

AUGUST 21, 2022 WORSHIP SERVICE

WELCOME – PASTOR LOIS

Good morning! It's GOOD to gather as God's people – to fellowship, to worship, to sing God's praises and pray, to be encouraged in our faith as we continue with this sermon series to unpack the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.

What do you bring to share this morning for opportunities for celebration and service?

I'm glad to welcome Re'an Wills and Sara Kelly and their reliable driver Jim _____ from Health Ministries in Newton. They were with us here in the FH on Friday morning for Sr. Coffee and they agreed to come back again this morning for a Moment in Mission. Thank you, for being here – and welcome!

Please join me in the **Call to Worship** as it's printed in your bulletin –

Leader: O God, open our lips

People: and our mouths will proclaim your praise.

Leader: You are good to those who wait for you,

People: to all who seek you.

All: Glory to You, Source of All Being, Eternal Word, and Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

Let's pray. May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen. (light the peace lamp)

INTRO TO SCRIPTURE READINGS – PASTOR LOIS

This morning we'll look at Articles 6, 7 and 8 of the Confession Faith. The summaries of those articles are printed in your bulletin. These three articles give us a really "big-picture" look at the Biblical narrative. They kind of give us a three-part story that we'll hear bits of this morning, from the book of Romans. The first part describes how God created all things, including humans, and then God made a covenant, a very special agreement with humanity that God and humans would love and honor each other and, together, care for the rest of creation. The second part tells about how humans agreed to this covenant but then broke it – over and over again. The third part tells about how God continues to love humanity anyway, and in the person of Jesus offers humanity ways to be reconciled to God and to all of creation.

Our three scripture readers this morning are folks who are not able to be here with us, in person, but Caleb and I have recorded them reading these passages. Lois Janzen will begin with Romans 8:19-25 and 38-39. Lois, by the way, is recovering well and hopes to join us again soon.

MORNING PRAYER

Creator God,

You made our massive and mysterious universe, of which scientists say only a small portion is observable. Your intricate handiwork is everywhere, in the expansive sky and delicate blooms, all demonstrating your artistry. You called forth a people to be a blessing to all nations.

Incarnate Word,

You were present at the beginning of time, and yet we know you through the life of Jesus. You lived as a human being, you experienced all the same weaknesses, emotions, and pain that we do.

You were faithful to your calling to the end, even suffering death on the cross, so that you could redeem the broken, and in fact all of creation.

Life-giving Spirit,

You inspired the witness of the Scriptures, and speak in manifold ways. You are the power that raised Jesus from the dead, and your same power lives also in us to become a renewed people.

Thank you for your love that remakes us and makes all things new.

Have mercy on us, as people unworthy of your love, and yet we are also priceless worth to you, so much that you have your Son for us.

We believe, and yet we also feel so small, so preoccupied, so overwhelmed.

Overwhelmed with our own cares and problems or perhaps also overwhelmed at the problems we see in the broader community and our world.

Poverty, addiction, deep cultural conflict, uncertainty about the future, racism, greater divide between the world's rich and poor, mass shootings, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, drought and heat waves around the world, and the list can go on.

We believe you are calling us, but to what? We believe you are at work, but where?

Let us neither be concerned only with ourselves, or fall into overwhelm and paralysis. But let us open ourselves to the transformation of your Spirit so that we can be a part of your transformation of the world.

We offer prayers for our fellowship and community.

We thank you, God, for our elders. We thank you for their hard-earned wisdom from years of experience. Let us be mindful and intentional about receiving their wisdom. We pray for your continued presence with them, and pray that they may not feel alone in the losses they experience in the latter years. We especially remember those walking with challenging health issues.

We pray for young people as they begin sports fall extra-curricular activities. In the transition from summer to school, we pray that all may find personal growth, strengthened relationships, and safety.

We pray for families that are experiencing this fall as a life transition – kids starting school for the first time, kids entering a new school or new activities, and young people leaving home for the first time. Help us to practice gratitude at all moments in life, and to remember the temporary nature of all things that we might fully be present to the joys of life as it is right now.

We also pray for those most affected by drought conditions and lack of rain to replenish the ground. We remember our vulnerability and lack of control and trust in you to provide for our needs.

We pray for the ability to see the goodness that you intend in our world. Strengthen us so that we do not think of our own pain or troubles as separate, but as part of the pain common to all humans.

Help us to be aware of injustice without despairing. To let that pain become a resolve to make positive contributions in a hope that does not put us to shame, because it is based on your love poured out upon us by the Spirit. Transform us to be the face of that hope.

In the name of Jesus, who perfectly embodied hope and justice, Amen

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

(Inspired by the offertory of the Nicaraguan Peasants' Mass, Carlos Mejía Godoy)

Lord,

In our worship, we offer you our daily labor, all our sweat and energy expended throughout the week. We offer you our entire work, whether milo and soybeans, or the passion and enthusiasm of our hearts.

Whatever the nature of our work, you receive the generous offering of fruit of our labor. May it be in service to your reign, Amen

“WE’RE BEING SAVED” – PASTOR LOIS

Romans 8:19-25 and 38-39; Romans 3:9-18, Romans 5:1-11

Each of the articles in the Confession of Faith has many scripture passages in the footnotes at the end, giving readers reference points so we know from where, in the Bible, these confessions are rooted and grounded – where the ideas came from. For each of these three articles, there were references from the book of Romans, so for the sake of continuity, I chose the Romans passages, but there were lots of others too!

The first verses that Lois read for us from chapter 8, describe the beauty and the pain, the patient waiting and the responsive action that are required as all of creation groans and works together in a concerted effort to co-create with God. These efforts can bring about God's intended peace and thriving in the world. Within these juxtapositions that Paul uses as descriptors, we find an explanation for what it means for people to have been created good, in God's image, and also to have been given the choice of whether to respond to God's call to live as faithful creatures. It seems like this was never set up to be a smooth or easy process! Because, as long as humans have both that of God in us AND free will, there will be this sort push-pull tension and synergy – both resisting and, at the same time, collaborating. I can't think of any better example to use to describe this process than birth. The way it's designed to work is for the body and the mind to both resist one another and collaborate with one another. It's painful, it's difficult, it's risky, it's usually not a good idea to do it alone – the birth process almost always requires some help from others and finally, when it's complete, there's something/someone brand new. Some brand new potential, energy, possibility and hope. "For in hope", it says in verse 24, "we are saved". And then, these wise words about hope. "... hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

And while we wait, we cling to the promise of God's love holding us steady, never leaving us. Verses 38 and 39 of chapter 8 that Lois finished the reading with are simply loaded with hope. Let's say it together – we'll just take a moment to look it up; it's number 337... "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

Because we find our own, human selves reflected in the person of Jesus, we trust that although it's terribly difficult, it is POSSIBLE for humanity to choose, in cooperation with one another *and* with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to make choices that will bring about a hopeful, peaceful, reconciled world – the kind of world that begins to resemble God's kingdom. This is what article 6 says we believe God has called us to. Making those kinds of decisions and choices is what we understand as our assignment for our years here on this earth. And one of the ways we can do that is to follow the old adage, "trust and obey". Some of you may have heard me say this before, but I can't resist this opportunity to tell you about my grandma and that song. She told us that when she was a little girl in the wilds of northern Michigan they, like many, didn't have cars in the early days and they depended on their horses to get around, including to get to church. So in my grandma's young mind the words of the song were, "Trust the old bay – for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust the old bay."

The challenge for us to trust and obey, we learn in article 7, is sin.

The passage that Irvin read for us from Romans 3 is a list – not an exhaustive one, mind you, but a collection from the Psalms of some of the reasons we humans are distracted and prevented from making the kinds of choices that can usher in God's kingdom. Specifically, Paul was naming the reasons that his own Jewish friends were no better than the Gentiles. "We are ALL under the power of sin", he wrote. So, when you hear a statement like that, how does it make you feel? What kind of baggage do you bring to the word sin? It has tended to be a pretty "loaded" word and can trigger some of us right out of the room. So let's have a look at what our

confession of faith tells us about sin. Some of the ideas that I'll share come from The Bible Project; they compliment nicely what's in our confession.

We sin when we don't trust and obey. Sin is when we miss the mark and don't make the goal. And what is the goal? The goal is to love. Simply put, our goal, every day, is to love God, love others, and love creation and to see all of those relationships as interconnected. And when we don't that, either individually and collectively, it's usually because we've lost our focus, we've lost sight of the goal. We're distracted – often by ourselves and the urge to act for our own benefit at the expense of others. When we do that it leads to a chain reaction of relational breakdown. Sin, unfortunately, is more than just making bad choices and doing bad things. It describes how quickly and easily we can turn our focus completely on ourselves and convince ourselves that this is where our focus really needs to be! We seem to be experts at deceiving ourselves into believing that our bad decisions are really quite good ones, our self-centered attention is actually where our focus belongs. And soon we can become captives of that circular myopic train of thought, enslaved by the power of our own unfaithful choices.

Now, lest we begin to descend into the pit of, “Oh, what a horrible wretch I am”, it might behoove us to remember that this self-indulgent behavior is fully, 100% human and every single human participates in it. It's in our nature. It's how we're wired. It's why we have to learn and make a conscious decision to trust and obey which is really counter to what we do when left to our own devices. This is why Jesus is such good news! Jesus was a human who showed us how to truly, selflessly LOVE! Jesus showed us, in human form, the fullness of God's love and faithfulness. And when we stay focused on Jesus and on following his examples, we can, sometimes, also show and be the fullness of God's love. Thanks be to God!

And that brings us to the 8th article in our confession of faith and the reading that Glen shared with us from Romans 5 on the topic of salvation. When I was in high school I dated a boy whose family attended a Southern Baptist church. They were very sweet and loving people and they welcomed me into their home. Part of what they understood about salvation was the notion of “once saved, always saved”. I learned that what that meant (at least to their son) was that a person could basically do whatever they wanted during the week as long as they went to church on Sunday morning and confessed (silently, in their own heart, obviously). Now, generally, that seemed to worked out pretty well for him. But I soon began to understand this concept that I was just talking about of a person making pretty self-focused decisions and all the while convincing themselves that they were actually ok decisions that wouldn't really have consequences and that it doesn't really matter because you've already been saved anyway... well, that just didn't ring true! It does matter! Because as it turns out, “being saved” isn't necessarily just a one-time event. It's an on-going process that keeps happening all throughout our lives.

Each time we catch ourselves making one of those self-absorbed decisions or missing that goal of love and care for the earth and for one another, we can own it, name it, and try to do better next time. And each time that happens we're being saved. We're learning about endurance and character and hope that doesn't disappoint. We're learning about the kind of love that Jesus showed us – a love that is stronger than hate, stronger than fear, stronger than apathy, stronger even than death. We're learning about a love that reconciles us to one another, to all of creation and to our Creator. As we learn, we're being saved, and thankfully, we have Jesus as our example and our friend along the way.