

SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE

April 14, 2024

WORDS OF WELCOME

INTROIT: #237 v.v. 1 - 2 *“In the Garden”* (Public Domain)

1. I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear falling on my ear the Son of God discloses.

Refrain:

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.*

2. He speaks, and the sound of His voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing,
And the melody that He gave to me within my heart is ringing. (Refrain)

CALL TO WORSHIP: AΩ*

L: Come, O Creator, O Immensity of love,

C: Come and be with us and in us and beside us and over us.

L: Be as hands upon us

C: and fashion us for shining

L: Be as warmth within us

C: and fire us for caring.

L: Be as strength beside us,

C: and shape our lives for healing

L: Abide in our prayers, the spoken and unspoken;

C: and make your Word come true in our flesh; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer. Amen!

HYMN: #252 v.v. 1-2 *“Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us”*

1 Savior, like a shepherd lead us, much we need your tender care;
In your pleasant pastures feed us, For our use your folds prepare:
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, You have bought us, yours we are;
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, You have bought us, yours we are.

2 We are yours, in love befriend us, be the guardian of our way;
Keep your flock, from sin defend us, seek us when we go astray:
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, Hear your children when we pray;
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, Hear your children when we pray.

PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION & NEW LIFE: AΩ*

L: Loving God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,

in your infinite wisdom, we are glad that you make all things new

All: Where there is hate, show your love. Where there is war, bring your peace. Where there is despair, bring your hope. Where there is fear, bring your understanding. Where there is scarcity, bring your abundance. Where there is systemic oppression, bring equal justice for all. By your perfect grace and mercy, make us new. May it be so. Amen.

*Moment of Silence, In Confession, Listening to God &
Reflection on God's Forgiveness, Love, Guidance, Redemption, and Restoration of our Lives*

WORDS OF GRACE:

L: God our Creator, Redeemer & Sustainer comes to us with grace, reminding us that God sent Jesus into the world, not for the purpose of condemning the world, but that the world might be saved through him, offering forgiveness and mercy, setting us free from past wrongs and with the help of the Holy Spirit empowers us to live life anew. Christ's birth, life, teachings death and resurrection gives life meaning and direction and the opportunity to start over; to rise up with Christ into new resurrection life

A: We believe in the grace and peace of Christ. We are forgiven.

With the help of God, we will rise up into resurrection life and share it with others. Alleluia!

HYMN OF RESPONSE: #252 v. 3 *"Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us"* (Public Domain)

3 Let us always seek your favor, let us always do your will;
Jesus Christ our only Savior, with your love our spirits fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, You have loved us, love us still;
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, You have loved us, love us still.

SCRIPTURE:

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Luke 24:36-49

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

³⁶ While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷ They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." ⁴⁰ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ Yet for all their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering, and he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate in their presence.

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, ⁴⁶ and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day ⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised, so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

A TIME OF REFLECTION:

Witnesses

Luke 24:36-48

How often have we heard the words, “If you see something say something, say something? What comes to mind when you hear those words? When you go to the movies anymore, they ask you to be aware of your surroundings and if you see something suspicious, say something. These words usually have a negative connotation. But, does it have to be that way? What if we use those same words for the good? How powerful might that be in today’s world?

The words that jumped out at me today from Luke’s version of the resurrected Christ are “You are witnesses...”. Witnessing happens in a variety of ways, in what we say, in what we don’t say, how we speak, what we do, and what we don’t do are all ways of witnessing in both positive and negative ways. Whether we like it or not, our actions and words are a form of witness. When I officiated the funeral service for Maxx’s husband David, before the service I noticed a gentleman sitting by himself during the visitation so I went up to him and inquired how he knew David and Maxx. He shared how they welcomed him when he was in need, treated him with respect and provided for his needs both physically and spiritually. He told me that Maxx and Dave not only spoke of their faith, but they lived their faith. Not only did Maxx and Dave witness the saving grace of God in both word and deed for the whole person to this man, but he in turn witnessed to me in the sharing of that story.

Witnessing our faith is easy when we know we are speaking to someone who has similar beliefs, but can be more challenging when we are unsure what a person believes. But let me try to help us move beyond that trepidation. Think about it. We witness to things that matter to us all the time. We bear witness to the great movies or television programs we’ve seen and want others to enjoy. We bear witness to the accomplishments (or failures) of our sports teams. We bear witness to the important events in our family or work lives. Take a moment to think about some of the most recent events you shared with another, in other words witnessed to another. I bet many of you spoke of the women’s NCAA championship game. Though the Hawkeyes lost that game, I bet many of you celebrated and witnessed to others the accomplishments of that team over the last two years. Just pause for a moment and think about the variety of things you witness to others that are important to you that brings you joy. I bet you never really thought of it as witnessing, but it is. Anyone want to share an example of things you have shared with others recently?

On Good Friday, our family celebrated the addition of a new great nephew which I shared as a joy in our time of prayer on Easter. Just yesterday I received the news of my great nephew and his girlfriend, now fiancé getting engaged. Sharing our faith can be just as easy.

Witnessing does not mean shoving our faith down someone’s throat or threatening them with eternal hellfire if they don’t believe like we do. It’s simply telling others where we sensed God at work — at home or work, at church or school, through a stranger or a friend, a doctor or teacher or neighbor, even through ourselves. Bearing witness is nothing more than saying where you think God is at work in your life and the world. We bear witness all the time; we’re just not used to thinking about doing it in terms of our faith.

Once again, I am going to pause for a moment and ask you to think about where you saw/experienced God recently. What were some of those experiences? (Let others share)For me,

- Donation of hats – Where I have been practicing the ministry of presence, one individual in the group every year knits hats for every second grade student in the school where her daughter is a second grade teacher. This provides warmth for the children and doesn’t single anyone out as being more in need than another, treating them all of equal importance.

- Sarah – in her Good Friday Message to volunteers at Stonehill.
 - Recognizing God’s presence with her in the writing of that message
 - Realizing that message was meant to be shared with more than just volunteers
 - In my hearing that message realizing it still needed to be shared wider, got her permission to share it with the church email list, in the weekly reflection letters I send out to the homebound members and to share on website and Facebook pages.
- I very recently saw God at work in this Congregation – when I shared with you of a woman who lost everything in leaving an abusive relationship, you brought in some simple everyday items needed to furnish a new place of dwelling, helping her to get a fresh start.
- God was also at work in the landlord as the landlord was willing to allow her to put a downpayment on the rent and pay the remainder when her disability check came in and not charge a late fee.
- We witnessed God’s presence last Sunday through the arms of a child who wandered through the pews offering hugs to all as a way of sharing God’s peace with us all.

In our witnessing, some will come to believe, some will have their faith strengthened, and others may not believe and that is okay. We are not in control of the outcome, but we are in control of answering God’s call to be witnesses, the planting and nurturing of seeds of faith where we see God at work and know that what happens after that is between God and each individual.

God of all creation, it is so easy for us to share things that bring us joy with others, but we have been taught that religion and politics are conversations that are not to be had in order to avoid conflict. Help us break that model and share where we see and experience you in our lives in both the good and trying times and through both our words and our actions; thus being instruments of your saving grace in this world. May it be so!

A TIME OF PRAYER - LIFTING UP PRAYER REQUESTS - THE LORD’S PRAYER

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

PRAYER OF DEDICATION: ΑΩ*

*L: God of the Resurrection, we dedicate these gifts to you
and ask that you bless them and multiply them.*

A: May these gifts of blessing be a sign of the love, light, and glory of our redeeming God who has created a world of abundance with all that we need. May we remain thankful witnesses to your generosity, O God, as we dedicate these offerings to you and your beloved creation.

SUMM-IT UP:

SENDING HYMN: #249 v. 1 “Peace I Leave with You, My Friends”

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CHARGE & BENEDICTION: AΩ*

Friends, we are witnesses to God's love and light. God's peace is seen in the dawning of each new day. God's equal justice bears witness in the interconnected universe which the Almighty has created. As you depart from this gathering feel the warmth of Immanuel's loving light, even in the cooler moments of life. Having been fed and nourished by the presence of the Living God, let us go back into the world renewed as instruments of God's loving peace and justice for all. May it be so.

As you embrace both the joys and costs of discipleship,
May the Lord bless and keep you.

May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.

May the Lord look upon you kindly and grant you the peace God alone can give.

POSTLUDE: "Let There be Peace on Earth"

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