

Sunday Worship on April 7, 2024 (CCLI: License Number #3156883)
(Welcoming Elder: Edwin Webster)

Sunday Order of worship

We Gather

- Call to worship
- Praise song – BOP 248 At the dawning of salvation
- Prayer for worship and Lord's Prayer
- Words of Assurance
- Praise song – BOP 93 O look and wonder (Psalm 133)
- Time for our children

We Listen

- Prayer for illumination
- First reading: Acts 4:32-35
- Second reading: Psalm 133 (refrain 1)
- Third reading: 1 John 1:1-2:2
- Sermon: Joy of fellowship
- Hymn BOP 635 Brother, sister, let me serve you
- Prayer for the people

We Respond

- Offering, Doxology (BOP 830) & Dedication
- Song for the Journey – BOP 642 O Master, let me walk with thee

We Serve

- Benediction

Responsive Call to Worship

We gather with joy, for Easter continues.

Locked doors have been opened and fear has turned to peace.

We celebrate the presence of the Risen Christ among us.

Doubts can be erased and uncertainty turned to faith.

Let us rejoice and be glad!

We offer our prayers and praise with humble, hopeful hearts.

Praise song – BOP 248 At the dawning of salvation

Prayer For Adoration and Confession

God of new life, we come to you, rejoicing in the mystery of the Risen Christ, present among us always, even when we least expect him. We marvel at your constant love, your victory over death, and your resurrecting hope which embraces us in every circumstance. Trusting in these gifts, we seek to live as Easter people in every time and place. Fill us with the gift of your Holy Spirit in this time of worship, and grant us your peace through Christ, our Risen Saviour.

Merciful God, we confess that our trust in you can be weakened, and we become anxious about many things. We talk about love, but we fear those who differ from us. We cling to our personal agendas, and neglect your call to serve others, especially when that service costs us something. Forgive us. Through the power of your Holy Spirit, re-ignite our passion for you, so we can witness to your love in all we do.

This time we come to you in prayer that you taught us how to pray: (The Lord's Prayer:)
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Words of Assurance

Hear the words of the risen Christ: Peace be with you. Receive the peace and forgiveness of Christ, and share that peace with one another this day and every day.

May the Peace of the Lord be with you.

Praise song – BOP 93 O look and wonder (Psalm 133)

Prayer for children

Prayer for Illumination:

Breathe your Spirit upon us, O Lord, as we listen to the Scriptures. Open our minds and hearts to receive your Living Word, and fill us with renewed hope. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

- First reading: Acts 4:32-35
- Second reading: Psalm 133 (refrain 1)
- Third reading: 1 John 1:1-2:2

“This is the word of the Lord / Thanks be to God.”

SERMON: Joy of fellowship

Today's sermon title is **“Joy of fellowship”**

Fellowship. When do we use this word? Fellowship is friendly association. Especially, fellowship is the association of friendship within the group sharing the same interests. In the Bible, fellowship is participative sharing and mutual encouragement toward Christ. The common interest of the fellowship of believers is Jesus Christ. The foundation of fellowship is Jesus Christ.

So, when we have coffee time or the fellowship of God's people after worship, the one thing holding us together is not coffee or friendship, but Jesus Christ. He is the foundation of the community.

When you think about many different groups of the world, how do people make groups? Common interests. Usually, where they are from, which industry they are in, what kinds of sports they play, how much money they make, which school they are from. All the social groups fall into these categories. One unique group or community is church.

We accept all people. Their social status, their income, their personal interests do not hinder anybody to make up a community of faith. This is because the only condition to become a church is Jesus Christ.

The subtitle of today's passage of 1 John is "The word of life." This tells us that Jesus is the source of life. And that was revealed in Jesus' resurrection.

V2, NLT, "This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with Father, and then he was revealed to us."

V3, "We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

Here in V3, John is inviting the audience to the truth. It is like this, "Come, believe what I have seen and heard. God who existed from the beginning is real. God promised the Messiah and he sent Jesus Christ to us and God revealed his love through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

"Come and join! Let us have fellowship with us. God the Father is with us. God the Son is with us. Let us make Jesus Christ our foundation!"

We have Wednesday Life Connect Group. We have different backgrounds, different interests, different life experiences. But, we get along. We share our lives and we support each other and we pray for each other. We love and care for each other. We enjoy each other. We believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is the foundation of our fellowship. And that's all we need.

Matthew 18:19-20, "Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gathered in my name, I am there among them."

This tells us that when two or three gathered their hearts in prayer, God will be with them. Gathering hearts in prayer is fellowship. Adjusting their common interests on the foundation of Jesus Christ is prayer. In this fellowship of people, Jesus promised to be there together.

Don't you want this kind of fellowship? Don't you want the connectedness with God and God's people in harmony and peace?

Through today's passage, John is calling us out to come and join this fellowship with God and with God's people.

V4, "We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete."

Our joy is not complete yet. Foundation was not built completely yet. Our fellowship is not perfect yet.

WHY NOT?

Whereas God is light and has no darkness, we have sin and we are walking in darkness.

V7-8, "...if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

When we are in darkness, sometimes, we don't even know that we are in darkness. Sometimes, we don't know our sins. Our realization of sin is similar to restoring low self-esteem.

There are three steps to improve our low self-esteem. When our self-esteem gets lower, it will be helpful.

First step. Know where you are. Know who you are. Face your honest self. When we go to shopping mall, there are many many stores. So, we need to find the map first to know where we are. Once we know where we are or who we are, we can finally figure out the next step.

Second step. Know where we are going. Know where we want to go. Set the goal. On the map, once you know where you are, then find out where you want to go.

Lastly, Third step. Walk. Follow the path. And don't stop until you get there.

Very simple. Everyone knows it. But, not everyone does it.

Without any intention, we sometimes deceive ourselves. 'It's okay we are doing fine. I believe in God, so God will help me.' But there might be some time that we never pray or never read the Bible. We never pay attention to God. Then, it's NOT okay.

It's not that God doesn't help if we don't pray nor read the Bible. But, if we do not build the personal relationship with God, then we don't understand when God speaks to us.

For example, in the flood, one person got on the roof. She or he prays to God, "God help me." So, God sent a boat. "Hey, come on the boat. I will take you to the safe place."

"No thanks. I prayed to God. God will help me."

Few hours later, there was a helicopter, "Hey, climb up the ladder, I will take you to the safe place." "No thanks. I prayed to God. God will help me."

At the end of the day, the person couldn't make it. So, she or he argued with God demanding the answer why God didn't save her or him.

God said, "I sent a boat, but you refused. I sent a helicopter, but you refused."

Sometimes, we don't know when God speaks to us through various situations.

Sometimes, we are not aware what kind of relationship we have with God.

Sometimes, we are walking in darkness, but we are not aware of it.

Sometimes, we lose the hope or the faith in our own selves.

That's because through experiences in our lives, we fail, we hurt, we struggle, and we are tired. These negative experiences lower down our self-esteem. So, it causes that we cannot see our true selves clearly. Similarly, the standards of the world make us turn away from God's truth. There is the truth shining brightly. But, we experience hurt. The hurt covers the light. We experience failure. This failure covers the light once more. This covers our light. This causes us to walk in darkness.

So, John wrote, when we invite you to the gospel, with the truth, the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, you will be able to open your eyes and realize your sin. You will be uncover all your obstacles covering your light which is the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection.

V9, "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Therefore, John continues in chapter 2, **“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”**

This is the true gospel for the world. This frees our light and the truth we have in us. Through death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Jesus became our advocate. Jesus cleansed our sins, as well as the sins of the whole world. That includes our sins.

Therefore, we are able to build the fellowship with Christ and God, along with other believers having Jesus Christ as the foundation our of fellowship.

Therefore, we are allowed to have the joy of fellowship with Christ and others.

Let us have Jesus Christ, who atoned all our sins, as the foundation of our joy of fellowship.

May the joy of togetherness with Christ fill your hearts and spread out to our surroundings.

This is the message of the Lord for us today.

Hymn BOP 635 Brother, sister, let me serve you

Prayer for the people

God of love and grace, thank you for your love for us. Thank you that you freed us from our sins. Thank you for teaching us that we can be free in you. Whether it's our blindness for our sins or it's our low self-esteem, you can free us from our sins and past hurts. Glorious God, help us trust your promises. Open our ears to hear your promises repeatedly, so it keeps reminding us your truth. And open our eyes to see your people who are already enjoying your promises, so that we can have hope that one day we will be like them too. Make our joy complete by removing all our past negative experiences and all our sins and unrighteousness. Help us come before your feet whenever we lose our true light.

There was a strong earthquake in Taiwan. Lives are lost and people got hurt. And many lost homes and buildings. We wonder why. We wonder what kind of messages you have for us. As we pray for them for your help and protection, help us discern your will in this. Also, there was one more earthquake in New York area. It didn't cause significant damage, but still, what is the message in this? Magnificent God, help us have wisdom and help us live accordingly. Help us be the good steward of your creation and help us love and help your people.

We also pray for our people in our church. We pray for Kambiz and Behinaz for their backpain. After their surgeries, they are having hard time recovering. Help them recover. Others need healing as well. Heal them and be with them in their recovering process. Also, there are hurt and pains in hearts. Relational struggles and frustrations. Financial difficulties. In this fast paced life, we just pushed away without reflecting our lives. Help us stand strong in you and help us come before your feet daily. Help us build personal connection with you, so we repeatedly listen to your voice.

As we worship you, connect our hearts to yours and to each other. Fill our hearts with joy and thankfulness for your life giving love. We thank you and we worship you. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

Invitation to the offering: In this season of Easter, we celebrate God's precious gift to us in Christ's dying and rising. As we present our gifts to God, may our generosity reflect God's goodness to us and the hope we have found in Christ Jesus. Let us praise God and glorify him with the Doxology (BOP #830.)

Offering prayer:

Generous God, thank you for the hope we can claim in your resurrecting power. Bless the gifts we bring so they may spread that hope in the world you love. In the name of your greatest gift, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen

Song for the Journey – BOP 642 O Master, let me walk with thee

Now, it is the time for us to be sent to the world where God called us to be. God is with us. God frees us from all unrighteousness. God opens our eyes. God reveals our true identities. God frees our light. Let your light be shining brightly as you build fellowship with Christ and with his people.

Benediction: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, And the Love of God, And the intimate fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with us all, now and always. Amen.