

Sunday, June 7th, 2020
Mantua Center Christian Church
MCCC Home Worship

You will need:

A candle and match
Bible
Paper
Bread and Juice (if desiring communion)

Order of Worship

WELCOME PANEL on the Video

- Welcome to Worship
- Today you can gather
 - *A candle and match*
 - *Bible*
 - *Bread and Juice (if desiring communion)*

GREETING & CALL to WORSHIP - CHAD

The Peace of the Risen Christ and the Power of the Holy Spirit be with you. Welcome to worship this week with the Mantua Center Christian Church. Together...we are seeking to have Open Minds, Open Hearts, and Open Arms to live and love like Jesus.

As people of faith, we come together for prayer, communion, and the comfort that is felt by being together. And yet, we also come together to recognize and hear the cry of the hurting. To face the realities present. The great 20th Century theologian urged Christians to have the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.

Many events have transpired in our nation over the last few weeks. The tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Armaud Arbery. There is an ache in the country that we see acted out in so many different ways. How will the church respond? In the city? In the country? In the suburbs? Paul wrote the Corinthians long ago, “²⁶If one member of the Body suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.”

So today we explore together what it means for us as people here and now to confront the hard truths in the world. How open are we to hear what we might not want to hear?

Family in Christ, let's come together knowing that in the midst of whatever confusion, anger, and fear we have within. In the midst of our joy, gratitude, and eagerness for truth we have...that God is here. God is with us, walking beside us on the journey.

Light a Candle - Let us worship together...

OPENING SCRIPTURE - Amos 5:21-24

Our opening scripture reading is a tough one delivered by Amos to the kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel back in the 8th Century BCE. Amos was a sheep herder and was called by God to speak truth in a difficult time. As the people of God do, we wandered from the teachings God pressed upon them. Amos tells them they had pushed aside the needy at the gate and trample the poor. So God says through him Amos 5:21-24...

²¹ I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.

²² Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon.

²³ Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps.

²⁴ But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

MOMENT with ALLY

HYMN - What a Friend we have in Jesus

PASTORAL PRAYER - Sarah Smith

Holy of Holies, in this season of chaos, we do not pray for peace because we misunderstand your peace as complacency. Instead, we ask for justice to rain down on your people, on all people. May we follow your call towards justice. Where you call us to start over, ease our fears of change. Where you call us to action, may we be emboldened to do your work for good. Where you call us to rest, may we do so knowing that we have put the work in and will pick it back up again when those around us need rest too.

Almighty, now more than ever we ask for your wisdom in seeing the light. We ask for the healing of the body and the soul of our peoples and communities. We are being destroyed from the inside from the spread of disease, both viral and philosophical. May we, in this time of vulnerability, take every precaution and every action to make sure that the world of tomorrow reflects your Kingdom here on earth.

Holy Mother, there are moments that blot out our ability to reason, to speak, moments where we are feeling too much, moments where we become numb to protect our souls. In this silence, may you meet us with wisdom. In our grief, may you meet us with compassion. In our anger, may you meet us with the path to justice. Hear us now in the silence.

(silence)

As we gather separately as your community, hear us now as pray the prayer Jesus taught us...

SPECIAL MUSIC -- Lord, Hear my Prayer by Jan Green

SCRIPTURE & SERMON - Chad Delaney

2 Timothy 4:1-5

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ²proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. ⁵As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Like many of us, I, too, am trying to do my best to stay healthy during this time--spiritually, emotionally, **and** physically. I'm trying to exercise daily and watch what I eat. At a doctor's visit several months ago my doctor had asked me what my favorite foods were. As y'all know I told him I could live on a steady diet of wings, french fries, and ice cream.

Well then he had something to say about that. He responded with some kind of facts and figures or whatever. I don't know I wasn't really paying attention. But then when I got home...I was relieved to find all these amazing websites about all the health benefits of my favorite foods. All I had to do was put in "Why is ice cream healthy for me" and it just so clearly stated that I have nothing to worry about. It was SO EASY to find what my itchy stomach, itchy eyes, itchy ears wanted to find!

Humans have always wrestled with something called confirmation bias and none of us are exempt. Our brains want to make sense of the world around us, but there's a bit of a flaw. We aren't as inclined as we might think to take in new information and then change course. Instead, we are more inclined to be skeptical of that information and even look for ways to confirm what we already think and believe.

All of us have all sorts of ideas and beliefs that we carry with us all the time--some of them are sacred to us or part of our identity. Something that we grew up with. Something embedded in our culture. Something we've come to understand based on our own personal experience. And when new information or contrary information is presented...it isn't always welcomed or heard or acknowledged. Sometimes we avoid

it. Sometimes we actively seek information against it. Sometimes we itch for the convenient or friendly truthiness over the difficult truth that we need to face.

Obviously, it's not just food, but the Apostle Paul here around 2000 years ago is giving advice to his protege and to any of the communities reading this letter about this very topic. The church was on the same page about stuff, but there was a lot of things they disagreed on. Lots of different beliefs and ideas about what it meant to believe in and follow Jesus.

So just be aware---human beings will have underlying agendas, beliefs, prejudice, preconceptions, teachings ingrained in them...that in fact may not be what God is leading us toward. So be mindful. We will want to surround ourselves with voices who will always tell us what our itching ears WANT to hear. We will turn from the Gospel and wander to myths.

How relevant is that today? All around us today we see this so strongly. It's like our TVs, Twitter, Facebook, friends are BUILT for confirmation bias rather than truth to reign. I can decide to believe whatever truth I want to believe and you bet there will be information available to you to confirm what you want to hear. You want to believe Ice Cream is a health food? No problem. You want to believe the earth is flat? No problem. You want to believe that climate change is a hoax? The internet got you covered. No problem. We are in the information age and there is no shortage of correct, researched, powerful, honest, evidence-based information right at your fingertips.....but there is no shortage of con artists, hucksters, scratchy teachers ready to give you the information you seek. Media ready for you to consume.

I feel like one of the most clear and pervasive examples of this in our culture today is Racism. Folks have a really hard time admitting their racist. Virtually no one you meet with be happy to admit they're a racist. We look for anything and everything to duck and dodge it. Yet Racism, whether we want to admit it or not--is here. We have prejudice and misconceptions and generalizations. We have institutional disparities of health and wealth. From the income gap to Mass incarceration. What is hard for us to admit is that its intertwined into the fabric of our country and culture from the beginning. Ibram Kendi writes in his book *Stamped from the Beginning*, "THE TITLE STAMPED FROM THE BEGINNING comes from a speech that Mississippi senator Jefferson Davis gave on the floor of the US Senate on April 12, 1860. This future president of the Confederacy objected to a bill funding Black education in Washington, DC. "This Government was not founded by negroes nor for negroes," but "by white men for white men," Davis lectured his colleagues. The bill was based on the false notion of racial equality, he declared. The "inequality of the white and black races" was

“stamped from the beginning.” This mindset is still here--in policies, in hearts and minds, in our lives. Racism may be dressed up differently. But still here.

As a white person, there's many myths that I've really wanted to believe.

- I like to believe that I'm not prejudiced and racist. I've never used the “n” word or anything. I always treat people with respect and kindness
- I want to believe the myth that everything I've accomplished is because of my own hard work and dedication. I've never received any benefits because of the color of my skin.
- I want to believe the myth that the system isn't hurting any one group of people, everyone just needs to take personal responsibility for their actions. We're all equal and have the same opportunities, so if people just did right, it would work out.

There's an itchiness for these to be true. Makes many of us feel all warm and fuzzy. Makes folks feel independent and rugged.

So when any information or idea or direct action or protest confronts those deeply held assumptions. Some of us want to resist. We don't want to believe that. That can't be true. If any of those things are true, I may have to examine my life, my choices, my assumptions about the world. I may have to admit that I fell for the con of the self-made man. With our fierce individualism, I've never REALLY wanted to believe my life inextricably intertwined in the lives of others. It's way easier to believe that racism is somewhere else out there with other people and has nothing to do with me. Because if it did have something to do with me, I may have to change and transform. I may have to actually believe that LOVE asks me to be uncomfortable. LOVE calls me to listen and learn. That LOVE in the Name of Jesus asks me to put others' interests, over my own. Love is hard. It is isn't I'm not doing it right.

There's so many voices in our world today about the civil disobedience and protests. About the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Arnaud Arbery. There are going to be voices within ourselves and the world that want to dismiss these as exceptions instead of harbingers of the reality that is in front of us. The violence and looting, yes, are unfortunate. That vast majority of police are excellent at what they do...absolutely...but people have died. There is police violence. Injustice is rampant. There are deep wounds from health to wealth which have not been addressed. We can dig in our heels, dismiss the concerns, and remain in the dark. Or as the church we can do as the Apostle Paul commissioned us, “to suffer with those who suffer.” We can “love our neighbors as ourselves.”

I believe that what Paul was nudging Timothy to do long ago, gives us a start to this journey of becoming more anti-racist. It starts with listening and being ready to confront information and ideas we may not feel comfortable with. Among us and our world there are those who think and believe differently...but they are Voices of sincerity, those really seeking truth, unity, respect, and love. And even with those in place there is still a healthy debate to have . Plenty to learn from and grow. Listen for those with intentions of community, truth, and the common good, the least of these...to hear another way. This isn't a call for "both sides". Some (right, left, middle, and inbetween) are interested in peddling conspiracy theories. Who clearly have power, money, nationalism, and their own self-interest at heart. Guard yourself from these. Look instead for the Fruits of the Spirit and engage these who are searching for truth.

2000 years ago Apostle Paul put the church on notice and it still applies today. "Hey, be mindful. Be discerning. Don't just seek out the information you want to hear and gather around yourself only those people who will confirm it. Question your leaders. Test the Spirits. Understand your own fears, wants, and desires. Do not be afraid to examine yourself and the world you think you understand!

Leave ROOM in your walk with Christ for confrontation of your assumptions. Leave room to be challenged. Leave room to be renewed and transformed. Leave room for REPENTANCE. Seek Love above all else. Jesus is calling us as the Church to follow his way.

Maybe then, as Paul says, we can proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favourable or unfavourable; convince, rebuke, and encourage" and carry out our ministry fully in the name of Jesus Christ. May it be so. Amen.

COMMUNION

Meditation and Prayer - Tim Bennett

Words of Institution - Sarah Smith

CLOSING HYMN - Softly and Tenderly Jesus is Calling

BENEDICTION - Sarah Smith

There were many places you could have been and things you could be doing in this hectic and, dare I say it, unprecedented time, and we are grateful that you are taking the time to be in community with us here at Mantua Center Christian Church. There are big things happening in the United States and across the globe. The affliction that has struck our country, Covid-19, has peeled back the layers of the system to reveal a disease that has long plagued our nation: racism. We are a community in mourning, in grieving, living into generational guilt, privilege, anger, and calls for justice. The path

before us is shifting as we seek the light of justice. Rev. Barclay of Enfleshed: Liturgy that Matters offers the following benediction:

We are not made powerless before evil. We need not cower or turn away.

The Spirit of Christ sends us to live out the good news.

God equips us.

God enables us.

God empowers us.

May our shared longings for justice be a source of strength and hope in times of trouble.

Go with peace, and welcome the presence of God.

Amen

BENEDICTION SONG