



Glendive and Wibaux United Methodist Churches

May 10, 2020

Good morning and welcome to worship with Glendive United Methodist Church. I am Pastor Carol Rhan. I am joined by Ms. Kathleen Linder on the piano. Like many other special days and dates in the last couple of months, Mother's Day, if it is celebrated in your household, will be different for many. Still I sincerely hope you adhere to CDC and Public Health warnings not to gather in groups of more than 10. What a sad commentary it would be if your family members, especially the vulnerable, became ill because of an unnecessary gathering. Please be safe and do no harm. As a community and a country, we are only as healthy as the most vulnerable among us.

Let us pray: Eternal Creator, we learned as children that sticks and stones may hurt our bones, but names will never kill me. In our hearing of the Word and meditations that follow, let us remember that name calling and words do hurt. But your words can heal, educate, support and share the love of God. Amen.

Acts 7:55-60

At that point they went wild, a rioting mob of catcalls and whistles and invective. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, hardly noticed—he only had eyes for God, whom he saw in all his glory with Jesus standing at his side. He said, “Oh! I see heaven wide open and the Son of Man standing at God’s side!”

Yelling and hissing, the mob drowned him out. Now in full stampede, they dragged him out of town and pelted him with rocks. The ringleaders took off their coats and asked a young man named Saul to watch them.

As the rocks rained down, Stephen prayed, “Master Jesus, take my life.” Then he knelt down, praying loud enough for everyone to hear, “Master, don’t blame them for this sin”—his last words. Then he died.

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

I run to you, GOD; I run for dear life. Don’t let me down! Take me seriously this time!
Get down on my level and listen, and please—no procrastination!
Your granite cave a hiding place, your high cliff aerie a place of safety.

You’re my cave to hide in, my cliff to climb.
Be my safe leader, be my true mountain guide.
Free me from hidden traps; I want to hide in you.
I’ve put my life in your hands. You won’t drop me, you’ll never let me down.

Desperate, I throw myself on you: *you* are my God!
Hour by hour I place my days in your hand, safe from the hands out to get me.
Warm me, your servant, with a smile; save me because you love me.
Don’t embarrass me by not showing up; I’ve given you plenty of notice.
Embarrass the wicked, stand them up, leave them stupidly shaking their heads as they drift down to hell.
Gag those loudmouthed liars who heckle me, your follower, with jeers and catcalls.

1 Peter 2:2-10 Stoner

Welcome to the living Stone, the source of life. The workmen took one look and threw it out; God set it in the place of honor. Present yourselves as building stones for the construction of a sanctuary vibrant with life, in which you’ll serve as holy priests offering Christ-approved lives up to God. The Scriptures provide precedent:

*Look! I’m setting a stone in Zion, a cornerstone in the place of honor.
Whoever trusts in this stone as a foundation will never have cause to regret it.*

To you who trust him, he’s a Stone to be proud of, but to those who refuse to trust him,

The stone the workmen threw out is now the chief foundation stone.

For the untrusting it’s

... a stone to trip over, a boulder blocking the way.

They trip and fall because they refuse to obey, just as predicted.

But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God's instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.

John 14:1-4

“Don't let this throw you. You trust God, don't you? Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father's home. If that weren't so, would I have told you that I'm on my way to get a room ready for you? And if I'm on my way to get your room ready, I'll come back and get you so you can live where I live. And you already know the road I'm taking.”

These are the inspired words of God for the people of God. And the people say, thanks be to God.

Doxology Praise God

Message Sticks and Stones

I've been a bit melancholy this week. Part of it is because we went from great weather to the overcast chill. Some is related to preparations to leave Glendive, our home for two years, the first of July. I can't deny that some sadness has to do with the consequences of the COVID 19 pandemic around the world. We are so blessed here and yet so many others have it much worse. And finally, the racism and gun violence this past week cannot be ignored. So, I have been melancholy.

People all over this country want to get back into their church and places of worship. This is the Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan and millions of Muslims are kept out of their mosques every day because of this virus, too. Where we worship, even who we worship, are what we hold onto in times of trouble. Whether they be made from stones or clapboard, the people in these places are our faith families, they are truly our homes, houses of worship. Most of us are anxious to be together again. But I must ask some difficult questions. Why? Why is worshipping together so important to us, to you, to me? Why is the worship space our place of normalcy, comfort and most hopefully for your relationship with the Eternal One? And why when there are actual physical protests to get back into churches, do we want to go back?

I wonder if the white father and son who chased down and murdered a black man jogging near his home in Georgia, also wanted to get back into their church? They've been free to walk around since February so perhaps they have been back in their church if they have one. I wonder if the family of three who shot a black security guard at a Family Dollar in Michigan wanted to get back into their church too. Their beef with the security guard was that he told a female family member she needed to wear a mask to shop. What an outrage, right! Did the customer in a Dollar Tree, also in Michigan, want to get back into his place of worship when, again, after being asked to wear a mask, he assaulted a store clerk by deliberately wiping his nose and mouth on her sleeve. Did the couple who shot three McDonalds employees in Oklahoma because they couldn't use the dining room, want to get back into their church that weekend? Not particularly good arguments by those who believe if we arm everyone, everyone will be safer. This is why I have been melancholy

All this is to say, what *normal* do people really want to get back to? If we're going to keep doing the same cruel, violent, racist and just plain mean behaviors, do you want to be in that normal? I don't.

Let me tie this into our Acts scripture this morning. Stephen is considered to be the first Christian martyr. He died for his faith. He had irritated the powers that were, so people spat on him, called him names, yelled at him and threw stones at him. He stood his grounded faith and was executed. He stood his ground because he had a committed faith. Nothing could shake him.

John Maxwell, in his Maxwell Leadership Bible (NKJV 1982) asks, where did Stephen's commitment come from. He cites half a dozen reasons illustrated in Acts 6 and 7.

“He had the presence of God in his life.

He based his commitment on biblical foundation.

He saw the error of past thinking.

He spotted the resistance of the religious leaders.

He kept his eyes on Jesus, truth.

And, he maintained his perspective.”

The store employees I mentioned earlier who were murdered or assaulted by fellow citizens weren't martyrs in the sense they died for their faith. But they were harmed for just doing simple, non-aggressive jobs, as they had been hired to do. They were protecting others' health and welfare. Maybe they were glad they still had jobs. Maybe they were hoping to visit their own houses of worship, over the coming weekend, we don't know. It was a normal day for them in a new normal world. What is the normal you want to get back to?

We will not all be called to become martyrs for our faith. But surely, we all can be like Stephen who was leading the people to a new life in Jesus Christ; a normal that they would follow in truth and love and commitment to God. He died for it. Do you want to return to church and your community and your families exactly as you left them? Or will you have the presence of God in your life and worship? Is your faith based on your ongoing journey through scripture study and reading the Bible or do you believe you know all there is to know or want to know?

Have you seen that past thinking may have been wrong, that church is more than a comfortable building with familiar faces on Sunday? Are you willing to look at the wrongness of political, social and even church leaders who would tempt you away from what you know to be the truth? Will you keep your eyes on Jesus from now on instead of the pronouncements of people who don't have your best interests, unlike Jesus who died for us? Can you maintain your perspective on what you've learned and will continue to learn during this time, rather than stay where you were?

I can attest that churches all over the country are deliberating on when and how to fully reengage with in-person worship. It's a pall over us as we worry about doing more harm than good to our parishioners. I pray that we will learn more humane and civil ways and indeed Christlike ways, to deal with others we disagree with or who are doing their jobs, whether we like the rules or not. This is not to say that all rules are right and that we should never challenge the power of authorities appointed or elected over us, but we must do so as Christians and people of faith in peace and love.

I for one, will continue to gather in assemblies of social holiness to shed light on gun violence, racism, expecting leaders do their jobs for us not for themselves, and to remind everyone that God IS OUR refuge. Amen and Selah

Hymn is # 390, Forgive Us Our Sins As We Are Forgiven

Announcements

There are a couple of items I want to share. First, Pastor Brenda Frelsi, Zion Lutheran Church, is doing a Bike-A-Thon on May 23. She is raising funds for the Food Bank, Salvation Army and Loaves and Fishes. I am her wingwoman. Not riding a bike on this 100-mile round trip but following in the support vehicle. If you would like to support her ride, please send a check to Glendive UMC, PO Box 200, Glendive 59330 or to Zion Lutheran Church.

Also, Girl Scout Troop 2323, sponsored by Glendive United Methodist Church, has received permission to distribute the cookies that were pre-ordered in the community in February. Starting May 15, you should be receiving a call or message from the Girl Scout you ordered cookies from to arrange for delivery and payment. I'm ready for some Thin Mints and Samoas and hope you are too!

Let us leave this space and time in prayer:

Eternal One, we are blessed with all we have been given, earned with our sweat and tears and the hard work of others. Bless the workers including railroad employees and others whose jobs are impacted by economic and virus conditions. Comfort them as only You can with your Holy Spirit falling over them like a warm blanket on a cool night. For our friends and families who keep us safe on the streets, in stores, in medical situations, online and in the gift of staying apart, we are thankful and beg that you keep them safe and healthy too.

Now we offer up the prayer of the Teacher, Rabboni, Jesus Christ,

Our father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for every and every. Amen.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, go in peace,