

KNOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BAYFIELD

2024 03 10

May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you ... and also with you. Welcome to worship at Knox Presbyterian Bayfield on March 10th, the 4th Sunday of Lent

Announcements

HYMN Praise God #306

CALL TO WORSHIP [responsive]

One: Give thanks to the LORD, for God is good;

All: God's steadfast love endures forever.

One: God gathers people from the east and the west, from north and south.

All: We will thank God for such all-embracing love.

One: Let us praise God for all God's wonderful works.

All: We will worship God and tell of God's deeds with songs of praise.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession [Responsive]

Gracious God, your love is everlasting. Where there is darkness, you bring light. Where there is sadness, you offer hope. Where there is despair, you bring new possibilities. You bring healing for the sick and forgiveness for the sinner.

In this time of worship, may our joy and reverence be evident in our songs and our silence, in our prayers and praises, for you are our God, here and everywhere, now and always.

Merciful God, we confess that we often take your acceptance of us for granted. We are careless in our relationships and focus on our own desires. The news distracts us, and we put opinions above your expectations of us. We seek your forgiveness. Renew our understanding of our place within your creation, so we may serve you more faithfully, day by day. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Friends in Christ, by grace we have been saved through faith. This is God's gift to us. God's amazing love allows each of us to receive his grace and be at peace with God, with yourselves and with each other. May the peace of Jesus the Christ, which surpasses all understanding, be with you. And also with you.

Hymn God is love; come heaven, adoring #314

To Hear The Word Of God

Prayer For Illumination and Scripture

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Your Word, O God, comes to us in the translation of ancient scripture. Send your Holy Spirit to open our minds with understanding and our hearts with wisdom in the name of Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

Scripture

Tanakh*	Numbers 21:4-9	[B#139/W#154]
Psalms	107:1-3, 17-22 [responsive]	[B#559/W#619]
Epistle	Ephesians 2:1-10	[B#192/W#205]
Gospel	John 3:14-21	[B#94 /W#96]

May God bless our understanding of this, God's holy word. **The word of the Lord.**

Message

O holy One, by the power of your Holy Spirit at work in the word read and proclaimed, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you.

Amen.

In Scripture we discover the opportunity to be saved by grace and faith. The opportunity to accept God's grace and follow in the ways of Christ. From Genesis to Revelation, we discover that God's grace interacts with faith. It is a mystery that allows us to recognize the more we know, the more we realize that there is more to be known.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul declared, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God". A gift from God. The gifts of God are given from God, not created by our rules and expectations. The passage from the gospel of John is one of the best-known and loved verses in the Bible: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

On this passage, David Chotka wrote about his experience growing up in the Niagara Peninsula. He heard countless stories of barrels, wheelbarrows, acrobats and publicity stunts that happened over Niagara Falls. One of the amazing stories was about the French acrobat Blondin who would do amazing feats on a tightrope stretched out over the Niagara Gorge. Chotka wrote, "One day, Blondin's manager was standing on the Canadian side of the gorge, doing his best to attract a crowd. Blondin took up a wheelbarrow and got onto the suspended rope and then turned to his manager. In front of the crowd, he asked, "Do you believe that I can push this wheelbarrow across this rope to the other

side?" The manager said, "Yes, I do." Blondin said, "Get into the wheelbarrow!" This is a wonderful example of the profound difference between believing and believing.

For God so loved the world ... is it possible to read all Scripture within the context of God's love? God's love created the world and freed the slaves in Egypt. God's love offered the guidance of the law and the promised land. God's love called prophets who declared God's Word and love and who taught of God's compassion for the outcast, the foreigners, the oppressed, and the insiders.

Cartoonist Hank Ketcham captured this message in wonderful ways. In an old Dennis the Menace cartoon, Dennis and his little friend Joey were leaving Mrs. Wilson's house with their hands full of cookies. Joey said, "I wonder what we did to deserve this." Dennis answered, "Look, Joey. Mrs. Wilson gives us cookies not because we're nice, but because she's nice."¹

Scripture proclaims that God's extravagant love for the world is an act of grace, freely offered to each of us. John began this passage with reference to the book of Numbers where Moses was instructed to lift up a bronze serpent on a pole to save the people from poisonous snakes. The passage is referred to as a "murmuring" story. The murmur refers to the complaining and rebelling against Moses in the wilderness as they speak out over the lack of food and water. They are frightened by the poisonous snakes and their fear is increased when people die from the snake bites. Their fear leads them to beg Moses to intercede for them with God.

The deeply embedded fear of snakes persists long past the wilderness journey. Beyond a healthy fear of poisonous snakes, Ophidio-phobia [ow - fi - die - uh] is the most common phobia - it affects about a third of the population. It seems odd when God told them that those bitten by a poisonous snake could look to the bronze serpent on the pole and be cured. This odd action may lead us to question whether Moses was lifting up an idol to protect against the snakes. This idea goes against teachings about idols, yet at first glance this explanation seems to fit.

Barbara Brown Taylor explored the meaning of the bronze snake. If the people believed that the bronze serpent was responsible for their cure, then that snake was an idol. But was that God's intent? What of a different perspective - that God loved and cared for the

¹ Billy D. Strayhorn, Cross Road: For God So Loved

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people. The use of an idol reminiscent of Egyptian symbolism seems highly unlikely. What if the serpent is a reminder for the people to lift their eyes and hearts to God? Taylor concluded, "Looking up at the symbolic snake, they looked through it to their only Physician, who alone was their Health, their Salvation, and their Cure."

In John's gospel, we are taught and reminded to look to the love of God as the basis of our primary perspective. We look to the teachings of Jesus to find the love of God for each of us. Praise be to God for visions and the movement of the Spirit among us.

Hymn O Love that wilt not let me go #209

THE OFFERING OF OUR LIFE AND LABOUR TO THE LORD

Quote How can we not be giddy with gratitude and reckless generosity for all the gifts God has given us? Rev Steve Garnaas-Holmes – poet, songwriter

The season of Lent leads us closer and closer to the Cross. As we contemplate Jesus lifted up for our sakes, consider what the gift of his mercy and grace means for you. Let your offering express your thanksgiving for such an amazing gift from God.

Doxology We give Thee but Thine own, What e'er the gift may be; All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee.

Blessing of Gifts

O holy One, in Jesus the Christ, more was given than we can understand. We offer our gifts and ask the blessing of your generous love. May they be uses to bless the world with the same hope and healing we have found in you. And let us not count the cost until we too have given all we can for the sake of your creation. Amen.

HYMN Guide me, O thou great Redeemer #651

Prayers of the People

Creator God, we thank you for the wonders of the world that surround us, for the promise of new life stirring in the ground as spring emerges around us. We pray for the earth in its vulnerability, as it staggers under the demands of the people. May your planet earth be held in reverence by all peoples. Guide our community to use its resources wisely and respect the fragile balance between life and death.

Holy One, we pray your Spirit will speak to the hearts of all people, particularly those who hold power and influence. May we be guided to seek peace on earth together. We lift up the regions in conflict and pray that a just resolution to conflict will soon prevail. May all who claim your name have truthful hearts and be known as peace makers.

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Before we call, you answer, God. Before we speak, you know our voices. Hear our prayers. Loving God, by your Spirit, surround us with strength and love. Equip us to offer support for those who are near to us. Draw near to those who must confront illness, loss, and changing circumstances. We are thankful for healing and we are thankful for the end of suffering.

God of compassion, we lift up families who travel the long journey of grief. May their memories be a blessing. We ask you to linger with Lois and her extended family as they mourn the death of Don. God of hope, we ask you to linger with all who are dealing with challenges: Renee & Jim; Judith & Gerry; Rob, Valerie, Jim & Jane; Carl; Betty Lou; Ruth; Audrey & Grace; Courtney, Gayle & family; and, Phyllis and Shawn. We lift up all who are on our hearts as they face immense challenges. O God of hope and new possibility, in Christ you opened the way into the future for us through the power of your redeeming love. Give us the courage we need to face our future, assured of your presence and power to sustain us.

Holy Spirit, source of wisdom and courage, embrace your people that we may live faithfully, encouraging each other by the commitment we have witnessed in Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together, Our Father who art in heaven, hallow'ed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

There will be a short intermission before the Annual meeting portion of the service begins.