

3/20/22 WORSHIP SERVICE

WORDS OF WELCOME – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

good morning! Welcome to 2022's first day of spring! It seems as if spring is arriving with warm, gusty winds and the promise of more rain – a much-needed gift which we'll accept with gratitude. Today is the third Sunday in Lent as we continue with Luke's story of Jesus on his journey towards Jerusalem, encouraging his listeners to repent and return to God's way of love.

CALL TO WORSHIP –

Leader: Together we seek the way of God,

People: humbling ourselves to receive God's mercy.

Leader: We crave the security of knowing God's presence

People: but we want to be able to predict and control it.

Leader: God, who has made us, knows what we need.

People: We, who are God's creatures proclaim God's greatness.

Leader: As we worship, let us receive God's abundant gifts.

All: Let us praise God and sing for joy!

INVOCATION –

God, we acknowledge your Holy Spirit presence here. We're grateful that there is no place we can go where you are not. There is no thought we can think, no act we can do, no word we can speak that you are not aware of. You are Love and we are your loved ones. Bless us in this time of worship – may we produce good fruit as a result of our time here. Amen.

MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR CALEB YODER

Holy God,

We are gathered to worship you, and we ask that your presence would bless all who are worshipping with us this morning.

Long ago, through the prophet Isaiah, you invited all who are thirsty to come to the waters and all who have no money to delight in the richest of fare. You invite us to a rich feast – the feast of knowing You, and knowing your love as the ground of all things. The feast of connecting with others for support, love, and discipline on this adventure that we call faith.

We want to believe that we are entitled to the feast, that we have earned it in some way, or we secretly despise ourselves for not being “good enough” for such a marvelous offer. But you have said “Come... without money and without cost.” You call us to come to you; listen, that we may live.

Your ways are higher than our ways, and your thoughts higher than our thoughts. Forgive us for buying into the logic thinking we need to earn your love, or of thinking we are better because we have somehow earned it. Teach us the lesson through the unpredictable experiences of life that your abundant life is always a gift and always available to us.

Help us to show grace to one another, recognizing that we are all on journeys of life and faith. Help us extend grace to those we relate to who we disagree with. Help us to bear fruit through the Spirit of Christ living in us.

We give thanks for the reasons we share for celebration, including the blessing of new life. Just as we rejoice with the Hiebert family in welcoming baby Raegan, so also we rejoice with Rod and Linda Peters and the extended Peters family upon the safe arrival of Felicity Strider Peters to Brady and Karyn who are in Maryland.

We also share sadness together when one of us experiences loss or when earthly life ends for people dear to us.

This morning we lift up ElRoy Wiens, whose brother Arlen passed away on Wednesday morning in Oklahoma. We pray for ElRoy and Loretta and ElRoy's family as they experience this grief and also a sense of togetherness.

We also lift up Rick, DJ and Luke Freeman with the loss of Rick's father Ron who died on Monday morning. We ask for your comfort and peace to be with the Freeman family.

We give thanks for the successes of Irvin's surgery and pray for him as he recovers. We lift up both Irvin as well as his children with this present medical challenge and journeying with this stage of the process of aging.

We pray for others in our community who are not well, journeying with health challenges or suffering the side-effects of treatment. Have mercy, O God.

We extend our prayers beyond our community. We continue to pray for the Ukrainian people as this brutal war continues. We pray for peace. We pray for truth-telling to prevail, especially through the antiwar movement within Russia.

We pray for Mennonite Brethren churches and other churches within Ukraine seeking to be faithful in showing God's love in a time of crisis. We pray that this crisis might be an opportunity for people to glimpse your sacrificial love and meet Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Show each one of us the things that make for peace, that will make the name of Jesus to be compelling. Give us the wisdom and resolve to heal the brokenness that exists in our relationships so that we can demonstrate the truthfulness of our faith.

Give us the measure of healing we need from our own wounds to persist each day.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We continue with words of confession, to remember that we are always in need of God's mercy and grace.

We will have a moment of silence in which I encourage you to bring to mind something you wish to privately and consciously confess to God, knowing that God knows our thoughts and our hearts completely.

Join with me in the words printed in your bulletins:

Leader: Holy One, we seek you while you may be found.

People: We call upon you while you are near.

Leader: Have mercy on us, O God, for our thoughts are not your thoughts and our ways are not your ways.

People: Forgive us for working so hard to try to earn and control your care for us.

Leader: With the Holy Spirit's guidance, open our hearts to receive your grace

All: and follow your way more faithfully.

(silence)

Blessed are we whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

Blessed are we whose sins our God does not count against us.

God's unfailing love surrounds those
who trust in the Holy One.

Let us rejoice and be glad!

PRAYER OF DEDICATION – please stand. Provider God, receive these gifts of money as they are offered to you with glad and grateful hearts. Receive also the gifts of time, of creativity, of loving and nurturing as we live our lives in gratitude to you. Amen.

2022-03-20

Lois Harder

Luke 13:1-9

From hubris to humility

At this point on Jesus' journey, he'd been teaching, healing, casting out demons, and making the people in power really uncomfortable and angry. He had already foretold his impending suffering and death twice, and in the verses just before today's reading he gave the crowds a bit of a scolding, calling them hypocrites – because, he told them, they seemingly knew how to forecast the weather and understand what signs the skies were giving them but they didn't know how to interpret the present time. They didn't understand what was happening right in front of them. People were not "getting" his message. They weren't understanding about God's kingdom coming "on earth, as it is in heaven", the message that he'd been trying to teach them. He could see that he was running out of time and he must have been really hoping that someone, his closest followers, at least, would grasp his teachings. He gave some pretty urgent, ominous warnings here!

It was not unusual for ancient people to understand suffering, illness and death as punishment for some sin that someone had committed. I mean, let's face it, it's *still* sometimes thought of in those terms. It's a human tendency to try to make sense of things that don't seem to make sense! If something horrible happens, we often try to come up with reasons or explanations – partly as a way to find comfort and security for ourselves. If we can name a perceived sin or mistake or find some explainable circumstance for someone else's bad fortune, then maybe we can reassure ourselves that it won't happen to us. This takes us back to the sermon series on Job and the ways Job's friends tried to understand and explain the awful things that were happening to him. Now, remember, the story of Job was written centuries before Jesus' time.

So, here was Jesus, trying to get this lesson across again in the first century and... here we are today – we're *still* trying to grasp it! It's not easy, that's for sure! So, let's keep trying.

There is no lack of current-day examples of innocent suffering. I'm sure one of the first situations that comes to all of our minds is the unprovoked war on Ukraine – not so different, actually, than the Galilean's blood that Pilate had spilled for no apparent or "deserved" reason. We watch helplessly as evil seems to prevail and our sense of "justice" is offended as it seems to be unattainable at this point. The Ukrainian people have done nothing to deserve or incur this kind of suffering and death! Another example – perhaps some of you saw the article in the most recent issue of Anabaptist World about the tragic auto accident near Andrews, TX? A 13-year old boy and his father were killed as the child was driving his dad's truck while his dad was a passenger. "A spare tire failed," the article says, "causing the truck to swerve and cross the median into the path of a van carrying members of the men's and women's golf teams of University of the Southwest in Hobbs, N.M. Six students and their coach died" in the crash as well as the boy and his father. Now, clearly, a 13-year old boy should not have been driving. But still... this is un-explainable, and nearly unbearable tragedy. Certainly not anything that anyone in this scenario "deserved". Closer to home and a personal experience, this past Thursday a friend of mine died from Covid complications. It was her final battle, after lots of other illnesses, financial hardships, an extremely difficult childhood and countless broken relationships. Her husband said to me, "Well... I guess God just has it in for us. We can't never seem to catch a break."

I'm sure you all can bring to mind other examples of undeserved tragedies. So, if we believe in an all-powerful, all-knowing, justice-seeking, loving God, how and why do these things happen? It must be somebody's fault!

The urgent message that Jesus is trying to get across is that we humans waste a lot of time and forfeit a lot of happiness trying to figure out whose sin caused the tragedy. We could experience life and joy so much more fully and be so much more productive in terms of helping to usher in God's kingdom, if we could repent of our hubris and embrace humility.

The definition of hubris is "excessive pride or self-confidence". Thinking that we can surely figure out why bad things happen to good people if we can only master the system of sin and how its consequences are measured out. That way we could be certain of which sins are

forgivable and which are not. We could know, beyond all doubt, who has gained entrance into eternal glory and who is destined to eternal anguish. Hubris – excessive pride or self-confidence.

Humility, on the other hand, is described by Paul in Philippians 2. The biblical editors titled this chapter,

Imitating Christ's Humility

2 Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷ rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Humility – living out the understanding that life is beautiful and fragile! It is a gift from God. Our time is unknown! Tragedy and illness and death – those are all capricious realities of life on this earth over which we have very little control. That's all God's territory and it's mystery to us.

Our job is to love. Love with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds and all our strength. Love God, love ourselves and love others. Love doesn't give up. It keeps meeting people right where they're at. It keeps proclaiming and sharing God's love. Love works to cultivate transformation and restoration for the world. And when that kind of transforming love becomes our focus, we can be liberated to leave all the rest to God. All the judging, all the figuring out whose sin is the worst and certainly all things eternal. When we can love with the heart of a servant, as Jesus showed us, we can be fruitful! We can humbly allow the gardener to prune and prod and dig and spread manure so that we can bear fruit! There's not much space for hubris in the posture of a fruitless tree. But there are limitless possibilities for growth and joy as we co-create with God, the kingdom of heaven here on earth.