

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
WILLMAR, MN
JUNE 14, 2020**



Prelude

Preparing Our Hearts

“My Life is in You, Lord”

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My life is in You, Lord
My strength is in You, Lord
My hope is in You, Lord
In You, it's in You. (Repeat)

I will praise You with all of my heart
I will praise You with all of my hope
With all of my life, and all of my strength
All of my hope is in You

Welcome to Worship

Friends, we are doing worship in a new way during this season. The sanctuary is empty, but we are still the church. The church has always been the people, not the building in which we gather. Even if we cannot be 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.

Wherever you are, and whether you are watching it live or as a recording, this is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Opening Hymn

“Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

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Come, thou Fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above.
Praise the mount I'm fixed upon it mount of God's redeeming love.

Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by thy help I've come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger, bought me with his precious blood.

Oh, to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter, bind my wandering heart to thee:
prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.

Opening Prayer

O God, you come to us in unexpected places
In isolation, behind closed doors
On dusty roads, as we go from place to place
In video chats with friends and telephone conversations with loved ones.
You come bringing us peace, where there is no peace
You come bringing us hope when everything seems hopeless
You come bringing us courage when we are afraid.
Come and be among us now, in every place where we are.
Open our eyes to see you, open our hearts to know you.
In the name of the Risen Christ we pray. Amen

Scripture Lesson

Romans 5:1-8

¹ Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

Message

“I Hope”

Rev. Leanne B. Thompson

We recently began trying to farm some grass on bare spots in our yard. It's not doing fabulously despite our best efforts to water and tend it. You see, the seeds were sown just in time for it to get hot and dry, just in time for the great outdoors to become a giant convection oven, baking everything that isn't thoroughly rooted and watered to a nice brown crisp. I have found myself muttering more than once, "I hope it rains." What have you been hoping for lately?

We often talk of hope as wishful thinking: I hope it will rain; I hope it won't rain; I hope I win the lottery; I hope my team wins the Super Bowl. We turn hope into a catalogue of frivolous longings. But Paul's concept of hope in Romans is different. For Paul, hope isn't wishful thinking, but absolute certainty about the future. Paul doesn't hope for things that might happen. Paul hopes for things that *will* happen. What Paul hopes for is grounded in God's faithfulness to keep his promises. God never promised us rain on demand, winning power ball numbers, or a triumphant team. We can wish all we want, but there is no guarantee those things will happen. They are not promised to us. Something more important and precious – and seemingly illusive – is promised to us: peace with God and peace with one another.

Peace is something that feels out of reach right now, doesn't it? The events of the last weeks and months have revealed wounds in our culture, blights in our fabric of community. Divisions that seem insurmountable. How can there ever be peace? It feels, so often, like when we try to be peacemakers we are sowing seeds in ground that does not want to receive them. We are sowing seeds that shrivel and die before they can take root. How can peace possibly grow when there is so much working against it?

Peace, friends begins with us. Not because of what we have done, but because of what God has done. The first wound has already been healed. Through the gift of Christ's grace, we are restored in relationship to God. We have peace with God. There is nothing held against us; there is nothing that divides us from the love of the heavenly Father. We can rest in the knowledge that we are fully embraced, fully accepted, abundantly loved. And that gives us inner peace regardless of what is happening externally in the world. It also gives us a reservoir of peace that can pour out of us into the world. Not something that comes from our strength, but something that comes from God.

Peace with our neighbors is possible because we already have peace with God. But did you notice the peace didn't happen because of our strength of will? It didn't happen by our work and effort? We play a role, certainly. But God makes it happen. That is God's promise to us.

God has promised us peace.
God has promised us restoration.
God has promised us unity.
God has promised us healing and wholeness.

And we know God keeps God's promises! God has already kept that promise to us personally. We trust that God will keep that promise to us collectively. Even if we haven't seen it yet.

That, friends, is hope. Knowing – *knowing* – that God will keep God's promise to bring us peace, restoration, unity, healing, and wholeness. Not just wishing. Knowing. Hope is knowing that God will do what God has promised to do.

"I hope it will rain," is wishful thinking.

“I hope I will see the end of violence.”

“I hope I will see the end of racism.”

“I hope I will see the restoration of humanity made one in Christ Jesus.”

- those statements are declarations of conviction about what will happen!

We don't know when. We don't know how. But we know that in the fullness of God's kingdom, we will see the day when violence will end, and racism will end, and all will be made one in the fullness of God's glory. But it will not happen without suffering. Paul, who was shipwrecked, beaten, and imprisoned, knew something about suffering. But the suffering didn't negate the peace he knew in his deepest being. In fact, the suffering, he taught was part of what helped produce hope: "...suffering produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." When God's peace rests at the very center of our being, the suffering we endure doesn't overcome us. In fact, the trials and suffering we endure become a refiner's fire, honing us into people of resilience, strength of character, and conviction. When we have endured trials and suffering hope is no longer a shallow thing – it is a deep, abiding, and sustaining thing: "...and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

We are not a lost cause. As awful as it seems in the world right now. We know – we have hope – that God has not abandoned or forsaken us. We know this because it is promised to us that “while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” While we were sinners, not when we were perfect and righteous. While we were sinners. We can boast in the truth that God has overcome the worst in us so that we might have the best of us to share with the world. We don't get permission to boast in anything else, but we can boast in the goodness of God and what God has done for us in Christ Jesus – restoring us to our true character, and destiny, and fellowship with God. This means we can live with hope that the sin and brokenness in world will be healed and redeemed.

What difference does hope make? Hope means that even in the midst of suffering, we live with conviction that we can be triumphant in our sufferings. Rather than being destroyed or challenged by our sufferings, we can triumph through and over them. Hope means we are not overcome by the troubles of the world. Rather, we can counter the troubles of the world with the love of Christ. We can continue to plant seeds of peace in the darkest, driest places knowing that they will be watered by the Holy Spirit. We can plant seeds of

peace, not wishing they would grow, but hoping that they will in God's time, by God's power. Live as people of hope, friends. Keep sowing peace wherever you can, and hope for God's will to be done.

Alleluia and Amen.

Hymn of Affirmation

"My Hope is Built on Nothing Less"

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My hope is built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain:

On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
all other ground is sinking sand,
all other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness seems to hide his face,
I rest on his unchanging grace;
in ev'ry high and stormy gale,
my anchor holds within the veil. [Refrain]

His oath, his covenant, his blood
support me in the whelming flood;
when all around my soul gives way,
he then is all my hope and stay. [Refrain]

When he shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found,
dressed in his righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before the throne. [Refrain]

Prayers of Intercession

We thank you, O God, that you have given us an enduring hope—one which cannot disappoint us or mislead us. We thank you, that through our faith in you and in your Son Jesus Christ, you enter into every believing heart and make new lives that have been torn asunder by the darkness of this world...

Lord, hear our prayer...

We pray today O God that those believers who are asleep may awake and know that salvation is nearer now than when they first believed. Help them, and us, to lay aside the works of darkness and to put on the armor of light that you bestow upon those who actively seek you day by day. Grant that their faith and ours may be fully alive...

Lord, hear our prayer...

We ask today, O God, for those who have lost hope and for those who have never had it. Grant to us and to those we lift before you in our hearts a new and abiding vision of what you have done, and what you are doing, and what you will do, to save and redeem your people and indeed the creation itself. Grant, O God, that all might see and believe and discover their purpose and the purpose of all that is and all that is yet to be...

Lord, hear our prayer...

We lift before you, O God, those persons and those places known to us to be in need of healing in body, mind, and spirit. Hear the names we speak aloud to you now or speak in the quiet of our hearts and minds...

Lord, hear our prayer...

We ask all this of you, O God, knowing that you are our hope and our salvation, a very present help in times of trouble, and the One whose purpose is to grant and new and abundant life to us and our world. Praise be to your name. **Amen.**

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.

Invitation to the Offering

Friends, we cannot pass an offering plate online. I want to thank you for continuing to give generously, sending your offerings to the church. Your gifts allow us to continue to be the church. And now, for your convenience, you can give online by visiting our website. So, I would like to take this moment to say thank you, and to bless the offerings you make on a regular basis: your financial gifts; and your lives offered to God's service. Let us pray...

Offering Prayer

God of all time and space,
you initiated the relationship of love and generosity with creation
at a time before and beyond all knowing.

Through the Word and the Spirit,
you continue in eternal love for all beings.

Fill us with a deep and abiding awareness of your presence,
your call, and your grace in our lives and in our world.

Shape us to into the people you have made us to be –
poured out in creative mercy
for the sake of Jesus Christ in all creation.

May the gifts we offer, and our lives offered to your service
reflect your love into the world.

Amen.

Closing Hymn

“Everlasting God”

words and music by Brenton Brown and Ken Riley

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Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord,
we will wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord.
Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord,
we will wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord.
Our God, You reign forever. Our Hope, our strong Deliverer.

You are the everlasting God, the everlasting God,
You do not faint, You won't grow weary.
You're the defender of the weak, You comfort those in need.
You lift us up on wings like eagles.

Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord,
we will wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord.
Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord,
we will wait upon the Lord, we will wait upon the Lord.
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You lift us up on wings like eagles.

Charge and Benediction

As people of faith we have gathered for worship.
As people of faith we now return to the world.
Go out to share the story of faith,
the story of life, with the world around you.
Share your hope in word and in deed,
in speech and in action.

As you go out to give a living witness,
as you go out to testify to God's love active in the world,
go knowing that God goes with you,
sharing the laughter and the hope, the fears and the tears.
Thanks be to God! Amen.