

From the Pews, Caroline Clark

The Israelites who offered Psalm 124 as a song of thanksgiving were confident that God was on their side. God had led them to victory against the Philistines, had achieved their deliverance from Egypt, and continued to offer them protection. Writing in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is difficult to feel that same confidence. We grieve for loved ones lost, for lives lived in isolation, for life-changing economic hardships, and for lesser travails like cancelled graduations and recitals. What kind of confidence can we express during this time of uncertainty?

Most of us are wondering “when will things get back to normal?” And for many of us members of Westminster Presbyterian, normal would be fantastic. But this coronavirus pandemic has also exposed problems with our old “normal.” Why are so many of our “essential” workers not treated as indispensable with fair pay, benefits, and respect? Why are people of color becoming ill and dying at higher rates than white people? When students and their teachers are happy to be avoiding lockdown drills and school shootings, what does that suggest to us about anxieties and dangers they faced before schools were closed? Some of us enjoying the environmental effects of cleaner air quality and celebrating, for example, the more peaceful nesting habitats of our coastal sea turtles are hopeful that such changes can be made permanent. I join those who are eager for not only a return to normal, but to a new-and-improved normal that recognizes and values the lives of the under-privileged and under-appreciated.

Psalm 124 is attributed to David (c. 1000 BCE) but may have been written during or after the period of Babylonian exile (597-539 BCE), yet another era of trials and tribulations, but the Israelites nevertheless continued to praise and give thanks to God. “The snare is broken and we have escaped” says the psalmist. When our snare of social isolation is broken, and we have escaped from our (very comfortable) prisons, I hope we can not only offer thanks to the Lord, but further his righteousness in restoring justice to his kingdom on earth. Right now our essential workers in healthcare, food production and sales, sanitation and others are not ensnared, but instead are following in the footsteps of some of the earliest Christians, who risked their lives to care and provide for others during the pandemics that occurred in the late Roman era. As the bishop of Alexandria wrote in his Easter letter of 260 CE,

“The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal of martyrdom.”

Such acts of service earned these early Christians the highest praise. In the name of Jesus, I ask myself, and ask you, how can you serve others not only right now, during our pandemic, but also next year (or next decade?) when our pandemic subsides?



WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
Sunday, May 17, 2020 | online, 11:15a | Sixth Sunday of Easter



Preparation for **Worship**

“We are not alone, sliding through mystery with no guidance.
We have an Advocate who guides us
with power and truth.”
— *Julia Seymour*

Gathering and Preparing for **God’s Word**

Prelude *Holy, Holy, Holy* Forrest
Welcome and Announcements

Sentences of Scripture, *Selections from Psalm 124, 125, 126*
Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.
As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds his people,
from this time on and forever more.
The Lord has done great things for us and we rejoice!
Let us worship God.

Hymn #2 *Come, Thou Almighty King* ITALIAN HYMN
See hymn sheet.

Prayer of Confession & Assurance of Pardon
Merciful God, our Advocate and Guide,
in the beginning you moved over the waters creating life
where there was none, setting order in the universe.
By your breath all creation draws life,
and by your presence life is sustained.
Without you, we are dust.
Nevertheless we often fail to follow,
in action and in spirit, choosing instead to follow our own whims,
and ignoring the force of your Spirit among us.
We imagine ourselves alone in your universe,
and live as if the world is ours to guide and control.
We do not listen for your word of grace, we do not follow after your justice,
we are not advocates for your good creation.
We have failed to speak the good news of your love,
or live as a people made new in Christ.
Have mercy on us, O God.
Transform our timid lives by the power of your Spirit,
and fill us with a flaming desire to be your faithful people,
doing your will for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Response *Spirit Open My Heart* Fedak

Hearing **God’s Word**

Prayer for Illumination
Old Testament Lesson, *1 Samuel 19:1-7*
Time for Children
New Testament Lesson, *John 14:15-21*
Homily *Close Beside*

Responding to **God’s Word**

Litany of Affirmation, Excerpts of *Heidelberg & A Brief Statement of Faith*
What do we believe concerning “the Holy Spirit”?
First, that the Spirit, with the Father and the Son is eternal God.
Second, that the Spirit is given also to us,
so that, through faith, he makes us share in Christ and all his benefits,
comforts us, and will remain with us forever.

In a broken and fearful world, the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing, to witness among all peoples
to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God’s new heaven and new earth,
praying, “Come, Lord Jesus!”

Morning Prayers
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.**

Hymn #692 *Spirit, Open My Heart* WILD MOUNTAIN
See hymn sheet.

Charge and Benediction
Postlude *Trumpet Tune in D major* Johnson

Leading Worship **this Morning**

Mary Kathleen Duncan, *preaching*
Ben Dorr, Lauren Slingerland, Leigh Stuckey, *liturgists*
Nancy Smith, *organist*
Mark Kemp, *vocalist*

2 Come, Thou Almighty King

1 Come, thou al - might - y King, help us thy
 2 Come, thou in - car - nate Word, mer - ci - ful,
 3 Come, ho - ly Com - fort - er, thy sa - cred
 4 To thee, great One in Three, e - ter - nal

name to sing; help us to praise:
 might - y Lord, our prayer at - tend.
 wit - ness bear in this glad hour.
 prais - es be, hence ev - er - more!

Fa - ther, all glo - ri - ous, o'er all vic - to - ri - ous,
 Come, and thy peo - ple bless, and give thy word suc - cess;
 Thou who al - might - y art, now rule in ev - ery heart,
 Thy sov - ereign maj - es - ty may we in glo - ry see,

come, and reign o - ver us, An - cient of Days.
 Spir - it of ho - li - ness, on us de - scend.
 and ne'er from us de - part, Spir - it of power.
 and to e - ter - ni - ty love and a - dore.

The author of this Trinitarian text is unknown, but this hymn has proved popular since the middle of the 18th century, partly because of its effective use of biblical metaphors, but also because of the strength of this tune, which was composed especially for these words.

692 Spirit, Open My Heart

Refrain Capo 3: (D) (G) (D) (G) (A7)
 F B^b F B^b C7

Spir - it, o - pen my heart to the joy and pain of

(Bm) (D/A) (G) (A7) (Bm) (D/A) (Em)
 Dm F/C B^b C7 Dm F/C Gm

liv - ing. As you love may I love, in re - ceiv - ing

(D) (G) (Em7) (D) (G) (D)
 F B^b Gm7 F B^b F *Fine*

and in giv - ing. Spir - it, o - pen my heart.

(D) (G) (D) (G)
 F B^b F B^b

1 God, re - place my ston - y heart with a heart that's
 2 Write your love up - on my heart as my law, my
 3 May I weep with those who weep; share the joy of

(A7) (Bm) (D/A) (G) (A7)
 C7 Dm F/C B^b C7

kind and ten - der. All my cold - ness and
 goal, my sto - ry. In each thought, word, and
 sis - ter, broth - er. In the wel - come of

(Bm) (Em7) (D) (G2) (G)
 Dm Gm7 F B^b2 B^b
to Refrain

fear to your grace I now sur - ren - der.
 deed, may my liv - ing bring you glo - ry.
 Christ, may we wel - come one an - oth - er.

The pace and diversity of modern life often hinder us from remaining vulnerable to our emotions and to the humanness of other people. This prayerful text to be open to such joys and pains draws on Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26 in stanza one and echoes Jeremiah 31:33 in stanza two.