

5/14/23 WORSHIP SERVICE

WELCOME

Welcome to Alexanderwohl, on this beautiful spring day whether you are worshipping with us here in person, or watching on Zoom, or are watching the recording later. We are glad you are here.

Many of us are celebrating Mother's Day today. Today we celebrate all those involved in the nurture and education of children as we dedicate two children and their families and commit to modeling and encouraging their faith development.

CALL TO WORSHIP

All: We are not alone; we live in God's world.

Leader: We believe in God: who has created and is creating, who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh, to reconcile and make new, who works in us and others by the Spirit.

People: We trust in God.

Leader: We are called to be the Church: to celebrate God's presence, to live with respect in Creation, to love and serve others, to seek justice and resist evil, to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

People: In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

Leader: We are not alone.

All: Thanks be to God!

INVOCATION

Thank you, God, for the opportunity to worship as a family of faith.

Thank you for the hard-earned wisdom of our elders and the energy and passion of the young.

Fill us with your Spirit as we seek your presence this morning.

Amen.

MORNING PRAYER

Last evening I received word that Vernon Base (who is the father of Lacie Hill, sec. at the elem. school) had a very unfortunate run-in with a cow yesterday afternoon and was injured quite seriously. He is at Wesley Medical Center in Wichita.

We thank you loving God, for this beautiful morning, for this place and this chance to be together as your people, to worship you and to fellowship with one another.

We're grateful for the gift of families – people given to us as well as those we've chosen – to trust, to love, to nurture and challenge us in this life. We're grateful for our mothers and for all

the people who show us your grace and who model the ways of Jesus for us. Help us to also *be* those kinds of people for others.

Thank you God for the accomplishment of graduation – of completing a course of study, knowing that hard work and learning has happened, and that we can move on to the next level or the next goal.

God, we're grateful for the rain that we've had recently. It refreshes the earth and all of creation. We acknowledge that we wish for more; it's still terribly dry here and in the western part of our state, especially. And while we need **more** rain, we pray for those who are suffering from too much – where there are destructive floods and land-slides in Rwanda, Uganda and especially in the DRC where many have died and there's already so much poverty and need. We pray for **all** people who've been displaced from their homes for whatever reasons – because of storms or wars or lack of resources. We pray for the Ukrainian people who continue to endure war and violence; give them comfort and hope. We pray for the people of Sudan. We pray for Israelis and Palestinians who continue to struggle for land and a place to call home. We pray for the Turkish people as they go to the polls today to vote in a presidential election. We pray for calm and a way forward without violence.

We pray for those we know and love who have health concerns. We think of Vernon Base and the injuries he's suffering. Be with the doctors as they treat him and with Lacie as she sits at his bedside. Be with Vernon. Bring healing, comfort and relief from pain for him. God, we pray for others who are undergoing treatments or who have upcoming procedures. We pray for those who just don't feel well, who may be tired and discouraged. Give healing, Lord. Work through doctors and others who have education and skills. And work through your Holy Spirit to give comfort and encouragement. We thank you for healing that has already come – particularly for Kent Sterk; we pray for continued healing and well-being for him. We thank you for healing and recuperation that Marilyn Schmidt has experienced and we pray for continued improvement for her. (Thank you that she can be worshiping with us here again this morning.?)

Thank you for the opportunity to host Vacation Bible School here again this summer, God. Continue to be with those who are working and planning and with the children who will come to enjoy and learn. Bless the efforts that are made to share your love.

Be with us now through the rest of this worship service. May your Spirit be given space in each heart and mind to move and lead and give what is needed for each person. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

OFFERING PRAYER

Please stand. **Prayer** – bless these gifts of money, O God. Bless each person who has given and bless each of us as we use ALL the gifts from you to share your love and shine your light. Amen.

REFLECTION

This opening passage from the second letter of Paul to Timothy, gives us a window into the mentoring relationship that the apostle Paul had with Timothy.

Timothy was a young leader in the church. You have probably heard the verse in 1 Timothy 4:12, where Paul gives Timothy the advice: “don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.”

Even a young person can demonstrate wisdom beyond their years and set an example for even older people to follow. Paul’s words to Timothy are poignant, as he recalls the deep faith of Timothy’s mother Eunice and grandmother Lois.

We know little about them apart from this verse. This was an era when most Jesus followers were first-generation. When there were Christian households of multiple generations, it is quite possible that the household came to the faith together, rather than the faith being passed down through the generations.

Yet, the life experience of Lois and Eunice on Timothy, and the familial relationship he had on him, surely meant that their faith was an inspiration to Timothy’s own faith. Paul is convinced that this authentic, genuine faith – “without hypocrisy” would be the literal translation – dwells in Timothy’s heart as well.

Just as Timothy gives leadership for others, he has received the familial leadership of these two older women.

YOSEMITE

A week ago, I was hiking at Yosemite National Park with a friend. This past winter, there was more than double the usual snow fall. As we made our way to Yosemite point, the trail was no longer visible as it was covered in snow. The snow was pretty solid, and we walked right over top of snowpack perhaps three to four feet deep, though it might have been nice to have some more traction.

Without a trail, we relied on the footprints of other hikers in order to find our way. Without those footprints, it would have been much harder.

The New Testament often talks about Jesus as a spiritual path. “I am the way,” Jesus says in the Gospel of John (14:6). The Gospels talk about following Jesus. The apostle Paul talks often about dying with Christ in order to be raised with Christ.

The way would be dangerous or impossible if it were not opened for us by Christ who has gone before us. The Christian life is seeking to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

Of course, it was not just one set of footprints that we followed on that mountain but many. There were a number of hikers who had gone the same way. Their footprints were joined to those of the very first person.

And we were making footprints too, adding to the snowpack trail. By virtue of making our own way, we make footprints for others to follow.

Our faith journeys are life-long journeys. When we dedicate children and their parents to the nurture of faith development in children, we probably have in mind things like family devotions, children's stories, Sunday school, or Bible school. But of course, we hope to lay the ground work for a life-long journey that the next generation will at some point need to make their own.

We need to offer our children something solid. They may test it, question it, or revise it later. But we have to be willing to talk about our faith, model faith, mentor faith, and entertain hard questions.

All of us answer will sooner or later face questions of deep significance with our lives: Burning questions like: "Who am I?" "What am I here for?" "What does it look like to live a meaningful life?" "What does love look like?" "Where do I find hope amid my own crises and the injustice and crises in the world?"

Two Sundays ago, the Faith Exploration group went to the Kauffman Museum to see the exhibit on the Mirror of the Martyrs. One of the most poignant stories of the Anabaptist martyrs is of a woman named Maeyken Wens. Maeyken wrote several letters while she was imprisoned for practicing Anabaptist faith. Two of these were to her 15-year-old son Adriaen.

She wrote to him:

"My dear child Adriaen, my son, I leave you this for a testament, because you are the oldest, to exhort you that you should begin to fear our dear Lord, for you are getting old enough to perceive what is good or evil..."

This, I, Maeyken Wens, your mother, have written, while I was in prison for the Word of the Lord; the good Father grant you His grace, my son Adriaen. Write me a letter as to what your heart says, whether you desire to fear the Lord; this I should like to know."

We no longer have the same circumstances of persecution, but we are still moved by a mother's desire to offer her footprints to her son, and assure him that there is life beyond the dangerous place they may take him.

PASSING ON FAITH

Back in the old days, Mennonite communities, along with many other communities of other denominations, were cultural enclaves. Everyone went to church. Everyone practiced this particular version of the Christian faith. It was a way of life.

The church certainly made a great effort to teach the faith to the next generation. We have plenty of memories here of pretty intense catechism classes, along with baptism services with dozens of candidates.

We don't live in the old days anymore. There's a good reason to think the next generation will not find the Christian faith reasonable, meaningful, or compelling, unless we give them that foundation. Frankly, it's kind of easy for older generations to have their heads in the sand about this.

If you are generation Z or younger and you are intentional about living out Christian faith, you will be in the minority in most parts of the country. Goessel may be some decades behind the trends, but that doesn't mean the trends don't impact this community as well.

Certainly, there is a point where we allow each young person the integrity of making their own choices. Neither the perfect parenting, nor the perfect faith formation predetermines how a young person will choose to orient and live their life.

If you can't predetermine what your child will do, what can you do? Parents and the congregation must answer for ourselves what our faith is about and why it matters to us.

It might be easier to just going through the motions, going to church or engaging in Christian practices simply because, "that's what we do around here."

If you are a parent, you don't need to worry about having the right words or extensive Bible knowledge, or the answers to your kid's hard theological questions. None of that is what matters most.

What your children will notice is the unspoken aspect of your faith. How important and central is this to you really? How much is your faith a part of your daily choices and pursuits? Do you participate in church because of social pressure, or because it means something deeply to you?

Your children will observe your own commitments, your spoken and unspoken values, and they will take their cues from that, regardless of what you say or teach. The important thing is to be very intentional without being willful or forceful.

No one would say, "well, I don't want to tell my child which language is the right language to learn, so I just won't teach them English, so they'll be free to choose which language they prefer to speak when they are older."

For most of us, the biblical story of Jesus, is the story that we know, our framework for making meaning of life, and living lives of love. This is what we are most empowered to teach, while giving freedom to the next generation to test this faith, and apply it to their own unique circumstances.

The hymn, "I know not why God's wondrous grace," echoes 2 Timothy 1:12: "But I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

The Common English Bible puts it this way: *"I know the one in whom I've placed my trust. I'm convinced that God is powerful enough to protect what he has placed in my trust until that day."*

If you listened closely, you will notice a small difference – is this about what we have entrusted to God or about what God has entrusted with us? The Greek actually allows this to be interpreted either way. Maybe it's both.

In the flow of the letter, it makes perfect sense to say that God has placed a sacred trust, a sacred deposit in Paul's hands and that God is working to safeguard that trust.

Also, Paul commands Timothy in verse 14 to do the work of safeguarding this deposit or trust, so that certainly suggests the interpretation of a sacred trust placed in our hands.

On the day that we are dedicating parents and children, we can only connect this to a very particular sacred trust that God has given us: these little humans. It is humbling and scary to assume such a sacred trust. Every parent feels the anxiety of messing up and inadvertently harming their children.

We have twin consolations. First, that parents are not alone, because you are part of a congregation that shares this sacred trust with you, and will partner with you in teaching your children that they are loved, teaching the story of Jesus and encouraging each one's faith development.

Secondly, you are not alone, because, as Paul says, God is powerful enough to protect what God has placed in your trust.

Let's partner with one another in this work. Keep walking. Follow the footprints of Jesus, and leave your own footprints for others to follow. May it be so.

PARENT/CHILD DEDICATION

Families come up front during the hymn, Today Earth is Singing.

Lois – *We welcome Bradley and Kay Siebert, along with Duane and Karen Unruh (also acknowledge Alma and DeAlan – John and Elaine?... others?) It's a lovely tradition in this congregation to offer several gifts to parents and their children at the time of dedication. There is a **certificate of dedication**. There are **faith marker books** where each event and commitment can be included. And there are **step stools or memory boxes** made by Tim Goertzen for each child. When Christian parents bring their child to God before the congregation, they come to thank God for this life entrusted to them, to offer their child back to God, and to ask for God's blessing on their life together. We as a congregation come to share their joy, to pray with them for the child's well-being and to receive the children into the care of the church.*

*The **rosebud** this morning is in honor of Mia Noel and her **grandparents will offer a prayer of blessing** for her. Cody received a rosebud and a prayer of blessing from his grandparents several months ago. (Grandparent blessing)*

Caleb – Braden and Jill, Jared and Laura, as you bring Mia and Cody for blessing by God in this congregation, do you consecrate yourselves as parents to bring them up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord? (We do.)

Lois – *Is it your purpose to seek to shape your family life by caring for one another, sharing in God's Word, in prayer and Christian fellowship so that Mia and Cody will be helped to know and love Christ as their Lord and Savior?*

Parents – *Yes, it is. As Christian parents we are thankful for the privilege of parenthood. We recognize that we have a very special role in Mia’s/Cody’s life, helping her/him to know and to love God. We pledge ourselves to the task of parenthood with love, patience, with firmness and with faith; trusting God to guide and strengthen us. We ask for the support of you, the congregation, in active partnership in our task of parenting. We need your encouragement. We entrust Mia/Cody to your loving care in this community of faith.*

Caleb – This is Mia Noel. She was born on January 9, 2023 to Jill and Braden, so she is just over 4 months old. Mia, may the God who created you, who sent Christ Jesus to redeem you, and the Spirit to dwell within you, may this God watch over you, bless you, and keep you always. As you grow may you come to know the love and presence of God in your life and receive Christ Jesus into your heart. And Jill and Braden – may you be given wisdom and grace to love and nurture Mia with gentle patience as you guide her in her decision to love and follow Jesus. In the name of the God who gives us birth. Amen.

Lois – *And this is Cody John. Most of us have already met Cody because he’s 9 months old – he was born last August 21st. Same blessing and prayer as above.*

We invite all of you to stand and offer the words of congregational covenant to these families:

Caleb: You have offered your Mia and Cody to the strong and tender care of God.

All: **We rejoice with you and give thanks for the gift of your child.**

With God as our guide, we will share in your child’s nurture and well-being.

We will support, by our example and words, your efforts to provide a loving and caring home where trust in God grows and Christ may be known.

Our prayers are with you and for you.

May our shared life and witness help you grow as a family in faithfulness and joy.

[You may be seated as we sing together *See the Children Here before Us.*]

BENEDICTION

May you know in whom you have placed your trust, and may God, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, protect the sacred trust of teaching and modeling faith.

Amen.