

## 7/18/21 WORSHIP SERVICE

### Worship Leading – Pastor Lois Harder

What would you like to share with one another this morning – are there opportunities for celebration or service?

- Today will be the first of two identical presentations of the congregational survey results and to hear an educational presentation by Veronica Mosqueda Bargdill, the ED of Heart to Heart Child Advocacy Center. That will happen immediately following the worship service at 11:45. We'll have some small snacks and there will be child care for children second grade and younger.
- Next Sunday we're slated to meet outdoors for our worship service; my weather report says warm but no rain. Please watch your email on Friday – we'll keep you posted.
- Other?
- Our youth have been at RMMC this week offering their service and having some fun too... we'll hear from them, along with Brian and Rachael Burkholder and Kevin and Bonnie Gaeddert, the adults that accompanied them on this trip.

### Morning Prayer – Pastor Lois Harder

Loving God, we are grateful for the opportunity to gather as your people. We thank you for this place and we thank you for each one worshipping here this morning. We're especially grateful for our youth – for their energy, their willingness and their commitment. Thank you for the significant work they did at camp this week, for the fun they had, for the bonds of faith and relationships that grew stronger. Thank you for Rachael and Brian, for Kevin and Bonnie – that they were able and willing to spend this week with these students. We thank you for each parent and family of the youth and we ask for your continued presence and blessing on each one. We pray especially for Brent Rauh as he heals and recovers from a stroke last week. Give him and Mary courage and encouragement as he undergoes the difficult rehab that will be needed. Be with the children too as their lives are altered by this unexpected event.

We pray for our younger children as well – be with them as they enjoy the end of summer and begin to think about heading back to school. We pray also for teachers, administrators and others who are working even now to prepare for a new school year. We're grateful for all schools and particularly our church schools; let your wisdom and creativity be known and experienced especially keenly there. We ask for your presence, God especially with Eli and Jayley this week as they go to camp. May they experience your love in new and special ways. Be with the counselors and other staff working there this week. Let your light shine through them in ways that are visible and impactful to the campers and each other.

We pray also for our elders and loved ones who are not able to worship with us in-person anymore. Be with those who live and work at Bethesda, at Kidron-Bethel, at Schowalter Villa at Pine Village, at Homestead in Marion, at Paramount Community in Newton – and other places.

Eternal God, we pray for Esther Funk's family – for Janice and Delton, Chrystiana and Peter and their families as they grieve her loss and celebrate her life. Bless them with your comfort and presence in the days and weeks to come. Be with others who are grieving losses of all kinds. Life is full of losses and gains – some expected and some take us by surprise. Help us to remember that YOU are the God who makes us whole, who gives us the fullness of joy.

We pray for the needs of the world. Be with those who live in places where there are fires and drought and be with those who are protecting the water. Be with those who live in places where there are floods or where buildings have collapsed and loved ones are unaccounted for. O God, grant the people of this world wisdom and willingness to care for one another as the covid virus and its variants continue to threaten our health and well-being.

We pray for all followers of Jesus who are gathered to worship you – in our community and around the world. You know the journey, the struggles and the joys of each follower and of each congregation. You know God, the particular dynamics of each group, the relationships that are strong and thriving and those that are tenuous and hanging by the last thread of trust.

#### Offertory Prayer –

Giver of all good gifts, accept these gifts offered back to you. Not that we can ever begin to repay you, but we acknowledge you as giver and creator. We give with grateful hearts.

#### Benediction –

Go now, filled with the love of the One who loves beyond boundaries. Do justly. Love mercy. Walk humbly with God and with one another.

## SERMON JULY 18 ALEXANDERWOHL

### **MAYNARD KNEPP:**

The Duerksen family trip is coming up soon. Since before we were married 40 years ago, I have been part of a vacation trip that Carol and her siblings and parents took every year. We've seen many different things, and yes, we've become aware of the fact that we have different opinions about politics and theology and scripture in our family. Sometimes we talk about it. Sometimes we don't.

Case in point. Recently one family member was talking about a wonderful local politician who did such great things for his community. When he was done talking, my response was, "Of course, he's a good Democrat taking care of his people."

And the family member, without missing a beat, said, "So, do you think it's going to rain some more?"

**Travis** raises hand and we acknowledge him, and he says "I have a question." (This is dejavue for sure for all those who remember the child Travis doing this after children's stories.) He asks "What difference does it make?"

### **CAROL DUERKSEN:**

That's a good question, but ....What difference does WHAT make?

**Travis:** "If we are following Jesus, what difference does it make?"

Right. So, let's look at 3 scriptures—Micah 6:8, Matthew 7:24-27, and Galatians 5:22-26.

If we are following Jesus it seems that we would do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Those are the basic elements.

**Travis:** Do you have a story? I like stories.

**MAYNARD:** Of course, here's a story about justice.

When we engage in conversation in regard to immigrants at the border it can be a very difficult conversation because the issues are so complex. There are so many opinions about the wall.... should we have one or shouldn't we have one. How does it or doesn't it affect me or our country?. How should we respond to people who come to our borders looking for a better life?

Every person coming to our border is one of God's Creation, and has a story and the reason why they are here. We all experience this issue differently. My experience is that I spent some time in El Salvador meeting with MCC partners--organizations that are working hard to try to make life more comfortable back home, so they want to stay in this beautiful place. El Salvador is a very productive country. Their growing season is 365 days out of the year.

When I was there, I chose to live with the family and experience firsthand what living in the community that I was in was like. It was a very small two room home with bunk beds along one wall, a few dishes in the corner, a hand washing station outside, a toilet outside. I arrived in the middle of the night on the back of an S 10 pickup in a driving rainstorm. It was a memorable evening as I tried to sleep in a bed with wet clothes on.

In the morning there was a small table with two chairs where they served us a wonderful meal as they stood around and watched. Our host was working on a 15,000-acre banana plantation and his payment was \$5 a day. He shared that the week before, the employees of the plantation went on strike, requesting \$10 a day. The US Marines showed up and broke up the strike. My response was "how is this possible?"

It's possible because the plantation is owned by an American company, and they have the right to protect their interests. To me that brings a whole new meaning of what it means to have cheap bananas at Walmart.

I realize this is just my experience from one little area of El Salvador. But in doing some research I am aware that 80% of the food production in El Salvador is owned by foreign investment. So, if we build the wall to keep all Salvadorans on their side, should we not also stay on our side? Do we expect privileges that are not afforded to other people in the world?

Justice is a very complicated issue. Just because it is complicated doesn't mean we have the excuse to ignore unjust situations. Sometimes our biggest problem is not a compassion problem, but a proximity problem. Not many people get argued into thinking differently about a justice issue. But many people get "storied" in. People don't change their mind because they lost an argument. But people's heads change because their hearts are moved by another person's suffering that they either experience or hear about in a story.

The story of Jonah in the Bible is about a man who wanted to avoid a certain situation. Jonah thought he wanted to avoid going to the sinful city of Ninevah, but in reality, what he wanted to avoid was having God's mercy made available to everyone. Why did he run away from God's call to go to Ninevah? Why did he end up in that big fish? Why was he so angry when he did end up going to Ninevah to tell the people to repent?

Because he didn't want God to be so merciful to those sinful people! That didn't fit into his plans and mindset. In Jonah's mind, those Ninevites were in the "sinners box." In his mind, he was saved and they were not. He had the truth and they did not. He was in charge and God was not.

Silly Jonah.

Surely none of us would think or act like that. Surely none of us would be so wrapped up in our way of thinking that we can't imagine God's mercy being bigger than that!

**CAROL:**

We need to remind ourselves every day to walk humbly. Because if we do, maybe we can walk ourselves into learning how to show mercy.

In the book "50 Shades of Grace" Karen Andres tells the following story:

Karen was participating in an 8 day-silent retreat. She was there because she didn't know how to deal with a deep sadness within her soul. Oh she knew why it was there. A beautiful, 49-year-old woman from her congregation had taken her own life. Karen was one of the pastors who had walked with her through her troubled life. Karen knew she couldn't take responsibility for the woman's death, but the ache in her heart left her feeling very empty. And so, she was at a spiritual retreat. She went for a walk, stopped to sit down, and prayed this prayer:

"Lord, I admit I am clueless. I know why I'm here but I don't know how to find healing for my inner being. I don't know if I feel connected to you right now. I feel like I'm missing something. Please help me."

After saying the prayer, Karen got up and headed into a small wooded area, but as she got closer, she smelled a skunk. "I'm not going near that area," she decided, and sat back down where it seemed safe.

Then she heard the words: "Do you believe I can protect you from a skunk?"

"What?" she said out loud.

"Do you believe I can protect you from a skunk?"

Well, Karen didn't know if that was God talking to her or now, but unlike, Jonah, she was ready to take the risk. So she said "Of course, God, you can do anything."

And then the voice said "Go back into the woods."

Karen argued just a little bit, but the voice said again, "Go back into the woods."

So she did. Slowly. Cautiously. She sat down on a stump.

The morning sunlight peered through the trees and seemed to focus on her soul. She felt warmth. Peace. And the tears began to flow. Love overpowered her.

This time she heard the words: "See, you haven't lost your faith. You still trust me. My love and grace is enough for you."

God gave Karen one more gift later that week. She dreamed that the woman who had died, who was an avid runner, was running....running with a smile on her face, toward a wonderful place!

Yes, walking humbly with God means hearing that still small voice speaking to our heart. It means going into the scary woods. It means running joyfully into wonderful places and situations.

**Travis:** What do those stories have to do with the story about the house on the rock?

**CAROL:** Jesus said if you hear my words and DO them, you are like a house on the rock. We have heard stories about what it can mean to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God. Our Galatians 5 scripture gives us specifics on what it actually means to live this out:

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,<sup>23</sup> gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.<sup>24</sup> And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.<sup>25</sup> If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.”

If we live like this, our house is built on a rock. It’s pretty simple, yet incredibly complicated. This is who we are and what we do.

**TRAVIS:** But what does this have to do with the Duerksen family trip?

**MAYNARD**

I thought you’d never ask.

We could spend time telling each other WHAT we believe and why, knowing all along that there will be differences. OR we can spend time telling each other WHAT DIFFERENCE OUR FAITH MAKES IN OUR LIVES. We can tell stories of how God has met us where we are. How God has connected us to people and experiences that changed our lives. How have we experienced justice, mercy, and humility?

After all, when you leave this morning, you may not remember much about this sermon, but you just might remember the stories. We need to tell the stories!!!

**CAROL**

We can celebrate that God is big enough and full of enough mercy to cover us all. We are all in the family of God. It’s a big family. It’s a family with one commandment from Jesus on the wall of the family room: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might, and your neighbor as yourself.”

Rachel Held Evans said this: “The church is not a group of people who believe the same things: the church is a group of people caught up in the same story, with Jesus at the center.”

May it be so.