
Trust, and thy trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.

4. Faint not nor fear, God's arms are near;
God changeth not, and thou art dear;
Only believe, and thou shalt see
That Christ is all in all to thee.

Charge and Benediction

Postlude: *Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken, Zion, City of Our God*
Savior, since of Zion's city I thro' grace a member am,
Let the world deride or pity, I will glory in Thy name;
Fading is the world's best pleasure, all its boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure none but Zion's children know.