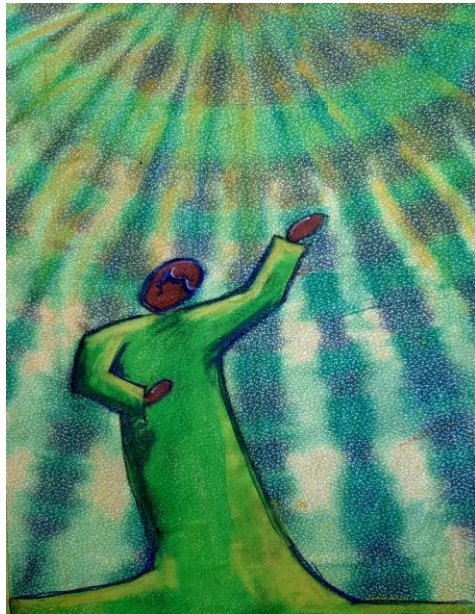


April 26, 2020

3rd Sunday of Easter

This Sunday I'd like us to worship a bit differently. The Psalm for today is Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19. This psalm was originally composed to be used in a thanksgiving ritual following recovery from sickness. I think this psalm contains words that are significant and worth spending time with. See if you agree with me. In the meantime, let us worship and thank God for being with us in these words.



“Living Psalm 116”

as created by artist Erin Beardemphl

Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19 Common English Bible

- I love the LORD because he hears
my requests for mercy.
- ² I'll call out to him as long as I live,
because he listens closely to me.
- ³ Death's ropes bound me;
the distress of the grave found me—
I came face-to-face with trouble and grief.
- ⁴ So I called on the LORD's name:
“LORD, please save me!”
- ¹² What can I give back to the LORD
for all the good things he has done for me?
- ¹³ I'll lift up the cup of salvation.
I'll call on the LORD's name.
- ¹⁴ I'll keep the promises I made to the LORD
in the presence of all God's people.
- ¹⁵ The death of the LORD's faithful
is a costly loss in his eyes.
- ¹⁶ Oh yes, LORD, I am definitely your servant!
I am your servant and the son of your female servant—
you've freed me from my chains.
- ¹⁷ So I'll offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to you,
and I'll call on the LORD's name.
- ¹⁸ I'll keep the promises I made to the LORD
in the presence of all God's people,
- ¹⁹ in the courtyards of the LORD's house,
which is in the center of Jerusalem.

Praise the LORD!

MEDITATION: On April 26 it will be 42 days since we have been together face-to-face. Sometimes it feels like we are alone in the world and alone on our faith journey. Then we read words such as Psalm 116 and our spirits are lifted up.

I am always amazed that these words were composed 3000 years ago, and yet they are still relevant today. (*My thoughts will be in italics.*) According to John H. Hayes, “Thanksgiving rituals, in ancient Israel as in most cultures, were intent on two goals: (1) celebration of the new or renewed status of the person/group/community and (2) offering testimony to the one who had granted the status being celebrated.” The condition of trouble or the state of distress from which this ancient worshiper has been saved is depicted in various ways throughout the psalm: snares of death, pangs of Sheol, distress and anguish, brought low, death, tears, stumbling. “All if these illustrate the marginal state of existence into which sickness had thrown the person.”

(In these 42 days if sheltering in place, we may be able to relate to the psalmist. We may have felt like we are in distress and anguish.) However, the action of the ancient worshiper in taking to God the predicament of illness is noted in verse 4 as calling “on the name of the Lord” or simply praying for help. Verses 12-19 are concerned with the fulfilment of vows made when the worshiper petitioned God for deliverance from trouble, most likely a debilitating illness. Those vows certainly would have included the offering of sacrifice. *I wonder if any of us have prayed to God for deliverance and included a vow of some kind. (For example: “Dear God, if I were well I could do more for the church.”) Or perhaps some other type of sacrifice.*

According to Dr. Hayes, “we should think of these thanksgiving rituals as times of great happiness and jubilant celebration. A person whose life had been threatened, disoriented, and removed from the normal course of activity (*such as being quarantined*) had been restored to wholeness. The life that had fallen into the grip of hell itself and had been invaded by the power of death was now free of both the illness and the anguished turmoil that the sickness brought (*not being able to assemble in worship*). Once restored, the person can look back and speak of the sorrowful plight of the past, which now is only a life-transforming memory. There certainly must be ‘scars’ from such a past, but they are signs of past triumphs and the residues of God’s grace, to be cherished and celebrated, not embarrassingly hidden.”

Will we have scars when this pandemic is over? What would they look like? What will we offer to God in thanksgiving for being saved from this virus? Will we give testimony to others concerning our salvation?

I invite you to read the Psalm again and ponder the words. Above all, praise God for what God has done for us. Amen.

* * * *

Here is a version of Psalm 116 written by Maren Tirabassi to Accompany Erin Beardemphl’s Image that opened our worship.

“I love God who hears my voice and my supplications. who inclines an ear to me. Therefore, I am confident to pray out all my life as long as I live. I will lift up the cup of salvation so that all can see. I will call out the name of God

so that everyone knows the source of my strength.
I will live out my promises to God not in personal spirituality, but in the midst of God's blessed people, and honor in love the lives and the deaths of all, for God holds all precious."

CALL FOR OFFERING:

The season of Easter teaches us that generous love is at the heart of God's work. Joyfully we are able to give knowing that our gifts will help others to see the blessed miracle of God's creative joy.

PLEASE DON'T FORGET TO SEND IN YOUR OFFERINGS

A SONG OF PRAISE:

"We Bring the Sacrifice of Praise"

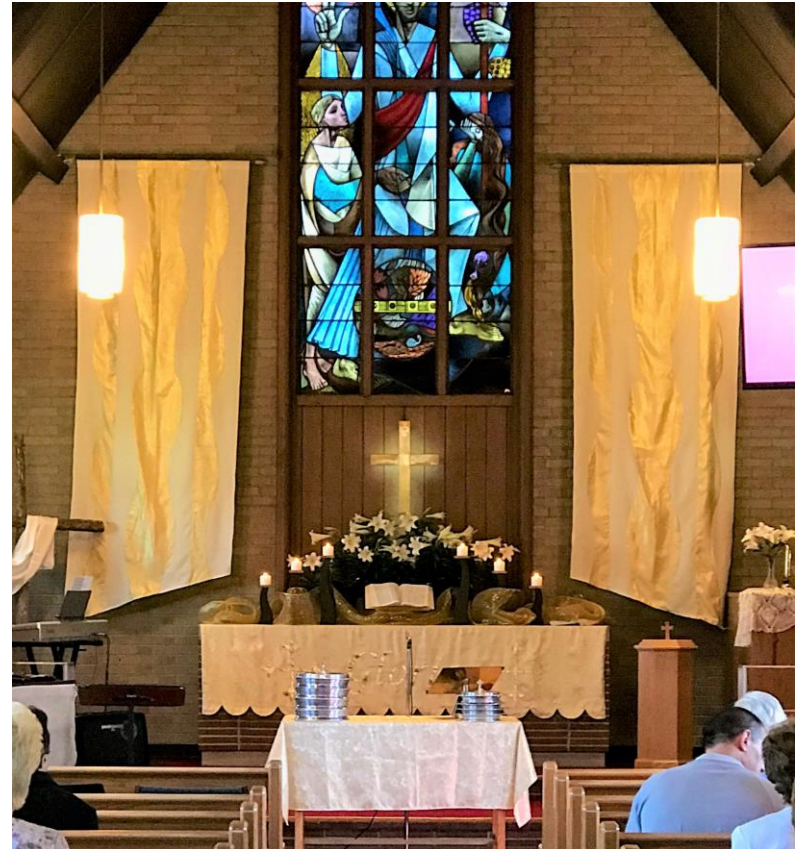
A contemporary hymn written by Kirk Dearman

We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord;
We bring the sacrifice of praise into the house of the Lord.
And we offer up to You the sacrifices of thanksgiving;
And we offer up to You the sacrifices of joy.

For those of you with the internet, you can go to youtube and find many versions of this song, from the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir to the composer singing it to sing-along versions. If you like it, we can sing it in worship in the future.

ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST: Dave Seneczyn, Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard, Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Rich Schmitt, Les Sattery, Cherie Klostermann, Shari Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard

EASTER 2019



Whether gathered or scattered, God is with us.

Amen.

Peace and Blessings, Pastor Rosemary
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