

Worship at home July 4, 2021



<https://www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/rm-quiz-benefits-walking>

God calls us to worship:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.¹

Let us worship God.

We bring our praise and confessions:

Great are you, O God,
and greatly to be praised in all places and at all times.
You have made all things and called them good.
You created humans in your image.
You gave us breath and life, a calling and a purpose.
Filled with love for all creation,
you lift up leaders and send out disciples
to take part in your reconciling work in the world.
Your love is endless,
your mercy without measure,
your faithfulness without limit.
And so we praise you with all our strength, mind, heart and soul,
in the name of Jesus, your Son,
led by your Spirit who guides us day by day.

God of overflowing grace,

¹ Isaiah 55:10-11.

we are a people blessed with abundance,
and yet we take so much for granted.
We do not recognize that your gift of life is precious,
and so we waste time on things that do not matter.
Preoccupied with our own needs and desires,
we close our eyes to the needs of those around us;
we close our hearts to those who are not like us.
We turn away from opportunities to learn and grow.
In your mercy, forgive us, O God.
Change our hearts and renew our calling to be bearers of your peace,
and witnesses to the work of your kingdom.

God assures us of his forgiveness:

While it is true that we have all sinned,
it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love in Jesus Christ.
To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say,
In Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven.
Be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another.

**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.

Hymn: #506 "The Spirit breathes upon the Word"

Thank you to Judy Armstrong and Marilyn Shaw for your musical ministry today.

God speaks to us through his Word:

No empty words: Contemplation

Listen now for the Word of God.

READ DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9.

1. The book of Deuteronomy contains Moses' farewell sermons to the Israelites. After escaping from Egypt and spending 40 years in the desert, the nation of Israel was preparing to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land.

And Moses wouldn't be going with them.

In his Farewell, he urged the flock to keep the words close. Words about which they had been talking, thinking, and puzzling. Words from which they had been running away and to which they had been returning for 40 years. Memorize them. Adorn your houses with them. Stick them on the fridge door. Carve them into the mantel. Paint them on your front door. Teach them to your children. Strap them onto your foreheads.

As they prepared for their new life on the other side of the Jordan, Moses pleaded:

Remember the one Living God with whom, by whom, and in whom is life in its fullness.

Commit to the Lord – head, heart, and hands.

Remember His words.

2. This is our final sermon in the series “No Empty Words: Living the Word of God in reliance on the Holy Spirit.”

We've talked about: hearing and receiving God's Word through the text of Scripture, meditating thereon, and praying in response.

It's important to realize that what we've been talking about is not a strategy by which to engage a particular spiritual discipline as much as it is a way to live a particular style of life.

Some of you may be familiar with a practice called *Lectio Divina*. Which simply means: divine reading, or, spiritual reading. You might have noticed that everything

we've been talking about are elements of this practice: reading/hearing, meditating, praying. But, what I'm trying to encourage is that we shift our thinking away from reading the Bible as a *spiritual discipline*, and toward engaging with the Word of God as *a way to live a life of faith*. A way to live a Holy Spirit-breathed, relational life with a Living God who speaks, hears, and cares.

Hearing, meditating, and praying is a way to be a disciple of Jesus.

What God was giving to Israel through Moses was not a set of commands such as a programmer might give to a piece of software, but a way to live a God-honouring, God-empowered, God-infused life.

At the center of all of this is the conviction that the God who spoke to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (later named Israel) whom we know through Jesus of Nazareth, is a God worth knowing.

At the center of all of this is the conviction that the God we know in Jesus of Nazareth is a God worth devoting our hearts, souls, and might to knowing and loving. The conviction that his way of life is worth pursuing. And that His Word, recorded and preserved in the written text of Scripture is trustworthy and worth obeying.

At the center of all of this is the conviction that, even though we might not know what awaits us on the other side of the river – whatever that river might be, if we go with God, it might not be safe, easy, or comfortable, but it will be good.

The Lord God charged Moses to teach the Israelites to “keep all his decrees and commandments ... so that your days may be long. ... so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord the God of your ancestors has promised you.”²

3. It wasn't going to be an easy task for the Israelites to build a community in this unknown land. They were going to forget God. They were going to ignore His Words.

² Deuteronomy 6:2, 3

They were going to run away. They were, eventually, going to be removed from this Promised Land in exile.

Yet, through it all, the Father continued to speak to His children. His Words continued to be received (by some), meditated on, and prayed over.

Some of His Words are difficult and unsettling. Yet, through it all, is the grace of a Father earnestly gathering and re-gathering his children to himself.

The Living God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who to know is life eternal, still speaks through the written text of Scripture.

4. Whether we read the text or listen to it being read, we do so with a sense of Holy Curiosity, listening attentively so that we *hear* the voice of God in the text. Having thus heard, we meditate. We commit it to memory. We talk it over. We ponder. We seek to understand what God is saying.

And, in prayer – spoken, written, or silent; in gratitude, praise, confession, supplication, and intercession – we respond to God and chart our course of obedience: How will I keep God’s Word in the challenge I’m about to face?

If you find reading/listening to the Word of God challenging, if there are things in there you don’t like, if there are things you don’t understand, if there are calls to obedience that make you uncomfortable, or calls to forgive people you don’t think deserve forgiveness, you’re not alone. The Hebrew name of God’s chosen people, Israel, means: “The one who strives with God”, or perhaps, “God strives.”

God chooses to work with and through people who strive with Him!

You see, as the Israelites learned when they entered the Promised Land and tried to keep the Lord’s decrees and commandments; tried to keep Him first in their hearts, Living the Word of God in reliance on the Holy Spirit doesn’t mean that you’ve somehow transcended this earthly life with all its struggles and joys. It doesn’t mean that you somehow understand all the mysteries of the universe and are in perfect harmony with yourself, others, and even God at all times.

In the schema of *Lectio Divina*, Living the Word of God in reliance on the Holy Spirit is called Contemplation.

In his book *Eat this Book*, Eugene Peterson says this about contemplation:

Contemplation means submitting to the biblical revelation, taking it within ourselves, and then living it unpretentiously, without fanfare. It doesn't mean (and these are the stereotyped misunderstandings) quiet, withdrawn, secluded, serene or benign. It has nothing to do with whether we spend our days as a grease monkey under an automobile or on our knees in a Benedictine choir. It doesn't mean "having it all together." It doesn't mean being emotionally and mentally well-balanced.

Contemplatives fly off the handle, make bad judgments, speak out mistakenly and regret their words, run stoplights and get speeding tickets. Contemplatives get depressed, get confused, get fat, get lost, and sometimes don't get it at all. "Contemplative" is not a term of achievement. It is not a badge of merit. ...

Contemplation means living what we read, not wasting any of it or hoarding any of it, but using it up in living. It is life formed by God's revealing word, God's word read and heard, meditated and prayed. The contemplative life is not a special kind of life; it is the Christian life, nothing more but also nothing less. But lived.³

Contemplation is daily, hourly pursuing the steps of the Christ who loves you, in response to the Word you receive, whether you're in the Garden, the Desert, or the Unknown Land across the Jordan.

Without being all that aware of it, without necessarily trying, in obedient contemplation, we begin to reflect the image of the One in whom we live, move, and have our being; the One who is the Light of life.

This is the result not of our concerted effort, but of the Holy Spirit softening and shaping our hearts as we hear, meditate, pray, and obey the Word of God.

We begin to live the Word of God in reliance on the Holy Spirit.

We begin to truly be "Christian."

For God's glory, the health of our souls, and the good of the nations. Amen.

³ Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book*, Eerdmans, 2006. pg. 112, 113.

Hymn: #508 “Your word, O God, awoke the uncreated”
Thank you: Judy Armstrong and Marilyn Shaw.

We respond with prayer, faith, and service:⁴

Lord Jesus,
You reached out to so many different people,
with so many different needs, in so many different situations.
We thank you for the ways you have reached out to us,
in the embrace of prayer,
in the energy of a song,
in thought sparked by a sermon,
and in the wisdom of a word from scripture or the words of a friend.
Sometimes your healing has brought comfort;
sometimes it has brought challenge and the call to respond.
Hear us as we seek your comfort and your challenge
for the world, for the church and for our lives.

Bring comfort to those whose lives have been overturned by the pandemic:
to those whose work or study has become so much more difficult;
to those who cannot find work and don't know where to turn;
to those who still struggle with COVID-19 or another lingering illness,
and those who have lost hope that things will ever improve.
(Pause)

Bring challenge to those who lead recovery efforts over the next months:
to those whose decisions affect the well-being of the vulnerable,
to those who guide economic and educational planning,
and those who are rebuilding community life:
(Pause)

May your wisdom and compassion guide them.

Lord Jesus, bring comfort to those who are lonely or shut in,
and to all who have lost beloved family members or friends during the pandemic;
bring comfort to those who feel pain without relief
and those who wait for diagnosis or life-restoring treatment.
Offer peace to those who know there is no treatment
and wait in hope for your eternal welcome.
(Pause)

Bring challenge to those want to make the world a better place,
and to all who work within science, medicine, and the law
to improve the quality of life for all people.
Give them a vision of their work that is both just and courageous,
so that no part of society is neglected or mistreated.

⁴ From worship resource for July 4, 2021 available at <https://presbyterian.ca/worship/>

Challenge those who stir up violence and unrest
with a sense of shame for the cost to innocent lives,
and with a deeper understanding of what justice means.

Lord Jesus, comfort your church
in places where ministries struggle, whatever the reason.
And challenge your church to renew our vision for ministry
so that our witness is faithful to your all-embracing love,
expressed not only in words but also in the actions we take
to embrace those who differ from us
and yet have a place in your heart and your eternal care.

Hear us now as we pray in the words you taught us, Lord Jesus, saying:

The Lord's Prayer

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.