

Worship at home

July 25, 2021

Thanks to Judy Armstrong and Marilyn Shaw for providing music for this week



<https://www.howtoloveyourneighbor.com/pillar-of-fire/>

God calls us to worship: Psalm 119:89, 90, 105

Hymn: #671 “I heard the voice of Jesus say”

We bring our praise and confessions:

Almighty God,
to you all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from you no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Merciful God,
in your gracious presence we confess our sin
and the sin of this world.

Although Christ is among us as our peace,
we are a people divided against ourselves
as we cling to the values of a broken world.

You have called us to be thankful
for your good gifts to us,
but too often we have taken them for granted
as if we deserved them.

You have called us to be hopeful
through the gospel of Jesus Christ,

but too often despair has come upon us,
and the cares of the world have weighed us down.

You have called us to be joyful
in the wonder of your presence among us,
but too often we become mired in the mundane
and lose the gift of reverence.

By your saving power, O God,
enable us to celebrate your love for us
with joy and thanksgiving.

God assures us of his forgiveness:

In Christ, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. God has made peace with us through the Cross of Jesus Christ. In Christ, all things hold together. Accept the peace of Christ and make peace with one another in his name.¹

**In response to the gospel,
we confess our faith and offer our lives and resources:**

Please remember to prayerfully make your offerings to the congregation of which you are most associated. If you're a member/adherent of Knox-Moore or St. Andrew's, Mooretown, please send your offering to Howard McKellar or Judy Armstrong.

¹ Ibid.

God speaks to us through his Word:

Speak to us through the scriptures this day, O God,
and by the power of your Holy Spirit, give us a deeper understanding of your Word for
our lives and our times, through Christ, the Living Word. **Amen.**

READ John 7:2, 14, 37, 38; 8:12
 John 12:44-50

“I am the light of the world”

1. John 7 and 8 are set in the context of the 7-day festival of Booths.

Through various rituals, the celebrants re-enacted their ancestor’s travels through the desert after God had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Thus, this was an annual festival to remember and celebrate God’s works of redemption and provision. And, in such acts of worship, to renew their covenantal vows, and to revitalize the hope that is inherent to the faith.

There were three primary rituals:

a) The worshippers lived for the week outside in temporary shelters to remember the temporary dwellings in which their ancestors would have lived as they travelled on their way through the wilderness to the Promised Land. These shelters were known as “booths”, or “tabernacles.”

b) On the last day of the festival, what John described as “the great day”, water was ceremonially drawn from the Gihon Spring which was a spring gushing up in the south-east corner of the city. Because it was constantly flowing, the spring itself was *living* and it provided fresh water to the residents of the city and thus was a *river of living water*.

On the last day of the festival, water was drawn from the *river of living water* and brought to the temple amid much singing and dancing. The priest then offered the water with thanksgiving to praise God and to remember how God had provided water from the rocks for their ancestors.

c) The temple would be lit up with giant oil lamps while individuals lit lamps in their booths. The effect at night must have been spectacular: the temple on

fire atop its hill and, in the city below light flowing out of many lean-tos and cabins scattered throughout.

This lighting of the temple remembered how the Lord had led the Israelites through their wilderness pilgrimage with a pillar of fire.

The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.²

So, we have the booths, we have the celebration of God providing living water, and we have the lighting of the temple to remember the pillar of fire by which the Lord led the Israelites through the desert.

Temporary shelters. Water. Light.

Organized around these rituals and symbols, this was a week of considerable rejoicing. It was a week of light and ritual, of story-telling and song, of dancing and late nights. This was a celebration of Redemption and Covenant. An opportunity to renew their covenantal vows of loyalty and obedience. A celebration of the Living Lord God who created the heavens and the earth actively taking part in human lives to set them free and form them into a holy, life-giving community.

And this carpenter's son from Nazareth in Galilee had the audacity to stand in the temple and proclaim that everything being celebrated; everything that was symbolized by the water and the light culminates in himself!

Against the imagery of the water being drawn and the stories of Moses striking the rocks to produce streams of water, Jesus said that not only could he quench anyone's thirst, but that those who believe would themselves become rivers of living water for others.

² Exodus 13:21, 22

Against the brilliance of the temple alight and the stories told of the pillar of fire leading their ancestors through the desert darkness, Jesus said that *he* was the light, not only for the Israelites, but for the world. *Anyone* who followed him would have the light of life.

Jesus is the realization of all the hopes suggested by the festival. He is Yahweh's redemption, he is the covenantal policy and procedure, he is the source of Living Water for all people, he is the light of the world.

2. We need to keep in mind that the light that was celebrated with all of those lamps is the light that radiated from the pillar of fire in the desert. As long as the Israelites followed the pillar of fire, they could be assured that regardless of what else happened, regardless of how oppressive the nighttime darkness seemed, they were travelling with God and He would lead them along the way to the Promised Land.

Note: the LORD God's chosen method of leading his people was a giant a lantern. It was not a set of shackles, nor a group of sheepdogs nipping at everyone's heels.

God never forced.

The people had to choose for themselves to follow the light.

There's a story told about a farmer whose dog would always lie in the corner of the kitchen and whine. One day a neighbour came over to visit. As they visited, the neighbour kept looking over at the dog until, eventually, he could contain himself no longer.

"What's bothering your dog?!"

"Well," replied the farmer, "this kitchen floor is as spacious and smooth as you can imagine. There's a nice rug under the table, and the sun shines onto the floor over by the window. But, over in that corner, there's a nail that has worked itself out and it pokes the dog."

"Why doesn't the dog move?!"

3. By the 12th chapter of John's gospel, Jesus surpassed this neighbour's level of frustration.

We read in verse 44: "Jesus *cried* aloud."

The Greek word which is here rendered 'cried' is an onomatopoeic term for the cry of a raven: *krazo* – "krad-zo!" A word that sounds like what it represents

It means to shriek, or to scream.

This is not the image of the mild-mannered Jesus we often hold in our mind's eye!

Jesus was screaming. This is important! Chapter 12 closes Jesus' public ministry, from here on his ministry is done in private with his disciples. This was the last chance for the wider public to get it. He was pleading. He was begging people to take what he was handing them.

A way off the nail.

A way through the darkness.

A way to everything represented by the festival of Booths and, as is the context for chapter 12 and following, the festival of the Passover.

A way to have their soul-thirst properly and fully quenched.

A way to eternal fellowship with the Creator, with the Father in heaven, in which is the very joy of Christ.

One of the gifts Jesus gives us is choice.

He doesn't force.

He also doesn't judge, because there is nothing more for him to judge. He bore the penalty for sin on the cross. By the cross, the only One who is capable of judging, declares us forgiven, justified, set free from sin, passed-over. And, if we accept his grace and receive his blessing, he mediates our reconciliation with the Father; he shows us the way and helps us settle into life in the Promised Land.

Jesus doesn't judge, he gives us choice.

He offers us Light.

Jesus offers to lead us along the Way through the desert to the Promised Land of fellowship with the Father.

By the time the Israelites had settled in the Promised Land, they didn't have the pillar of fire. But they did still have the Torah and the temple.

We might not have the pillar of fire, nor the temple; and, as we've seen this year, we can't even count on having the church as a tangible community, but we do have the Scriptures, we do have the Holy Spirit, we do have Jesus interceding on our behalf.

And the same Lord who led the Israelites along the way through the desert offers to lead us now.

4. The dog chose to reject the existence and the nearness of the smooth and spacious kitchen floor. It was stuck in the darkness of believing that life with the nail was all there was.

That is our choice to make as well: To believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God through whom we come to the Father in fellowship with whom is eternal life of Christ's joy; to trust and obey his word in response; and to receive the gift he offers, or not.

The choice, and the consequence thereof, are ours to make and to accept.

I am learning that this choice isn't one we make only once. It's not limited to the moment when we become a Christian, nor when gathered in worship on Sunday morning. It's a choice we make at all the turning points of our day. When we open our eyes in the morning. When we greet our family. When we begin our daily activities. When our energy wanes in the early afternoon. When we're sitting down to supper, cleaning up afterwards and restoring the order of our home, settling in to the evening, and closing our eyes to sleep.

These are all moments when we can choose how life will unfold in the aftermath: with anxiety, frustration, fear, and anger? or, with the joy of Christ despite circumstances? These are all moments to renew our covenantal vows and choose to

believe that *Jesus* is the Light; that *his* ways are the way to eternal life – in the quotidian monotony, or the chaos of illness, or the grief of death, or the festal celebrations.

I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me [does not need to remain] in the darkness.

For the good of our souls, the health of the nation, and the glory of God.

Amen.

Hymn "I am the light of the world"

We respond with prayer, faith, and service:

Loving God, in Jesus Christ, you teach us to pray
and to present our petitions in his name.
Guide us by your Holy Spirit,
that our prayers for others may serve your will
and show your steadfast love for all.

Gracious God,
you have called together a people to be the church of Jesus Christ.
May your people be one in faith and discipleship,
breaking bread together,
and telling good news
so that the world may believe you are love,
turn to your ways,
and live in the light of your truth.

Creator God, you made all things and called them good.
May your planet earth be held in reverence by all people.
May its resources be used wisely
and its fragile balance between life and death respected.

Eternal Ruler,
in your mighty realm the nations rise and fall
Hear our prayers for those who rule the nations,
that they may learn wisdom and truth,
establish justice and mercy,
and seek the ways of peace.

Ever faithful God,
you have knit together as one body in Christ
those who have been your people in all times and places.
Keep us in communion with your saints
following the example of faith and life
which they set before us,
and bring us to the joy which you have prepared in your presence.

Eternal God,
ruler of all things in heaven and earth,
accept the prayers of your people,
and strengthen us to do your will;
through Jesus Christ.
Amen.

God sends us with His blessing:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Amen.