

JUNE 25, 2023 WORSHIP SERVICE

WELCOME

Good morning! Good to be together on this beautiful summer Sunday morning. We'll continue in our series, "Seeking Peace Together" and this morning's admonition is to find some inner peace by letting go of worry. Right. Rest assured, the sermon is actually for me, but you all are welcome to listen in, if you'd like!

CALL TO WORSHIP (bulletin)

INVOCATION –

Creator God, you give drink to every animal and provide water for your people.
You cause grass to grow for the cattle and bring food from the soil for us.
You provide nesting materials for the birds of the air and safe dwellings for your people.
You clothe the lilies with splendor and cover us in beauty.
Let us seek your kingdom and help created a world
 where all creation, including all of your people,
 have clean water, nourishing food, safe dwellings, beauty upon beauty. Amen.

MORNING PRAYER – PASTOR CALEB

Creator God,

The earth is full of your abundance!

You give drink to every animal and provide water for your people. You cause grass to grow for the cattle and bring food from the soil for us. You provide nesting materials for the birds of the air and safe dwellings for your people. You clothe the lilies with splendor.

We confess that our attention and awareness is so often focused on what we think we lack that we fail to see and appreciate the many gifts you offer us in your grace. We thank you for all that we receive from the abundance of your earth: for food and water, shelter and clothing, beauty and joy in abundance.

We thank you for the ministry of camp, and the unique ways we experience your presence in the camp setting.

This week we remember Rebecca Hein as she goes to Camp Mennoscah later today. We pray for Rosie Gaeddert as she starts her week at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp.

We also remember Timothy Schrag, Jacob Schrag, Peter Voth, Nathaniel Schmucker and Lizzie Schmucker who are working at Camp Mennoscah this summer.

We pray for Tim Goertzen as he departs to go to Dawson's Creek, KY where he will serve with Mennonite Disaster Service during the month of July. Work through the gifts of Tim and the

many volunteers who will be there to participate in work projects. May your Spirit create experiences of joy, growth and new relationships through this work of rebuilding after disaster.

We pray also for the ministries within our congregation.

We pray for the intergenerational Sunday school time for 3-year olds through high school students that will begin next Sunday. May this be a time of growth and learning for children and youth and also a needed rest for regular Sunday school teachers.

We pray for those in our congregation experiencing grief.

We pray for Donley and Dennis Duerksen and their families with the passing of their sister Joyce Duerksen Unruh, who died peacefully at Bethesda Home on Thursday.

We also pray for family members of Joanne Klassen, who include brothers Ted and Kermit Nikkel, and sister-in-law Alice Jantz. We pray for your consolation and your grace to be with these families in a time of loss and change.

We pray for Rhonda's daughter Maty as she anticipates giving birth soon and having major surgery soon after. May your peace and your healing be with her. Go with Rhonda as she travels to be with Maty in August.

We pray for all those in our midst who feel pain in body and spirit and those carrying a heavy load of fear and worry. Through Christ, you know our burdens, and your life-giving and loving power is greater far.

We pray that we might release our anxiety and receive your abundant gifts, even as we live with uncertainty or challenges.

We thank you that life is more than food and the body more than clothing, that our deepest call and truest peace comes in working with you toward your reign of love. Let us truly seek first your kingdom, and be channels of your love and grace to those in need.

We pray in the words that Jesus taught...

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

O God, who both comforts and confronts us,

We give these offerings as our modest attempts to say that it is you whom we serve and not wealth. They are small actions we take to let go of our worry and trust in your provision. They are our witness to the world that we want to seek your reign first.

Receive what our offerings and work through them and through us, according to your will: to feed and clothe, nourish and love, bring peace to your people, and lead all people into transformed life. Amen.

SERMON – PASTOR LOIS HARDER

Matthew 6:25-34

“Letting Go of Worry”

“Nah, yo!” I don’t know whether you caught that at the end, but that’s the way dear Miss Susan ended the reading. That all-important Low German phrase is not in the Bible, but it seemed entirely fitting for Susan to include it. As I understand it, “Nah, yo” is a sort of exclamation or a way of punctuating something to indicate that it’s final or settled. It means something like, well, yes. or there now. So, it really does fit very well at the end of this passage in which Jesus was reminding his disciples not to worry. “... don’t worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today’s trouble is enough for today.” Nah yo.

This is probably a familiar passage to most of us – it’s early in Matthew’s gospel. Jesus had just begun his ministry. He had called his disciples and he was preaching and teaching throughout Galilee. As Matthew writes it, chapter 6 is smack in the middle of what’ve come to know as Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount”. Matthew, chapters 5, 6 and 7 are some of the most important (and difficult) teachings of Jesus and these three chapters are key in Anabaptist/Mennonite teachings because they focus so clearly on Jesus’ direct instructions for how to live as his disciples and for how to understand and usher in God’s Kingdom here, on earth. Starting with Matthew 5, here’s a quick, paraphrased review...

In God’s Kingdom things are upside down from the way we’ve come to expect them to be. You’re blessed when you’re poor. So, in God’s Kingdom you probably wouldn’t say things like, “We are so blessed to have that second summer home up in the mountains.” In God’s Kingdom you’re blessed when you’re mourning. You might wonder whether you’ll ever feel joy again. In God’s Kingdom you’re blessed when you’re humble. A sense of personal vindication wouldn’t be considered more important than repairing a broken relationship. In God’s kingdom you’re blessed when you long for justice. You would be careful not to automatically align yourself with those who have the most power. In God’s Kingdom you’re blessed when you’re able to extend mercy because you realize how fortunate we are that with God none of us gets what we deserve. In God’s Kingdom you’re blessed when your heart is pure and you can genuinely see the complexities in people. You would understand that God is present in each person. In God’s Kingdom you’re blessed when you can intervene in a difficult situation. You would take care to try not to villainize anyone but you would try to find a third way. In God’s Kingdom you’re blessed when you’re bullied or treated badly because of your faith in Jesus. You wouldn’t rush to defend yourself, but you might patiently try to explain what Jesus means to you.

These are not glamorous or powerful or popular positions to choose. They’re hard. These are not stances that are usually taken by rugged individuals or by those who like to throw their weight around. These are choices that are upside down from the way things are usually done. And these were precisely the choices that Jesus was asking his disciples to make.

From there, in chapter 5, he went on and taught his disciples about being like salt and light in the world. He told them that he had come to accomplish the purpose of the law, not to do away with it – yes, that same law that had been misused and taken to such extremes that it had

become like a chain, binding people. The law was never meant to do that. It was intended to create boundaries that would help to actually liberate people so that they could live more freely within the boundaries.

Jesus went on then in chapter 5 and into chapter 6, teaching them about the importance of relationships. About gentleness and not judging, about honesty and integrity. He taught them about trying to find love in their hearts for their enemies, about offering their gifts with modesty and humility. Jesus taught his disciples how to fast and pray, asking God for what they needed just for that day – and no more. He said that they were not to trust in all their stuff that they had saved up because gathering lots of stuff can lead to having a small and selfish heart.

Now we're mid-way through chapter 6 and according to Matthew, Jesus said that each person needs to choose where their loyalty, their allegiance will be. Will his followers spend their time and energy looking at the big picture and trying to embody God's Kingdom here on earth or will they be more short-sighted, spend their time and energy chasing other priorities? One can't fully do both.

And after all of that teaching and preaching, and in that context of reminding his disciples that this would be hard and that they would have to make hard choices, Jesus said, "Therefore, that is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food and drink, or enough clothes to wear. Isn't life more than food, and your body more than clothing? Look at the birds. They don't plant or harvest or store food in barns, for your heavenly Father feeds them. And aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? And why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? So don't worry about these things, saying, 'What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." Nah-yo.

Jesus wasn't saying that food and drink and clothing aren't necessary. But that God knows what is necessary. His followers are encouraged not to "worry", the Greek word means "to care for", in this instance, to care too much, to be overly concerned, or anxious. Jesus is cautioning that this anxiety not be what motivates our behavior and then causes us to lose our focus. This challenge to trust in God's providence doesn't mean we shouldn't work and have property. Jesus was talking to people who made their living sowing, reaping, storing in barns, toiling – he simply wanted them to see that their life wasn't limited to or bound by these tasks. Seeking God's kingdom needs to be the first priority.

As one commentator wrote, "The Kingdom of God has different values from life in the empire, or life in a profit-based society. The kingdom of God includes the poor, the merciful, those who mourn. The kingdom of God calls us to bring light to the darkest parts of the world, to be salt in

the world, to be signs and sacraments of mercy and justice. God is not promising to meet all our needs, like some shopping list brought to the Kingdom-value-supermarket... God expects us to serve him through living out the kingdom values, and in that we find (perfect) freedom.”

Our song of response is “My Lighthouse”. Here in Kansas we don’t often think of using images of the sea for our faith analogies, but the Irish band Rend Collective did. This is an upbeat, song that declares our faith in Jesus as My Lighthouse, the peace in our troubled sea, the one who keeps us focused and safe. This is one of the songs that Eric and Kevin sing with the students on Wednesday evenings during mid-week, so I’d like to invite any of the mid-week or older students who know this song to come up and help lead us.

Sermon Resources:

The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Volume VII

Believers Church Bible Commentary, Matthew

Second Sunday after Pentecost, Commentary on Matthew 6:24-35 by Emerson Powery

Patrick Comerford: an online journal... www.patrickcomerford.com/2017/02/matthew-6-24-34-so-do-not-worry-about.htm.

BENEDICTION – from Matthew 11:28-30

As we leave this time of worship, let us carry these words from Jesus:

Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart,

and you will find rest for your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Whatever the week ahead brings, may you walk with Jesus and have rest for your souls.