

05-12-2024 Worship Service

Welcome –

Good morning and welcome to all! It's a busy weekend as we honor and express appreciation for our mothers and others who've nurtured us, we praise God for the gift of new life in the form of Tate Matthew Miller and we celebrate with our graduates! And in the midst of our gratitude and celebrations, we acknowledge that there is also great pain and grief in our lives and in our world. Thanks be to God that we can gather to worship, to pray and sing, to fellowship and support one another, to bring to God all that we hold in our hearts this morning.

What do you all bring to share with each?

*Sr. Coffee this Friday at 10 a.m. – Justina Neufeld telling her story...

Call to Worship (bulletin)

Prayer –

Spirit of Holiness, we are grateful for your presence with us this morning, in this place and all the time. You are the promised One, sent to us by Jesus to walk with us, guide us, comfort us, advocate for us. Make space in our hearts and minds as we worship, so that we may know your presence and live your love. Amen.

Dedication of Tate Matthew Miller and his parents

Chrystiana and Bryant, I invite you and your boys to come forward now.

As you bring your child for dedication it is, of course, an act of praising and thanking God. And it is also bringing your child into a relationship with the body of Christ – the church. When children are presented to God and to the church, they are placed in the care of the church. With Christian parents, and grandparents, the children can grow up with and come to their own understanding of their parents' faith. As parents dedicate their children, they are committing themselves to this calling.

As we have heard before – and will hear again, Jesus made children a model of faith. It's the task, then, of families and the church to nurture this faith and to prepare children for a time when they are more mature and can make their own decision to accept Christ and the call to follow him in their lives. So parents, families, and we, as a congregation, share great joy as well as a great responsibility to nurture our children.

Chrystiana and Bryant, as you bring Tate Matthew for blessing by God in this congregation, do you consecrate yourselves as parents to bring him up in the nurture and instruction of the Lord? (we do)

Is it your purpose to try to shape your family life by caring for one another, sharing in God's word, in prayer and Christian fellowship so that Tate will be helped to know and love Christ as Lord and Savior? *(it is...As Christian parents we are thankful for the privilege of parenthood. We recognize that we have a very special role in the life of our child, helping 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 our children to your loving care in this community of faith.*

Bryant and Chrystiana – may the God who has entrusted you with this child grant you fullness of love (and grace) in raising him. May God grant you to live lives of faithfulness to the gospel before your children so that they might know the ways of God’s kingdom.

Tate Matthew, 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 welcome Jesus into your heart. In the name of the God who gives us birth. Amen.

Up on the table, there’s a certificate of dedication, a faith marker book for you to keep photos and written memories of your Tate’s faith journey and a step-stool for Tate.

I invite all of you now to stand and respond with the words of support and covenant. We’ll read both #970 and 971, flowing from one into the other and naming Tate at the places it’s indicated.

Leader: You have offered Tate 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.

People: God, maker of galaxies who numbers the hairs on our heads, we praise your name for the goodness of creation and for all the blessings of this life.

Leader: We give you thanks for Tate.

As Jesus took children into his arms and blessed them, each child is held and blessed, and belongs to your reign. By your grace, raise Tate and all our children to your glory.

People: Through your Spirit, lead them to faith in Christ, sustain them in misfortune and danger, and let the love they give and receive abound.

In your power, grant eternal life, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Number 173 is a song that Bryant and Chrystiana sometimes sing as a lullaby to Tate, Emmett and Nolan.

The Gifts of Nurturers, Babies and Mumblers Psalm 1; Luke 18 **Pastor Lois Harder**

There’s a way of doing Bible study where you try to put yourself into the story and find yourself in the characters. So, for instance, in this story about Jesus blessing the children, it can be interesting to ask, who do you most relate to? Do you resonate most with the “people” who were bringing the children to Jesus? Or do you see yourself as one of the disciples who were protective of Jesus and didn’t want him to be bothered by these people or their children? Or, maybe you relate most closely to Jesus in this story and your love for children is what comes through? Maybe you find yourself as one of the children, needing the gentle touch of the Messiah?

It doesn’t say whether it was men or women, dads or moms, bringing the children to Jesus – just people. Clearly, it was people who cared for these babies because they were looking for Jesus’

touch of blessing. I could imagine myself as one of the moms (or grandmas) who was eager to bring my children to Jesus! He was a phenomenon! It must have seemed that if Jesus would just touch and bless your child then nothing bad would happen to them! They'd be safe, secure, protected, they would experience only goodness and wholeness in their lives – if Jesus would touch and bless them. Who wouldn't want that? These folks wanted what was best for their children – to be nurtured, cared for by Jesus.

I can also imagine myself being one of the disciples in this story. They were protective of Jesus and there were plenty of incidents when the crowds were not just annoying, but potentially dangerous as people pushed and shoved, trying to get close to Jesus. More than once, Simon Peter is described in the gospels as sort of thinking of himself as Jesus' personal body guard/crowd control unit. I can understand their feelings and their desire to keep him safe.

But I don't necessarily *want* to relate to the disciples in this story; they just weren't getting it! This is already the 18th chapter of the gospel and they still thought Jesus needed their protection – from children! Bless their hearts...they were still not understanding what the nature of God's kingdom is all about! And there was Jesus still patiently trying to explain that we learn about the nature of God's kingdom from babies – and those who nurture them. Babies are innocent and dependent. They don't care about positions of power or wealth. They trust their caretakers for their basic needs. And in a healthy, ideal relationship, a babies' caretaker will provide their basic needs. We know that here, on this earth where everything is less than healthy and ideal, that doesn't always happen. But with God as the nurturer, we can count on it – that relationship of trust and dependency is crucial. As the baby grows, the caretakers teach them how to be, as Matthew puts it, as innocent as doves and as wise as serpents.

The disciples were having a hard time getting their heads around this notion that the kingdom of God was something altogether different than they were expecting or looking for. In fact, those who choose to participate in and be members of God's kingdom choose to trust God in child-like ways, vulnerable ways. And, by the way, as we discussed in the Route 15 SS class last week, involvement in God's kingdom is completely voluntary. You can't be born into, you can't be coerced into it, you can't earn it and you certainly can't buy it. You make a choice every day – sometimes multiple times a day – to trust God and be a part of God's work. You make a choice to be innocent, vulnerable, like a baby or a dove and then you trust God – often through God's people – to help you figure out how to be as wise as a serpent.

And as you get older you learn and you live and you achieve, you write cool poetry and you run like the wind, you learn to sing and play beautiful music and take gorgeous photos, you receive well-deserved awards and you progress through various levels of education, learning stuff like biochemistry and cellular physics and, along with the choice to trust God and follow the examples of Jesus, you begin to make other life choices. The writer of Psalm 1 was talking about some of those choices. You've got choices about which path to take to get from here to there, choices about who to hang out with and how their choices can affect yours. We know it's not as simple as the psalmist makes it seem – there are hundreds of paths one can choose in life, not just two. It's not just a choice between righteousness or wickedness, but Psalm 1 is in the genre of wisdom literature, so the writer is trying to make a point. Happy are those whose delight is in the law of the Lord.

The root of the Hebrew word is “blessed” or “happy” – we might think of it as fulfilled or content, walking in the right direction, so that your mind and your soul can experience that peace of Christ that passes all understanding. This does not mean never making mistakes or never feeling anxious – oh, no! Those are just part of the human condition. But the Hebrew here is talking about making choices that keep us in line with what we learned earlier about trusting God and choosing to participate in God’s kingdom.

And how do we know when we’re doing that? That’s what we read in verse 2 – it’s when we delight in the law of the Lord, the Torah, the stories of creation, the stories of God calling the faithful, providing for them, accompanying them, guiding and surprising them. But what does it mean to delight in the Torah? The Hebrew word here is hagah and it can mean several things, but in this passage it means to meditate or think about it, to recite it from memory, to muse about it or to growl about it, like a dog growls with satisfaction when it’s chewing on a bone, to mumble it as you go about your day.

And the Psalmist writes that those who hagah the Torah are like trees planted by streams of water; their roots are nourished deeply by what God provides. And they grow and flourish and produce green leaves and broad branches and good fruit.

And, by extension, those who don’t hagah the Torah will not experience this sense of fulfillment or contentment, they won’t be recalling God’s faithfulness in the past and trusting that same faithfulness in the present and for their future.

Now, I think maybe you young folks could really benefit from learning and incorporating this Hebrew word hagah. If you ever hear a complaint that your elders can’t hear you or can’t understand you because you’re talking too fast and mumbling, you might explain that you’re trying to hagah the Torah. For instance, when you’re asked where you’re going and when you’ll be back, you could sort of growl or mumble your response – and see how it works to claim that you’re hagah-ing the Torah.

Today, as we celebrate Mother’s Day, infant and parent dedications and graduations, we can see the full circle of blessings from God throughout the seasons of our lives. May God continue to guide our feet, to hold our hands, to stand by us and assure us that we’re his children, to search our hearts – as we run this race together.

Prayer of Dedication – please stand

Provider God, we are the grateful recipients of your love and goodness. Bless these gifts that are returned to you, that may bring you glory and be used to shine your light in the world.

Benediction – Ephesians 3

I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.