

Sunday, March 22, 2020
Fourth Sunday of Lent

If this were 11:00 on a Sunday morning, the Shawnee Presbyterian choir would be assembled up front, except for one or two choir members still conversing with friends in the pews. Brian would ring the steeple bell, Olivia would conclude the piano prelude, and our worship would begin. For these next few Sundays it will be different—far from what we are used to or what we might prefer. Our sense of community is compromised. But this time will help us stay connected, and centered in Jesus Christ, who is the heart and center of all we do and who we are. So...settle in for a brief time of worship, and thanks for your patience. Earlier you received Session Clerk Barb Dickinson's list of various worship options you might visit. This is a unique period of time for all, and we are learning to adapt. For now, welcome to worship of March 22, 2020.

Our Call to Worship is from Psalm 63: *O God, you are my God. I seek you, my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live. I will lift up my hands and call upon your name.*

The Unison Prayer of Confession, as printed in our bulletin: **Holy Jesus, renewer of life, we know there are times when our doubt and impatience and lack of imagination outweigh our trust in you. For this we ask your forgiveness. Set us free, O Lord, from a past we cannot change; open us to a future in which we can be changed, and give us grace to grow more in your image and likeness; this we ask in our sacred and holy name...***(time for silent prayer and reflection)*

Words of Assurance are from Psalm 91: Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent... Those who love me I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them: I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue them and honor them. With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.

Friends, know this truth: In Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, tis' now and ever shall be: world without end. Amen. Amen.

I do miss hearing our choir and singing hymns together. The hymns planned for this morning are: *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*, and *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. For any youth listening in or reading this, I pray you are doing better than okay. You are such a vital part of this church family, and our worship is one way of expressing our adoration for and dependence upon the Lord.

The message I was preparing for today is from the Gospel of John, chapter 11—the raising of Lazarus from the dead. I will save that message for another time, mainly because it would take up about five pages, and I lack the wisdom to turn it into a shorter message. I do encourage you to read the 11th chapter of John later today, and marvel over how Jesus still calls us from death and despair into life and hope.

Instead, a brief meditation from Psalm 91. **Please take your Bible and read it now.** Then, these thoughts: Know that we are sheltered in the shadow of the Almighty. In difficult moments it may be

hard to see the shadow of God protecting us. We cherish knowing that God never leaves us, and no matter what this day or this week holds, when we call upon the Lord, God hears. When we are in trouble, God is there. May you abide in God's love always. Our prayer: Almighty God, our refuge and our fortress, shelter us in your shadow. Help us to know your presence always, and your love that never fails. Amen.

A book that Mary and I have been using for Lenten devotions is Ash and Starlight. (Prayers for the Chaos and Grace of Daily Life), by Arianne Braithwaite Lehn. Her prayer, "When I'm In Life's Winter," is based upon Psalm 91 and other scriptures:

Enveloping God. You gather me in when the wind of anxiety and fear whips, when I feel my face, my heart, tighten against the cold's force. With wide, warm arms, you bring me into your heart where my angst melts by the fire of your love. And, it is there, as I rest and thaw, that you remind me... Remind me of the unbelievable power in perseverance, the choice to open my eyes each morning and say, *Yes, I will keep going. I will find grace here. I will live from courage instead of fear. I will dwell in the One Who dwells in me.* As my fears melt, dripping to my feet, you let my real self come through... A self you love so much... My path toward reclamation comes through acceptance, through affirming I will be gentle and forgiving toward myself because that's how you are with me. I will lean with all my weight into your warmth... My solace and strength in life's winter. Amen.

Benediction: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Now and always. Amen.

We would likely not be joining hands today, but would united our voice to sing: *God is so good. God answers prayers. God is so good...to me and to you, to us all. Amen.*