

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
WILLMAR, MN
August 30, 2020**



Prelude

Welcome to Worship

Friends, we are doing worship in a new way during this season. Welcome to those of you who are here in the sanctuary. It is a joy to have you back. Many of you have good reason to still be joining us virtually. We miss you, but we understand. And we look forward to when all of us will be able to be together again safely. Let me assure you, wherever you are, we are still the church. The church has always been the people, not the building in which we gather. Even if we are not all together in this place, we are together in worship today by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and by the digital signal that helps us connect to one another.

Before we begin I need to offer a couple notes on worship today:

- You will notice there are no bulletins. We are trying to observe touch-free worship as much as possible, avoiding anything that could spread contamination, so there are no bulletins and no songbooks in the pews, but everything you need will be on the screen.
- We are not singing together today. I know this is hard for us, but it's a high-risk activity, so sing in your hearts, sing in your minds, it's probably OK to even hum along a little bit, but please don't sing with your voices. If you are watching online from home, sing all you want.

- We are not passing the peace today. I would also ask that you respect each other's personal space. I know you want to greet each other. But please observe social distancing today.
- We will not be passing the offering plates. When the service ends, we will be dismissing you by rows to prevent it from getting too crowded in the narthex. If you want to visit, please do so outside. As you exit the sanctuary, you can place your offering in the offering plate by the door.

Now, let us prepare our hearts and minds for worship.

Call to Worship

One: The God of our ancestors calls us to worship.

All: Praise the Lord!

One: Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

All: Let us worship God!

Preparing Our Hearts

“Praise Ye the Lord, the Almighty” (#35, GG)

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Praise ye the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, now to his temple draw near;
join me in glad adoration!

Praise ye the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth,
shelters thee under his wings, yea, so gently sustaineth!
Hast thou not seen how thy desires e'er have been
granted in what he ordaineth?

Praise ye the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the amen sound from his people again;
gladly for aye we adore him.

Confession & Forgiveness

One: Trusting in the power of God to save,
let us confess our sins before God and this assembly.

**All: Holy God,
we confess that our love for you and for others
has not been genuine.
We have not held fast to what is good,
and we have lagged in affection for our
brothers and sisters.
We have not been patient in suffering,
nor have we persevered in prayer.
We have repaid evil for evil
and have failed to live peaceably with all.**

**Forgive us our sin,
free us from the power of evil,
and help us trust in the power of your
everlasting goodness;
through Jesus Christ. Amen.**

One: Friends, hear the good news:
Christ has broken the power of sin and evil
and has opened to us the way of eternal life.
In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Hymn

“We Are Standing on Holy Ground” (#406, GG)

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We are standing on holy ground,
and I know that there are angels all around;
let us praise Jesus now;
we are standing in his presence on holy ground.

We are standing on holy ground,
and I know that there are angels all around;
let us praise Jesus now;
we are standing in his presence on holy ground.

Scripture Lesson

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

¹³ But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."^[a] He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD,^[b] the God of

your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you':

This is my name forever,
and this my title for all generations.

Message

"Here I Am"

Rev. Leanne B. Thompson

Take a moment, wherever you are, and consider your shoes. What shoes are you wearing today, and why did you choose them? Did you select them because they match your outfit? Because they have that little bit of extra heel that makes you feel taller? Did you choose the shoes that give you the best support, or feel really comfortable when you wear them? Are you rocking the latest trend that makes you look stylish and hip, even if they are killing your feet? Are you wearing the shoes that are appropriate for wherever you plan to go from here – to the lake, or to the golf course, or to work in your yard? Are you wearing your favorite pair of glittery pink cowgirl boots that you wear with everything because they make you feel like you can take on the world? Are you wearing the shoes that were convenient – the first pair you grabbed when you reached in the closet this morning? Or are you wearing the only pair of Sunday appropriate sandals you have left that weren't chewed up by your new puppy? If you are joining us from home today, are you wearing your favorite pair of slippers, or nothing on your feet at all? What does your choice of footwear say about you, about what you are doing in your life right now, about where you have been, or where you are headed, about how you approach life?

Odds are, if you are here in the sanctuary and are over the age of 2, you came wearing shoes today, and most likely still have them on your feet. You didn't come today with bare feet. And you didn't do here at your church-home what you do at home-home and kick your shoes off as soon as you walk in the door. That would just be weird, right? That is not something we do in our faith tradition. In many faith traditions shoes *are* removed at the door. It is a sign of respect, a recognition that, like Moses, they are entering into a place where they will be standing on holy ground. Please know that it is perfectly acceptable to leave your shoes on in this place. You are not offending God by

wearing them on this holy ground. I can say with equal confidence that you are not offending God if your shoes are battered, stained, worn, or out of style. God is not offended if you have chosen to quietly slip your shoes off during the sermon because it is more comfortable. It is altogether possible that I have, on more than one occasion, quietly slipped my dress shoes off behind the pulpit while I preach because it is more comfortable. God is also not offended if you have chosen to show up wearing no shoes at all. I am quite confident that God has little interest or concern with your footwear choices this morning or any other day. Unless of course your shoe lessness is not a choice, but rather the consequence of poverty and want. Then I am sure God cares a great deal. But that is not what we are talking about today.

We are talking about Moses, and the instruction to him to take off his sandals because he is standing on holy ground. I think there is more going on here with Moses removing his shoes than a simple show of respect for being in the presence of God.

Respect isn't a bad reason for taking off your shoes. Scott and I make a practice of showing respect for you and your home when we come to visit by taking off our shoes. Before entering your home, we have come from all kinds of places in the world, and you don't need us tracking all kinds of who-knows-what into your house. It's a behavior deeply ingrained in us by our mothers growing up on the farm. So, we slip off our shoes without any fuss as we step through your door.

More than once this has left me feeling exposed. Think about it for a moment. If I asked you to slip off your shoes right now, what would you be showing to the world? Would it reveal the sock with a hole in it that you hoped no one would notice, or that you are unintentionally wearing two different socks? Maybe you did a fair amount of walking before you got here this morning and your feet have been building up a little sweaty stink inside your shoes (especially if they are snow boots). Perhaps you are wearing no socks inside your shoes and you remove your shoes to reveal a sadly chipped pedicure, or too long toenails you wish you would have remembered to trim this morning. Yes, these are all things I have been embarrassed to discover as I slipped off my shoes at the threshold of someone's home.

We may be standing on holy ground together, that place where God is present when two or three are gathered in his name. But taking off our shoes may

expose more about us than we are comfortable exposing. Taking off our shoes may be a sign of respect, but it is also symbolic of making ourselves at home together, of being our true selves, stinky feet and all, in each other's presence.

Yes, it is significant that God instructs Moses to remove his sandals as a sign of respect for the holy place on which he is standing. But it is just as significant that in instructing Moses to remove his sandals, God just might be instructing him to be his fully authentic self in God's presence; God might be telling Moses to relax and be himself, to make himself at home in God's presence. God might be telling Moses to allow himself to be vulnerable and open to what God is telling him.

Consider what we know about Moses at this point in his life. He is an outlaw hiding from justice. He has taken the life of another human being – perhaps justified, perhaps not. He killed an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave, so I guess your opinion of his guilt or heroism depends on your perspective. He has discovered that he is descended not from Pharaoh, but from the people enslaved by Pharaoh. And this has caused some confusion and angst in this young man trying to find his place in the world. Moses doesn't quite know who he is or who he is supposed to be. He has fled a life of privilege as an adopted child of Pharaoh's palace and taken refuge with a tribe in Midian. He is keeping a low profile in the wilderness tending his father-in-law's flocks. The Egyptians have not found him there.

But God has. And God is calling him to take off his sandals, strip off everything he thinks he knows about himself, set aside every fear and doubt, and become the person he was always created to be. If removing his shoes was a symbol of reverence and respect we might expect Moses to respond reverentially and respectfully to God's request. But that is not what happens

Biblical Scholar Karla Suomala paraphrases and reflects on the exchange this way:

God lays out a plan for Moses: "Moses, I've seen my people and how miserable they are down in Egypt. I've heard their cry at the hands of their taskmasters. I know how much they are suffering, and I've decided that it's time for me to do something about it. I want to get them out of Egypt and bring them into a much better land, a land that I promised

their ancestors. So, here's the deal, I'm going to send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

Instead of bowing in awe and humility, as a shoeless man before a deity ought to do, and saying, "Yes, with your help, I will," Moses says, "Hey, wait a minute. I'm not ready to sign on." He then goes on to provide a list of reasons why he is not the right man for the job.

Does this sound like a man who knows how to behave properly in God's presence? Moses sounds more like a regular guy, a real person, a little too much like me, and maybe you too."¹

God calls Moses. And Moses, exposed before God, unable to hide anything about himself, sees only his flaws, only the ways he doesn't measure up and isn't up to the task.

I wonder how many times that happens to us. In large or small ways God calls us, and we see only the ways we don't measure up to the task, we see only the ways we are scared or intimidated, we see only the possibility of failure. But our shoes are off before God. God knows us completely; nothing about us is hidden from God, and God knows exactly who God is calling. God called Moses because he was uniquely equipped and positioned for the task to which he was called. And if God is calling you to do something, or say something, or be something, it is because you are uniquely gifted for that which you are called. It most likely won't be something as dramatic as confronting Pharaoh. Very few receive a call in their lives of that magnitude. Thankfully, you don't have to answer God's call to Moses. You get to answer God's call to you.

God called Moses to be Moses. God is calling you to be you.

Parker Palmer, in his book *Let Your Life Speak*, suggests that being one's self isn't always easy or automatic. "We arrive in the world with birthright gifts," he says, "then we spend the first half of our lives abandoning them or letting others" persuade us that they aren't worthwhile.

Who you are is worthwhile, and who God is calling you to be is within your reach. You don't have to pretend to be someone else or hide who you really

¹ https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3390

are. God loves you, and created you, and is calling you. So take off your shoes, or sandals, or sneakers, or fabulous boots. Be your authentic uncensored self before God and say, "Here I am." And, as Anatheia Portier-Young so poetically instructs you:

"Draw away the covering that has protected you. Clear away the barrier between yourself and the earth so that your bare feet may touch and sink and take root in this holy ground. Let this living soil coat your skin. Dig in, feel your way, and find your balance here upon this mountain, so that its life becomes your life, its fire you fire, its sacred sand and loam and rock the ground of your seeing, speaking, and calling."²

Alleluia! Amen.

Let us pray:

"O God, you have called your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

Hymn of Affirmation

"Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" (#65, GG)

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Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty.
Hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me till I want no more;
feed me till I want no more;

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.

² https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2136

Strong deliverer, strong deliver,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.

Prayers of Intercession

Listening God, you heard the prayers of the Israelites.
Hear now these prayers, both spoken and silent:

For peace where there is conflict...

For food where there is hunger...

For hope where there is despair...

For health where there is sickness...

For faith where there is fear...

For life where there is death...

We pray in the name of Jesus,
who conquers all that would defeat us
and gives us new life.

And now, with the confidence of the children of God,
we pray the prayer which Jesus taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed 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 debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Moment for Mission

Before we move on to our offering today, I want to take this moment to remind you that each month we highlight a mission of the month and invite

you to make a special offering to that particular ministry. The August mission of the month is United Campus Ministry at Ridgewater College. United Campus Ministry welcomes students to campus and supports them throughout their time at Ridgewater College. One of their major areas of service is their meal ministry that serves as many as 250 students twice a week. But there are countless other ways they offer hospitality and spiritual nurture to young adults. In person, and as the case may be this fall, online.

Jeff Schmitz shares these words: “Our biggest need remains prayer and continued support. Having churches support what we’re doing out here helps put wind in our sails to keep doing it during times like this when everything seems uncertain and our plans keep changing. Our other big need is a board member. We are still needing people to help oversee the ministry, hold me accountable, and dream for our future. If you are interested, let me know!”

He continues: “Thank you again for the support, I wish I could include more stories. There were students we helped with pregnancy, parenthood, benevolence, abusive situations, mental health support, and so many more areas...and it all starts with the connections we make through the meals that are supported by churches like yours.”

Friends, it’s not too late to support our August mission of the month. You can place your check, designated to the August mission of the month, in the offering plate, send it to the church, or you can give online. Thank you for supporting this ministry.

Invitation to the Offering

You are aware by now that we are not passing an offering plate during this season. We invite you to leave your offering in the plate by the door on your way out of the sanctuary, or you may continue to send your offering to the church or give online. Regardless of how you give, I want to thank you for continuing to give generously. Your gifts allow us to continue to be the church. So, I would like to take this moment to say thank you, and to bless your financial offerings and the offering of your lives.

Offering Prayer

Holy God of holy ground,
like Moses, we question our fitness to serve
heaven's purpose on earth.
Overcome our qualms with the assurance
of your presence;
bless these offerings that, through them,
we may do your will.
Amen.

Closing Hymn

"Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing" (#546, GG)

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Lord, dismiss us, with your blessing;
fill our hearts with joy and peace;
let us each, your love possessing,
triumph in redeeming grace.
O refresh us, O refresh us,
traveling through this wilderness.

Thanks we give and adoration
for your gospel's joyful sound;
may the fruits of your salvation
in our hearts and lives abound.
Ever faithful, ever faithful
to your truth may we be found.

Savior, when your love shall call us,
from your struggling pilgrim way,
let no fear of death appall us,
glad your summons to obey.
May we ever, may we ever
reign with you in endless day.

Charge and Benediction

One: Go in peace to love and serve.

**All: We take up our cross to follow
in the way of Jesus, our Lord.**

One: The blessing of God be with you,
the love of Jesus fill you,
and the power of the Holy Spirit sustain you,
now and forevermore.