

Worship at home

August 21, 2022



God calls us to worship: Psalm 71:1-5

We respond in praise, confession, and supplication:

Prayers:

Praise and supplication:

O God, our strength and refuge,
We come together to worship you and praise your loving kindness.
In your presence, we rest from what distracts us,
to focus on your truth and goodness.
You call us to live in relationship with you.
Through the love of Jesus Christ, you repair our lives.
Through the power of your Spirit, you engage us to serve you in the
world.
Receive our prayers and our praise this day,
Creator, Christ, and Spirit,
revive our hope and our energy
and make us ready to answer your call.

Confession (*said in unison*):

**Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart, mind, and strength;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.**

Assurance of grace:

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hear and believe the good news:

In Jesus Christ, sin is forgiven.

In Jesus Christ, we are reconciled with our heavenly Father.

In Jesus Christ, there is peace.

Accept his grace,
and be at peace.

*(The response to: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" is: "**His love endures forever.**")*

Hymn: #378 "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus in the morning"

God speaks to us:

Reading: Hebrews 11:39-40; 12:1-15, 18-19, 22-29

*(The response to: "This is the word of the Lord" is: "**Thanks be to God.**")*

Trusting without knowing the score

1. Imagine for the moment that you play an instrument in an orchestra. Maybe you play a violin or trombone, maybe an oboe or timpani. At any given point in a particular piece of music you might not know what the other instruments are doing nor how the performance sounds to those in the audience. As one part of the orchestra, you have to trust the conductor to know the score and that they will direct all the parts such that the diverse sounds blend and create the sonic beauty which the composer intended.

Hebrews 12 follows the chapter in which the preacher called to mind a litany of heroes of the faith. In chapter 11 he praised the faith of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, Daniel, and too many others to name. These he held up as men and women who are examples to us of living their lives, and dying, wholly trusting the living God who is both composer and conductor; pioneer and perfecter.

I have little doubt, that you could add to that list people you have known or known about who exemplified the life of faith. Maybe parents or grandparents, teachers, pastors, or friends.

The pedal tone of the preacher's argument is that none of these heroes lived to experience the rewards of their faith.

In 11:13 we read, "All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them." And this observation is echoed at the end of the same chapter: "Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised." (11:39)

They played their parts, they trusted the maestro, they have yet to hear the finished performance.

2. When our lived experiences don't match the expectations we have of the rewards of faith, it is easy to grow weary, to lose heart, to become apathetic or even resentful or bitter.

The kingdom of God is supposed to be a state of peace and joy, but maybe you are facing hostility because of your Christian faith and the demands it makes on your

life. Maybe friends or family members shun you or give you a hard time whenever you express your faith.

Maybe it's not that direct. Maybe you simply grow weary of the tension between what ought to be – health, wholeness, and beauty – and what is – illness, division, destruction.

Maybe when you are worn down and tired you begin to question the promises that God makes of His strength imparted to you in the mystery of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”, but you wonder if he wasn't speaking hyperbolically!

When our lived experiences don't match the expectations we have of the rewards of faith, or the vision we hold of the salvation life, or the ideal to which we adhere of the church of being this community of peace and love, it is easy to grow weary, to lose heart, to become apathetic or even resentful or bitter.

3. This was the situation addressed by the preacher in the sermon to the Hebrews.

People had become followers of Jesus Christ *and* were struggling with trials, hardship, and even hostility. Their daily experiences bore little resemblance to the salvation life and the kingdom of God of their imaginations and they were wondering if this faith-path was worth taking.

They were discouraged and weary of the battle. As their eyes turned away from Jesus and focussed instead on their problems, bitterness and resentment threatened the harmony and thus the witness of the Christian community – as so often happens when we become occupied only with our survival and problems.

So, the preacher calls us to redirect our mind's eye by reminding us of the faith of our ancestors who, though they might not have lived to see the rewards, yet they trusted wholly God's promises and that Jesus has made them to be true even if our momentary experience would seek to deny them.

While we may not be able to lay hold of it as we might our phone, or a book, or a mountain, by faith and God's grace, we *have* come to:

Mt. Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem;
innumerable angels in festal gathering;
the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven;
God the judge of all;
the spirits of the righteous made perfect;
Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant,

the sprinkler of the blood by which all this is made possible!

Along with those witnesses who have died before us, we can rest in the assurance of our proximity to the heavenly Jerusalem and our place in the assembly of the firstborn and our celebrating with the angels in festal gathering because Jesus has gone on ahead of us.

By his ascension, Jesus has left our realm to take his place in the centre of the heavens and leaving us with the seal of his reign: the Holy Spirit dwelling within.

He's gone on ahead of us, he's finished the race, he knows the score and he's orchestrating all the parts to come together and create the glorious sound of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven!

By the forgiveness of sin he secured on the cross and by our union with Him in the Holy Spirit, we are already there.

You have not come to [a mountain] that can be touched.... But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.¹

4. So, placing our faith in that unshakable truth, while we continue our daily living in this present age, playing our own part, let us do so gratefully, joyfully, with reverence and awe; casting aside the weight and the sin that would slow us down, fixing our eyes on the One who has finished the race on our behalf; lift our drooping hands and strengthen our weak knees so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed and that through our lived witness of this truth, no one will fail to obtain the grace of God!

¹ Hebrews 12:18-22

We respond in thanksgiving, intercession, and faith:

Prayers:

Lord God, Loving God, gather us into your presence as we pray.
Silence our hearts and minds in these moments
so that we may listen for the movement of your Holy Spirit
who prays within us through our sighs too deep for words.

O God, we lay before you our thanks and our concerns
as we remember those who have come to our attention through conversations
or chance encounters this week.
We offer gratitude for moments of joy and goodness,
and remembered pleasures stirred by your Spirit;

We remember all those whose situations are very close to our hearts today,
those facing stress or sorrow,
those challenged by pain or illness,
those making a new beginning or searching for a new path.

We remember the things in the news lately that concern us deeply:
the stress on the environment and worries about its future,
the pressures on those who have lost jobs or cannot find work,
the pain of those who meet discrimination or hatred in daily life,
tensions among nations who threaten each other

And we remember one another and needs known and unknown in this
community.
Bless us as we make a new beginning together as summer turns to autumn.
Show us the paths of ministry you are opening before us.
We believe you hear our prayers and will be faithful to answer according to your
will,
so together we offer the prayer Jesus has given us:

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: #689 "Simply trusting every day"

God sends us with God's blessing:

Benediction

Congregation sings "Amen"