

Home Church Package – February 7, 2021

Materials prepared/curated by Rev. Jenn Swanson

We are completing the series Wholehearted: Guideposts for Faithful Living this week. If you didn't see the other parts of the series in the fall or if you aren't reading the book, don't worry, each worship experience stands on its own.

This week we will explore Cultivating Laughter, Song and Dance from the book **"The Gifts of Imperfection: Your Guide to a Wholehearted Life"** by Brené Brown...so put your dancing shoes on!

By combining the stories of our faith and insights from Brené Brown's book we deepen our relationship with God, others and ourselves to bring healing to the world.

This and all of the guideposts are founded on the groundwork of connection, compassion, courage, creativity, and belonging. All of these are so central to faithful living as Jesus' disciples.

Welcome to his Worship in the Season of Epiphany, a time of living in the Light and understanding more clearly.

Threshold Moment

We gather together now...taking a breath in and exhaling...letting go, for now, of chaos and the clutter...things that distract us from the quiet centre...where God meets us.

There is a space for the calm and deep joy ...setting aside striving, planning, and anxious thoughts...making room to hear the still small voice.

We enter this time of worship and prayer...breathing in the gentle rest of God. Know that the Holy One meets you right where you are...the companionship of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit are alive and at work in and around us this day...in this time.

Opening Prayer

by Philip Newell, Celtic Benediction (page 76)

For rest and wakefulness
stillness and creativity
reflection and action
thanks be you, O God.
Let me know in my own soul and body
the rhythms of creativity
that you have established.
Let me know in my family and friendships
the disciplines of withdrawal
and the call to engagement.
Let me know for my world
the cycles of renewal given by you
for healing and health
the pattern of the seasons
given by you for the birth of new life. Amen.

Scripture Readings (from NRSV)

Acts 16:16-34

One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

Reflection

by Rev Jennifer Swanson

At first, these two readings seem to be disparate, but the more I thought about them today, the more I realized that they work quite well together. In the Acts reading, we have the adventures of Paul and Silas, full of action and high drama while the Ecclesiastes reading seems more like a philosophical explanation of how life is.

It was in the closer reading of the first that I saw the very clear connection.

After the slave girl came to Paul and Silas (after annoying them for a few days) they healed her, mostly to get her to leave them alone, but nonetheless, it was “a time to heal”. This possibly not so altruistic act made her owners furious because of course now that the spirit had left the girl, she could no longer tell fortunes for them and they lost their source of exploitation and income. These despicable men then retaliated against Paul and Silas and a fight ensued, so “a time to throw stones” and “a time for war” and, as a result, Paul and Silas landed in jail. What happened next? They prayed and sang hymns to God while all the other prisoners listened and despite their predicament, their faith and their loyalty to Jesus Christ was in no way deterred.

And then came the earthquake (again, what an adventure!) and all the cells unlocked and the chains fell away and the prisoners were set free and the distraught jailer was about to punish himself for this unfortunate circumstance when Paul stopped him and said “ummm...don’t hurt yourself...we are all still here” (which is rather funny...I can picture this somehow) and so it was “a time to speak”, and thus Paul saved the jailer from killing himself out of guilt.

Paul and Silas subsequently ministered to the jailer and went to his home and baptized him and his entire family into the family of Christ which was certainly “a time to love”, and no doubt, also “a time to laugh” and “a time to dance” and “a time to embrace” because Paul and Silas had much bigger motivations than to blame and shame: they were motivated by the Love of Christ.

And so I wonder...in this time of waiting and getting annoyed or short with each other and being stuck in the house and the incessant rain and the fear about vaccine supply and worrying about how long this pandemic is going to last....I wonder what our bigger vision is? How can we find ways to focus, not on the suffering and discomfort of this particular season, but on what we are doing this all for? On what this life full of seasons that we live means? On where the light shines through in all of it? And once we have that figured out, perhaps like Paul and Silas and the jailer and his whole family, we can find time to rejoice.

May it be so.

Amen.

Closing Prayer

Who lit the stars and coloured the grass green.

Who dressed the peacock in feathered splendour, and wove the patterns of the snowflakes...
As we climb up and out of our acorn shells, rooted beneath in you and moving and growing and stretching out beyond that which seems to have confined us,
Help us to realize that with YOU, everything is possible.
Help us to remember our collective potential
As we seek to do your work in this very small and vast corner of your amazing world.

Today we pray especially for those experiencing loss...loss of loved ones, loss of connection, loss of health and agility of mind or body, loss of community, loss of energy or enthusiasm. We ask that you spark our hearts and theirs with even tiny moments of joy and beauty as we all struggle to live with new realities.

We hold tenderly our sisters and brothers of Lax Kw'alaams Grace United Church near Prince Rupert in the loss of their beautiful church to a fire last Saturday. May the congregation and the community know our hearts break along with them in the magnitude of this loss.

We pray also today for those whose names are in our hearts and minds... and while we name the people and situations we pray for...out loud or silently...Holy One we believe you already know...and in that knowing, you wrap each one in your healing light and in your ever present Love.

In the name of the One who came to us as Love, we pray. Amen.

Commissioning and Blessing

This day and every day grant to me light.
This day and every day grant to me peace.
This day and every day grant to me rest.
This day and every day grant to me grace.
This day and every day grant to me joy.
Amen.