

WORSHIP June 21, 2020

Good morning,

Welcome to Bethany's online worship this week. As the pandemic continues in a more intense way here in Arizona; as the protests for racial equality continue unabated; and as the nation's largest wild fire burns in our backyard (the Bush Fire) ... we come together for worship. We do so, not to escape from all that is simultaneously happening around us, we gather to engage, pray for, and seek to be enlightened in the ways of God as events happening in the world affect the lives of all God's people.

While worship may offer us some peaceful respite as we seek to be in the presence of God, it is also a time to be active. Active in thanksgiving for blessings received, to be active in listening to what God may be saying, and to be active in seeking the empowerment for being God's servants in the world.

So, as you worship on this day ... listen, be thankful, pray, and be open to what God may be saying to you today. Happy Father's Day to all father's out there. Be thankful for the gift that Fatherhood is and be prayerful for the responsibility it conveys upon you.

Blessings.

Pastor Rick

Pastor Rick Lawrence

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To watch the worship service on video ... click here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=By0sZY7aI9E>

GREETING AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PREPARATION FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP

*We come to worship our God, who has done wonders in our lives.
God anoints us with joy and light, gifts from the depths of God's heart.
We come to follow Jesus, who showers our lives with grace and hope.
Jesus sends us into the brokenness of the world to be agents of change, healing, and love.
We come to be touched by the Spirit, who brings gentleness and peace for all.
The Spirit enables us to offer reconciliation and justice to everyone we meet.*

A BRIEF CONFESSION

*God is good! God is gracious! God is merciful! To God we bring our confession:
Where we have failed to honor your desire for our lives;
Good and gracious Lord, have mercy and forgive us.
Where we have failed to act when needed;
Good and gracious Lord, have mercy and forgive us.
Where we have acted with malicious intent;
Good and gracious Lord, have mercy and forgive us.
God is good! God is gracious! God is merciful! We are a forgiven people!*

GREETING

*The Lord be with you
We seek to hear the call of God upon our lives
Open our hearts and minds, Lord, for witness and service!*

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1st reading – Romans 6:1-5

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

2nd Reading – Psalm 69:7-9, 16-17

*It is for your sake that I have borne reproach,
that shame has covered my face.
I have become a stranger to my kindred,
an alien to my mother's children.
It is zeal for your house that has consumed me;
the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.
Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good;
according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.
Do not hide your face from your servant,
for I am in distress—make haste to answer me.*

Gospel reading – Matthew 10:24-33

*'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!
'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known.
What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.
'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.*

SERMON

Pentecost 3

The Take Home
Matthew 10:24-39

June 21, 2020

So, you've just heard a scripture reading that most

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preachers dread

when it comes around every three years or so in what we call the common lectionary system ... that system of assigned readings for each Sunday of the year.

Oh, we don't have to follow those assigned readings if we don't want to ... but, in pastor circles where we talk about the upcoming readings for each week, when texts like this one come around, we ask each other: "*Are you going to chicken out or dive into it?*"

I was always taught in seminary to resist the temptation to "*chicken out*", that it is a good discipline to wrestle with difficult texts, that it builds "*preaching muscle*", they would say, that it keeps you from getting on your "*preaching soapbox*" to always preach on what interests you, rather than what's necessary.

So, what do you think ... am I going to "*chicken out*" or *dive into it*?

Well, you've probably guessed ... I wouldn't be talking about the options here if I were going to "*chicken out*", I would have just selected a different passage and you would have never known the difference.

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But as it is, we're going to dive into

Screen 2

this one ... this passage about not fearing those who can kill the body, but fearing those who can kill both soul & body in hell;

this passage about not to fear, because you are of more value than many sparrows;
this passage about not denying Jesus before others, lest Jesus deny you before God;
this passage about Jesus coming not to bring peace, but a sword;
this passage about Jesus coming to set a man against his father, a daughter against
her mother, and so forth;
this passage about not being worthy of Jesus if you love your parents or your
children more than him;
this passage that if you do not take up the cross and follow Jesus you are unworthy
of Jesus altogether.

My goodness ... no wonder it's a temptation to skip this one.

Sounds like Jesus had a really bad day when he spoke those words.

So, what's the deal, what's going on?

Well, we're not going to get into a big biblical history lesson here

to try and understand what was going on that Jesus would say such things ... while that has
its value, more to the point though – What's the “*take home*” of these words for us today?

But a little history is needed ... the main thing you need to know
is that Jesus was preparing his disciples for the work of carrying on his ministry ... and for
the writer of this Gospel of Matthew, that he was preparing the early church to do the same.

And the environment for doing that, some 2000 years ago ... well,
it was not a friendly one,
it was really hostile,
it was literally a life and death decision to become a follower of Jesus in many cases.

So, in an environment of hostility for being a “*Jesus follower*” and in a
context of persecution for being Christian ... these words about not to fear and about
being at odds with friends and relatives – well, understanding that ... then these words
make some sense,

don't they.

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But, our challenge isn't one

of understanding the history here ... We “*get it*”, early Christians saw themselves as a vulnerable minority in a hostile culture.

We understand this, but we don't relate to it, really.

So, that's the challenge for us ... to relate

to these words in some way, even though our situation and circumstances are nowhere near what it was for those first followers of Jesus.



Screen 3

I'm going to take a stab at that (to help us all relate) by introducing you to Clarence Jordan ... maybe you heard of him, maybe you haven't.

You may be familiar with Clarence Jordan through his *Cotton Patch* translations of the New Testament ... or, you may have heard of him because the Habitat for Humanity movement originated from a community he began called the Koinonia Farm.

But if you are like me, his name doesn't ring any bells, at all ... and as I learned about him, I am astounded that we in Christian circles, at least, do not have, minimally, some name recognition here.

Clarence Jordan earned a degree in agriculture at the University of Georgia in 1933.

It was during his college years that he became convinced that the roots of poverty were

spiritual as well as economic and that led him to the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary where he earned a Master of Divinity degree and later a PhD in New Testament in 1938.

But do not think of Clarence Jordan as some dry scholar here, he definitely had

a sense of humor ... Once he was accused of being a communist because of his association with Myles Horton who was labeled a communist by J. Edgar Hoover's FBI. Horton was a pioneer in the early civil rights movement and this is what brought he and Clarence Jordan together. Anyway, to that accusation of being a communist, Jordan responded: *"I really have trouble with your logic sir. I don't think my talking to Myles Horton makes me a Communist any more than talking to you right now makes me a jackass."*

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He started the Koinonia Farm in Americus, Georgia in 1942,

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In short, for Jordan, the farm was about answering the prayer of Jesus *"thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as in heaven"*. Jordan looked around at the Jim Crow south divided by very stark differences of rich and poor and of black and white, and he knew a witness was needed proclaim God's Kingdom here on earth. He sought to show that by following Jesus' call of *"thy will be done, on earth as in heaven"* that it could transform society into a place where all are welcomed as equal, with equal access to the table, and equal voice regardless of background, class, or race. It was a spiritual venture to live the "Kingdom of God" in the day in and day out workings of people's lives.

The community shared not only faith and resources, but also work.

In the words of Clarence Jordan ... and I quote:

“We farmed for our livelihood and sought ways to work in partnership with the land, “to conserve the soil, God’s holy earth. We shared, taught and were members of local churches. From the beginning of the community, we emphasized the brotherhood and sisterhood of all people. When we could afford to hire seasonal help, Black and White workers were paid a fair, equal wage. When the community and its guests prayed or ate a meal, we all sat together at the table, regardless of color.”

Because of the racial mixing at Koinonia and because of Clarence Jordan’s many sermons and writings opposing racism, materialism, and militarism, local businesses started boycotting Koinonia in 1956. This boycott continued into the late 1960s. The Ku Klux Klan pursued a more violent path, firing guns into Koinonia’s buildings, torching the farm’s roadside market stand, and threatening increased violence unless the Koinonians agreed to sell their land and leave. They refused and instead renewed their commitment to prayer, passivism, and equality. They created a mail order business to sell their goods & produce ... a mail-order business, which continues to sustain the Koinonia community to this day.

That mail order business, by the way, started when the Koinonia Farm tried selling peanuts



from their roadside stand ...

the Ku Klux Klan dynamited the stand.

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Jordan put up another stand.

It got blown up too ... finally, the Koinonia Farm created a mail-order business with an ad filled with Jordan’s sense of humor and the marketing hook line of:

“Help us ship the nuts out of Georgia.”

I share the story of Clarence Jordan and the Koinonia Farm

because it is a more modern day example of persecution that can happen when living and witnessing to the ways of Jesus ... the people of the Koinonia Farm were persecuted for

their beliefs and lifestyle, plain and simple.

But still, these are

difficult words of Jesus to process, aren't they ... they are especially difficult in our context today where there are opposing Christian stands on controversial issues.

Each side can feel persecuted when their viewpoint

is under attack ... there are Christians on opposing sides of the abortion issue;

there are Christians on opposing sides of the gay & lesbian issue;

there are Christians on opposing side of the immigration issue;

there are Christians on opposing sides of the death sentence debate; and

today, there are Christians who are on opposing sides of the

Black Lives Matter protests that has gone world-wide with protests

happening on every continent in the world with the exception of

Antarctica.

Each side can cite this reading

we hear today from Matthew's 10th chapter and claim that they and their beliefs are being persecuted and are under attack.

And then, feeling persecuted, they become more

emboldened and radicalized to the point where they begin to violate the core teaching of Jesus – Love your neighbor as yourself.

The opposite side

becomes the persecutor,

the enemy,

the "other" that needs to be defeated ... and then the words, *Do not think that I*

have come to bring peace to the earth; I

have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

These words, then, become a battle cry.

This is not good ... Imagine if Clarence Jordan and the people of the Koinonia Farm took up this posture when bullets flew through the living spaces of the farm or when the roadside produce stand was blown-up numerous times.

Imagine if they felt the need to retaliate in some way ... or at the very least, give into the temptation to see those who were willing to do them harm, to see them as the “other”, the enemy.

What they did (and I read this over and over again) what they did instead is that they responded with prayer ... which meant praying for their enemies
they responded with nonviolent resistance ... which mean, not demonizing their persecutors
they responded with a renewed commitment to live the Gospel ... which meant continuing, unabated, with living lives of sharing and racial equality.

Praying and living “*thy Kingdom come*”

(the Koinonia Farm Mission Statement) meant living the words of Jesus, “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” ... this is what changes the heart,

this is what transforms the world,

this is what serves God’s purpose.

There is a Clarence Jordan quote that can be our “take home”

after wrestling with these words from Matthew’s 10th chapter:

It is not enough to limit your love to your own nation, to your own group. You must respond with love even to those outside of it. . . . This concept enables people to live together not as nations, but as the human race.

I would say, that if you seek to

live a life according to that ... you will be persecuted in one way or another, unfortunately, by those within your own group or even family sometimes.

This is what Jesus did and he was crucified ... but Jesus was resurrected which says that love is stronger than any kind of persecution that can be given and doled out. AMEN

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH - Written by Confirmation Class 2014

We believe in an active and creative God who formed the earth inside and out. God gives us beauty to see and mysteries to consider. Our God is radically amazing.

We believe God sent Jesus to teach us to forgive, to serve, and to live as the people God calls us to be. He chose to die on the cross giving us God's healing love to live holy lives. Jesus' presence is with us always.

We believe God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. This spirit connects us with God and each other for relationships of trust, faith, belief, heart, and love. These are holy relationships filled with God's energy for praying and working to bring God's heaven into our lives and into the world. The Holy Spirit is alive within us always. AMEN.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Gracious and loving God, you created all the people of the earth in your own image. Help us to more fully understand that as we seek to live together in community and in the world. Help us bear your message of love, compassion, dignity and respect for each other, and forgiveness as we live and serve in the desire to be your faithful people. When serving in your name brings us ill-will, give us courage. When serving in your name exhausts us, give us strength. When serving in your name perplexes us, give us wisdom & guidance. Lord, in your mercy ... hear our prayer.

Gracious and loving God, we pray for peace and provision. Our world these days is filled with discord and need. People, nations, races are at odds with each other ... this in the middle of a pandemic. We pray for people and nations to work at understanding each other to find positive and healing ways to move forward. We pray for peacemakers to not grow discouraged. We pray for providers not to grow weary of generosity. We pray for servants to be filled and renewed with compassion. Lord, in your mercy ... hear our prayer.

Gracious and loving God, we pray for all those on our Bethany Prayer List. Where there is physical need we pray for comfort and healing. Where there is emotional distress, we pray for peace. Where there is spiritual struggle, we pray for growth and resolve. We ask that you bless today all for whom we pray. Bless them only in the way that you can. Lord, in your mercy ... hear our prayer.

Gracious and loving God, we pray for our nation and world. As a pandemic still rages, we pray for frontline healthcare workers. We pray for those ill with the COVID disease. We pray for families who have lost loved ones. In the midst of a racial social upheaval world-wide, we pray for understanding, a willingness to listen, a heart for healing and peace. Lord, in your mercy ... hear our prayer.

A Prayer Litany for Peace :

We pray for all those who hunger and thirst for justice, that their lives and their work might be rededicated to doing the work of Christ.

We pray for the homeless and displaced people of our nation and the world, that they might find comfort, that their suffering might be lightened.

We pray for persons who are lost and in pain, that they might find the love of Christ that exists in the love we show to each other.

We pray for the children and the youth, who are so often neglected and discounted, but who have so much to offer, for they are not merely the future, but are a vital part of the present.

We pray for guidance and strength in times that are uncertain at best and life-threatening at worst, and when our lives are in transition.

We pray for our loved ones who face illness, pain, joy, sorrow, loss, grief, love, compassion, kindness, rejection, and stress in their daily lives.

We pray for peace, for there is no greater gift of God.

We pray all these things in Jesus, who lived a life of radical service all his days. Amen.

OFFERING *(Please mail your weekly offering to the church.
4300 N 82nd St. Scottsdale, AZ 85251)*

PRAYER OF BLESSING

Let us pray:

*God of mercy and grace, the eyes of all wait upon you, and you open your hand in blessing.
As you give to us the good things of life, both physical and spiritual, help us in turn to be of a
generous spirit using our gifts to serve others and to honor you. AMEN*

The Lord's Prayer

*You may say traditional Lord's Prayer or use the Aramaic translation printed below or you
may say both in succession*

*O Creator, the one who gave birth to the universe,
You are the sacred source of our being.*

*Focus Your ways, Your light, within us.
Make us useful for Your purposes here on earth so that
Your desire and our lives become one*

Grant what we need each day in bread and insight.

*Loosen the cords of mistakes binding us,
as we release the strands we hold of other's guilt.*

*Do not let surface things delude us, snare us, and lead us away
from You and Your purpose.*

*But free us from what holds us back, give us power to
live as you intended and created us to live.*

*From You comes the all-working will, the lively strength to act,
the song that beautifies all and renews itself from age to age. AMEN*

BENEDICTION

*Let the majesty of the God the Creator
be the light by which you walk,
the compassion of the Jesus
be the love by which you walk,
the presence of the Spirit
be the power by which you walk. Amen.*

DISMISSAL

*Fear not and go in the power and presence of Jesus.
We are sent blessed to be a blessing. Thanks be to God.*