

WHITEHORSE UNITED CHURCH
WORSHIP SERVICE – SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2020

ANNOUNCEMENTS BEFORE WE GO ON LINE

I'm not going to make a big fuss on line about being here in person; I want those who are joining us on line to feel that they too are part of the congregation and that this isn't the "real" congregation

I'll take my mask off for leading the service, put it back on for singing

Others please remain masked.

Thanks to the hard work that made this possible: Sheila, Joan, Jennifer, Agnes, others I probably don't know about.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AFTER WE GO ON LINE

We're gathering as usual on a Sunday morning – many of us at home, some of us here in the sanctuary. This is a two week trial to see what the logistics are like. You can still sign up for next Sunday. Call or email the office.

We'll evaluate it after those two weeks and make a plan.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Read the last part of the text here

Welcome!

Welcome to you who are here in person, by that I mean your physical person - and welcome to those of you who are here in person, but on line.

We're one body, we're one family, near or far away, there's no "real" and "unreal" ways to worship, you know?

face to face physically

or face to face in the presence of God – through the miracle of this on line possibility and gift.

In the mystery of things God has brought us into being

brought us into each others' lives

brought us to this moment. And thank God, because....it might have been otherwise.

So much is unclear. So much has changed

And God, our Creator, in whom we live and move and have our being

God is among us

assuring us, and challenging us as week

And we enter this space together

seeking the face of the God we worship, and sometimes doubt; sometimes ignore; sometimes betray yet longing for...

As we do that, we want – this.

We want to be with God, with God's people...we want meaning, and purpose, and the promise that this moment isn't all there is.

We're seeking.

Seeking the face of God, the faces of God

in a world that is presently baffling, and more than a little frightening.

Seeking the face and faces of God.

I call you now to this seeking place where you're not alone

To bring your doubts and your fears

together with a daring, unexplainable, chosen trust.

You may have stretched the bandwidth of your comfort zone to be here today,

The Holy One among us invites you to stretch your soul; to admit to the possibility of hope

to stretch your imagination and return to your hearts' deepest knowing

From our place in the cleft of the rock

We dare to peek out and risk - who knows what we might discover in the afterglow of glory

There just might be a shining future - a morning that is just breaking....

SING MORNING HAS BROKEN

CALL TO CONFESSION

Confession can be a doorway to love. And so let's confess. And let's weep. For what we have lost, for what is broken, for our own complicity in the breaking.

Let's confess because we know better. We humans know we are better than our present behaviour would reflect, and the world is made for more glorious life than we've allowed. We know that. And that knowing (even if we don't pay attention to it most of the time) in itself is hopeful, and so we can confess.

We know that the world, which seems at a breaking point, is more than our casual selfishness and thoughtless consumption. More than this moment's whims and more than our immediate needs.

Our need for God's mercy, God's glory, God's abiding presence – our need is thick.

Let's confess, so that we can love the world back to wholeness again.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God, you are the rock.

You are the cleft in the rock.

You put us in that cleft; the cleft of your presence, so that we can see clearly and from a different perspective. From behind, we see what we have done, we can see you not only in the wake of your glory but in the wake of our own actions.

We can see – in the fringes, in the shadow

where the light is not so bright that it blinds us

but rather, from behind,
where the light is partial and slanted and
where we can risk telling the truth of our lives,
safe, in the shadow, safe, trusting that we will
not be burned.

In the direct light that reveals to us our sinfulness
We couldn't bear to come face to face with our own built-in fear and violence
The shameful behaviour that we have directed against one another, against ourselves, and against you
sometimes in the cleft we have no words
we cry, or simply sigh in your direction

Our strange hunger for ease and convenience should not mean the death sentence for the rest of
creation.

We confess our complicity.

Hear our silent prayer.

(silence)

For what we have done and said and thought that breaks faith with you and one another

We ask forgiveness, gracious God.

Speak to us again of Glory. Speak to us of love and a world made new

Forgive us and come with us as we turn and walk toward the truth.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Moses pleads, bargains, pushes God to forgive the people. Moses stands in the breach between God's
brokenheartedness at the casual way the people have forsaken everything that's right and true. Moses
stands in the breach and says....it's not about them, God - it's about You. Remember your promise,
remember your love, don't abandon us. If you don't come with us, all of us, ...

Moses makes a bet on the future. Bets himself and his people on the faithfulness of God; that mercy
will triumph in the end, and that the nature of the Holy one is - finally - compassion and

And God is moved, and changed. Not unresponsive to Moses, not unmoved and unreachable, but
present and listening and against all evidence to the contrary, ready to give the people yet another
chance.

What is this but a call? The grace God offers calls from us - from the depths of us, - response. To bet
our own lives on the faithfulness of God, on a conviction that the Covenant will stand; that God and
God's creation are meant to be together and meant for something better than what we see before us
now. A call to say - I'm all in. "All in" as "exhausted" yes. AND "all in" as "I bet my life and I commit my
being to this vision"

The covenant stands. The presence of God will come with us. This is GOOD NEWS. So let's sing our
joyful response.

SERMON

It was so strange to know that today would be the day when some of us would be worshipping here in person for the first time since March – face to face -
and to have the given text
this appeal from Moses to God – let me see your glory. Let me see you face to face.

Little did we know that our own faces would be masked
and that in a sense, so would God's.

This text is dense. Brimming with imagery, leaking both glory and questions and makes you shake your head and say "what WAS that that just passed by?"

I want to highlight two things about it this morning:

First:

It's old. You can tell. Really, really old. It smells old, like desert sand and foreign spices and it smells of ancient wisdom and also ancient strangeness.

It comes from a time and from an author whose world view could accommodate speaking of the Holy one in this most familiar way;

Did you notice that? Here, God is understood as very human like...

Here, God not only leads the people and frees them and gives lavishly
but also sulks and threatens and has changes of mind.....

who is so angry with the people for that episode with the golden calf

so angry with the people who had just been freed, and fed, and formed, by a gracious gift of a law...

those same people,

right after

took silver, and gold and made ...well it was a bull, a calf, but soon enough it would have been coins
and crowns and swords, that unholy trinity to which humans have been enslaved for thousands of
years....

God is so angry, so disappointed,

that God says

just leave me alone – Just leave me alone or I'm going to do something I'll regret.

Then

after Moses intercedes.... please don't do that – remember your promise and besides what are the
neighbours going to say?

Ok ok I'll send my angel with you -

but I'm not going

nevertheless Moses persists...

and then finally – God gives in and says

Ok I'll go.

It's a strange depiction of the Holy don't you think?
Strange, butnot so far out of our range of experience.
It comes from a people who have had long had a relationship with the Holy One.

These are not unsophisticated people, unaware of the complexity and mystery of God.

Not at all.

They are VERY sophisticated people, who know – better than we do often - what poetry is, how a metaphor works, and they know too.... know how to live with paradox.

So for example, if you are put off by this picture of God, "anthropomorphism" is the geeky word, it means God who looks and behaves like humans do

if you're put off by that, well just read on.

Or read back.

So far in this book God has appeared in a burning bush, saying "I am who I am"

God has appeared in thunder and said "I'm the one who brought you out of Egypt"

God has said "I brought them out of Egypt **so that** I might live among them"

God is present in a fire - and a cloud - and in silence

and if you can't abide any of that, then read on

because at the end of this passage

it turns out that God is so holy

so holy

that no one can see God directly -

in fact the faith of our siblings in Judaism says that God is so holy that they don't even speak the holy name.

The people of this book – they know paradox. They know how to hold all those things at once.

and not try to apply to these poetic stories

a linear logic that would dissect and eviscerate them.

God is holy and beyond words and beyond sight

AND

God is holy and close and personal and responsive.

That's not so hard to grasp.

We need to use words

and our words are of course inadequate and kind of limp next to the splendor of the Mystery that

Moves the sun and the stars...

but they are what we have

and moulding them into a story

seeing the backside of the Creator from a cleft in a rock

is our imperfect, unspeakable privilege and sacred task.

The second thing, is shorter, and perhaps more immediate
Moses says to God- he won't give up – he says:
please, please come with us.
Whatever else we need now, we could do without it all but we can't do without you.
We can adapt,
And heaven knows we've all had to adapt a lot in these last months...
But we can do that.

We can have meaningful, difficult and rich conversations about where we are as a church right now.
We can discern what we need to give up here in this wilderness, and what we need to keep to take us forward.

We can let go of lots of things. Anyone who has lived any length of time at all knows how to do that.
We can do that - give up so much that is superfluous in a changing world
but we cannot, cannot live without God.
Moses won't leave it alone. An angel isn't going to cut it. God's presence with only him isn't enough.
Come with us. He says. Come with us or it's all been for nothing.

In any crisis there is always someone who appears selling certainty.
There IS no certainty. It sells. It gets people elected. It makes people feel better but it's not true. There is no certainty. Never has been. But you know that.
We've been here before – here, where everything is changing.
We know this place. We know that there is no certainty
only this:
God is.
God is.
We have no final word on who God is, we only know we need God's presence. And sometimes God's absence.
With Moses we know our need. And with Moses we persist. We pray, we rage, we plead, we sink our travelling sticks into the sandy soil and wait...
But we know that God's presence with us – and with Moses I mean ALL OF US
is the one thing we cannot live without

and so here we sit
in the cleft of a rock, sort ofbetween a rock and a hard place literally
and we wait.
What's going to happen in the future? Not a clue.
We don't get to see that.
But - even now, God's glory is passing by
We glimpse the afterglow
Get a whiff of holiness,
Hear a holy rustling

We know the one thing that is needful
The only thing that matters
that God is with us, will come with us

Immanuel

The covenant stands – we are God’s people – God is with us. We are not alone
Thanks be to God.

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

In our passage today God says to Moses – “My presence will go, and I will give you rest”
That “you” is a singular word. Moses will have rest, God says.
And we crave rest; we long for that assurance of God’s presence
but Moses? Moses won’t let it go
because he knows that we have no rest at all, not really
until everyone has rest.
He won’t accept it. He pushes God -
Come with US. He says. All of us

Moses moves back into the truth of what God calls us to: a community, a people, a family fit for service
in the world.
And if we’re ever going to see the face of God it’s going to be in community – the community of all
living things.
And so, with the book of Numbers, I leave you all with this blessing

May God bless you and keep you
may God’s face shine upon you
and be gracious to you
May our God lift up holy countenance upon you
and give you peace.