

Call to Worship

There is too much wrong with the world for us to find a home in it. Yet there is news around that God loves the world. Would you like to meet such a one? He invites you to meet HIM. -- even now. Lift up your heads, behold our salvation draws near.

We join ~~in~~ in the hymn "Praise My Soul the King of Heaven."

Invocation

Our Father, From where we view the world, all reasons to love it are canceled out by its abominations. We are weary of the world and long for another home. If that longing is the beginning of your work in us, quench not the smoking flax but fan it to a flame. Increase our love of heaven until it bursts again into heaven's love of the world.

INTRODUCTION AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

This is first united church broadcast of worship, produced during the summer months in the studios of CKWX Vancouver. I'm Jack Shaver and I'll be preaching later with the sermon topic... Things Old And New. The Hymns are sung by the Carl Tapscott choir and were recorded under the label Great Hymns of All Time. Next Sunday, summer student Bob Brinn of the Toronto School of Theology will be conducting the service.

I would like also to mention the programme of Public Lectures offered by the Vancouver School of Theology at UBC. The college holds a summer school each year at which visiting professors from all over the world give classes. The more famous of these professors are invited to give an evening lecture to which the public is invited. On Thursday July 5 at 7:30 pm Robert G. Tannehill, professor of New Testament at the Methodist Theological Seminary of Ohio is giving the lecture.. His topic HOW TO READ A GOSPEL New helps in responsive reading..

Listen now to the prayer of Saint Francis "Lord Make Me An Instrument of Thy Peace..." sung by a Salvation Army Chorus from Central Ontario.

The Old Testament Lesson is found in the book of Ezekiel Chapter 17, beginning at verse 22

The Epistle Lesson is found in II Corinthians Chapter 5 beginning at verse 1.

Hear the Holy Gospel as it is written in Mark Chapter 4 beginning at verse 26.

We Join in the Hymn Breathe On Me Breath of God.

Prayer

Let us pray

Our Father, Hear the prayers of this gathered people. Though scattered and alone, the miracle of the air waves has gathered us into one body of listeners. Each one has some things he or she needs to have heard. Each one, offers prayer unto you, on behalf of himself and herself and on behalf of the the others.

Let our crys come unto you.

Some of us are tired of the burden of life, of the endless things that go wrong, We long for the refreshment and rest that will fit us for life in the world and equip us to embrace it in love and patience.

Some of us are lonely and isolated. We let no one else come close, and are cut off by everyone else. We long to be known, but fear the risk of it. We long to reach out, fear the rejection we may receive. In the stillness, reach us with your love.

Some of us are worried about loved ones. Our attempts to intervene seem to make things worse, and our withdrawl seems too much like neglect. We lift before you those you have given to us. Teach us the way to care, and let not our hearts harden.

Some of us are in captivity... enslaved by powers that destroy us. Break the hold these powers have and set us at liberty.

Some of us are burdened with a bad conscience. Life is sour with regrets.

Everything would change if we could know forgiveness. Tell us again about your justification.

All of us fall out of love and spend great stretches of our lives in a dry and thirsty land. Send our roots rain. Warm our hearts with your love so that we may delight again in one another.

And now as our Savior has taught us.... we say--

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but delivers us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever amen.

Anthem

Listen now to a song by Jim Strathe. Jim wrote the words and composed the music. I first heard him sing ^{the song} at a concert ~~this spring~~ in New Westminster. It's called Fierce Love. I was deeply moved by it. The song is about Jim's father. It also points to God's love. It seems to me that if God loves the world it must be with a fierce love.



THINGS OLD AND NEW

Earlier ~~last~~ week I was sitting with our Superintendent, Art Griffin, confessing myself to be in a certain state. It reminded him of a story told about an African Explorer who was force-marching through country strange to himself and his hired native porters. At one point the crew came to a halt and refused to go on. No amount of urging or threatening could budge them. Their explanation was "We are waiting for our spirits to catch up to us."

How often something like that state occurs with us. We get out of touch with the spirit that moves us - that gives us life, - that creates us. Or we find that what has been moving and life-giving and creating has let us down. ~~It was a poor~~ ^{It was a poor} substitute for the living God. What more central, and life-giving, needs to happen to us than that we be in touch again with the Lord of Life.

When we turn to the Bible to get some help in this, we get strange help. ... which is as it should be. If we knew the nature of God's help before we received it we would already know God and have no need of him.

The God-Stuff in the Bible is strange - in that it is always a reminder of something new. When someone gets to be my age he gets to ~~be~~ wondering whether he has learned anything. He realizes again and again how much he needs to hear, for the first time what he heard at the start of it all. The Biblical message is such that every time you are reminded of it it's NEWS. ... Old and new at the same time.

The God stuff on the Bible is strange in the way it ties together agony and ecstasy. Distress might be due to God's presence ~~or~~ his absence. Ecstasy might be truly or falsely based.

The God stuff in the Bible is strange in the way it ties together the Holy and the worldly. God is who-he-is and there is no other. He is other than the world but the world is his. Israel came to know God as it wrestled with what was happening to it in its history, both good and bad. God is Holy Spirit, he is also Word made flesh. If we want to know what God is

The God Stuff in the Bible is strange in the way it ties together Having and not having.

Because of what the Lord has done we know he is to come again. We know he has not finished his work.

The Bible ties together God's presence and God's promise.

doing we are to look to some flesh for his embodiment.

The Bible is strange in the way it refers to God's kingdom. It is in the midst and it is about to come, in a flash, like lightning as it suddenly illuminates the whole place, from horizon to horizon.

The scripture lessons we read were appointed for Sunday July 1 by the North American Ecumenical Lectionary. When I first took note of them I wondered if the people who selected them knew they would fall on Canada Day. It seemed to me that the kind of things these readings suggest are things we all need to be reminded of as we look to our history, as we acknowledge our state, and, in all that, as we seek to get in touch with God again.

The Bible continually suggests.... if you want to get in touch with God -- get in touch with your history. Get in touch with with what is happening to you and around you. Hidden there will be the activity of God.

Ezekiel is one of the Biblical writers that makes strange connections. Because of the famous song he is probably best known among us for his wheels within wheels. To me his most famous metaphor is a scroll, containing words of lamentation mourning and woe, which he is charged to eat, and when he does .. it is sweet as honey in his mouth.

In the passage we read tonight Ezekiel names the hidden activity of God thus...He is setting down in the midst of Israel a fresh young sprig of Cedar which will grow into a noble tree which will bear fruit and which will become a sheltered home to all kinds of life. He is bringing low the high tree and making high the low tree. What is going on in history is that God is drying up the green tree and making the dry tree flourish.

I mentioned earlier that state, so aptly described as "Having to wait for our spirits to catch up to us." Is it a word to that state of alienation to hear that God is at work, drying up the green tree and making the dry tree to flourish? Is that disconnected state a time of sorting out? A time of shaking down? A time when false hope and false promises are shown for what

they are while true hope and Godly promise are planted and watered so that they flourish?

The Apostle Paul is another Biblical writer who makes strange connections. In the passage we read tonight he is talking about courage, about not losing heart.

That's a big word courage. Sometimes when I am trying to get God-talk to work I substitute the word courage for the word faith. The substitution helps, I think, ~~to~~ restore the Biblical meaning to the word faith. As with our present understanding of the word faith, courage carries an in-spite-of meaning. To have courage is not a matter of having no fear or no anxiety. Courage is the name we give to the power to embrace the fearsome thing. Courage is a matter of being afraid but ~~to~~ going anyway.

As with the word faith, it matters what kind of courage you have. Whatever gives you the courage to embrace the fearsome aspects of life will shape the kind of life you live. it will determine the crucial decisions you make. It will set the nature of the relationships you ~~make~~ ^{have} with things and with people.

However, NOT as with the word Faith as we see it, it makes no sense to consider the object of your ~~C~~ourage. We often get asked.. "What is the object of your faith?" Or we often think we are dealing with the God question when we discuss the object of our faith. In the Biblical understanding of the matter, it also makes no sense to ask for the object of our faith. It does make sense to speak of the source of your courage, or to examine the nature of your courage. In the same way it makes sense to ask of biblical faith, what is its source? Who is its author? What is its nature? What is the stuff of it?

In our scripture passage, in which Paul talks about courage, he talks about groaning and sighing with anxiety, These go together somehow. There is something about 'not being where you long to be' that is a source of courage.

Have you any notion of how that can be? Have you any experience of things turning into their opposites?

Does knowing there is more significant meaning to be had, than you now have, rob you of courage or give you courage? I would have to answer... "Both are true." I certainly do find myself, all too often, totally out of courage. The attrition of having a string of things go wrong can turn me away from life. The sight of the world's countless victims of injustice undermines my love of the world. The extent to which evil and violence seem to reign throughout the systems of the earth makes one world-weary.

But when I look to what makes me of good courage, it does not appear that there are any simple direct connections. Courage is an in-spite -of thing as well as a because-of thing. Its presence is a mystery. Courage does not always come when things get better. Courage comes when you care enough. And if you care enough in our world you experience distress. You are moved as much by what you don't have as by what you have. You are visited by a longing for a world unseen. You are possessed by a meaning of existence you do not yet possess. The presence of pain in life does not necessarily drain us of courage, pain accompanies good courage.

My current pain and distress may be mine because I am withdrawn from God, or it may be mine because God is drawing near.

The Gospel lesson we read tonight contains two of Jesus Kingdom parables. Both of them refer to the Kingdom of God as seed. Again we are reminded of the hidden nature of the reign of God. Those who seek God are told that he is at work in the world, unknown to us but at work. It's like a man scattering seed upon the ground who sleeps and rises night and day while the seed grows he knows not how.

None of us knows how the courage that sustains us in a love of the world comes to work in us. How is it that there is a courage that sustains us rather than one we must struggle to maintain? None of us knows how a courage that brings pain and distress can create us instead of wear us down, move us instead

of paralyze us. The parable suggests that this courage can be at work in us and others when we don't realize it.

The second parable includes the remark that mustard seed is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, yet it grows into the greatest of all shrubs so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.

That's all it takes for the reign of God to be at work in the world-- something as small as a mustard seed. We don't need to be talking about some great noble edifice of faith, visible to all. It is enough that God have his foot in the door. God needs only a small suspicion that he is God at work in our history.

The God stuff of the Bible is strange stuff indeed,

Are we more likely to be found of him as we are reminded of its many apparent contradictions?

The message will always come as a reminder of something new. We will constantly need to be reminded and the message will always be new.

The recognition of not having can be as powerful a pointer to the reality of God as the recognition of having. Presence and promise go together. Presence and hiddenness go together. Just because we don't know he is at work doesn't mean he is not at work. By its very nature, God's work will have an element of strangeness to it. Faith in God includes not knowing him and not knowing he is at work. His reign is like the planting of the smallest seed of the earth.

All your saying you are without him may be the small seed of your trust that he reigns. That's what can make you of good courage.... for we walk by faith and not by sight.

Hymn Join now in the Hymn When I Survey The Wondrous Cross.

Benediction

Organ Postlude

The courage to embrace life includes the acceptance of pain and distress.