

Week 7. Sunday, March 17, 2024

Holy Moments – Unity

Psalm 133

¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in **unity!**
² It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.
³ It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

This week, we will look for Holy Moments.

This is what Pastor Bruce told me. *"A Holy Moment is a moment where differences fade into the background and are swallowed up by hope and unity in God's love. Through prayer and intimacy with God, our empathy towards others will grow. As we strengthen the bond of trust with our Lord, we will forge new levels of intimacy in our relationships – even difficult one."*

As Christians, we are called to live in unity.

Ephesians 4:1-3 *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the **unity** of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Unity can be difficult. We have been raised in a world that prizes individuality. Uniqueness. Yet when we look at successful endeavors, they are the result of unity. Cooperation.

Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved. [Mattie Stepanek](#)

Today: Look for a Holy Moment of Unity, where differences fade.

Week 7. Monday, March 18, 2024

Holy Moments – Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.*

God comforts us in our trials. Our unity with Him means we have Him always with us. But what do we do with the comfort He gives? Do we sit in it like an overstuffed armchair, happy and content in the life He has given? Or do we share it?

Cure sometimes, treat often, comfort always. **Hippocrates**

Too often, when we see someone in need, we don't know what to do. We want to fix the problem. So we search for answers; we start to "do" something. But is that what the person needs? Or is what we need to do to feel good about ourselves?

Maybe we need a Thoughtful Spot, like Winnie the Pooh and Piglet have.

HALF-WAY between Pooh's house and Piglet's house was a Thoughtful Spot where they met sometimes when they had decided to go and see each other, and as it was warm and out of the wind they would sit down there for a little and wonder what they would do now that they had seen each other. **A. A. Milne**

Instead of taking charge, we may need to take a moment to sit, listen, and comfort. I'm not saying we shouldn't do something. But maybe "doing" shouldn't be our first response. Maybe Listening, Being, Comforting come first. But then, don't be afraid to leave your own comfort zone to help someone else.

Life begins at the end of your comfort zone. **Neale Donald Walsch**

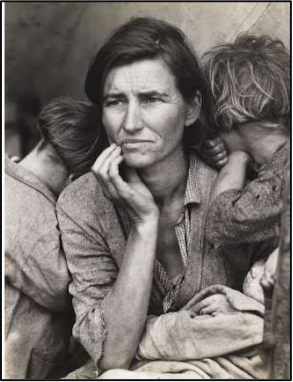
Today: Look for a Holy Moment in which you can offer Comfort to someone in need.

Week 7. Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Holy Moments – Trust

Psalm 13:5 *But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

To be trusted is a greater compliment than being loved. George MacDonald



Dorothea Lange was an American photojournalist who took photographs of sharecroppers, displaced farmers, and migrant workers during the Great Depression. We have all seen her iconic black and white faces, such as *Migrant Mother*, taken in 1936. How was she able to take such stunning, honest portraits? People trusted her. She was empathetic.

As Christians, we should be trustworthy. If someone is in need, they should be able to reach out to us for help without worrying that they will be treated badly, judged, or condemned.

Likewise, we should trust others. We should respond with open, loving hearts. Not with suspicion or superiority. We are God's representatives here on earth. We are His people. His children. When people see us, they should see Him. We should be as trustworthy as He is.

Psalm 22:5. *To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*

We need to be consistent. Once you invite God into your life, you are changed forever. Once you choose to act as He would have you act – empathetic, loving, open – you can't go back.

Trust is built with consistency. Lincoln Chafee

Today: Commit to living a trustworthy life. Live so that anyone who reaches out to you will see the hand of God reaching back.

Week 7. Wednesday, March 20, 2024

Holy Moments – Hope

Psalm 9:18

*But God will never forget the needy;
the hope of the afflicted will never perish.*

Romans 5:3-5

³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Hope by Emily Dickenson

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all.*

Hope is central to the human condition. We all have hope for something. Maybe it is a blessing for our children. Or ourself. Or a dear friend. Hope works in many ways. We can hope for something to happen, or for something to not happen. Right now, if you think about it, you are hoping.

Hope can be a bridge between people, as Romans 5:5 so eloquently tells us. God's love poured into us brings Hope to others. We are His vessel, bringing His hope to the afflicted. To the poor. To the struggling.

But Hope is not just a feeling. An emotion. Hope is action.

Everything that is done in the world is done by hope. Martin Luther

A Holy Moment of Hope can be joining with other hearts to hope, to pray. For salvation. For safety. For peace in our world.

Today: Find a way for your Holy Moment of Hope to become action.

Week 7. Thursday, March 21, 2024

Holy Moments – Prayer

Matthew 6:9-13 ⁹ “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.
¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”

*To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing. **Martin Luther***

Christians are called to pray. But what does that mean? Too often, prayer becomes a list of “I want...” We don’t just pray for what we want for ourselves. We pray for others. But too often, prayer is a one way conversation.

*True prayer is neither a mere mental exercise nor a vocal performance. It is far deeper than that - it is spiritual transaction with the Creator of Heaven and Earth. **Charles Spurgeon***

Prayer is a privilege! The Creator of Everything invites us to have a conversation with Him. He listens to us. But do we listen to Him? Is our prayer a telephone, where we speak and listen? Or is it a telegraph – we send a message and hope He gets it?

*Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays. **Soren Kierkegaard***

Today: Let prayer change you. Open your heart to God and let Him pour His love, His peace into you so you may be drawn closer to others as you seek to do His will in the world.

Week 7. Friday, March 22, 2024

Holy Moments – Intimacy with God

Job 29:4-5

⁴ Oh, for the days when I was in my prime,
when God’s **intimate** friendship blessed my house,
⁵ when the Almighty was still with me
and my children were around me,

*Mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an **intimate** sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us. The important thing is not to think much but to love much and so do that which best stirs you to love. **Saint Teresa of Avila***

*Be polite to all, but **intimate** with few. **Thomas Jefferson***

I think Jefferson is right. We should have very few intimate friends. People who know us deeply - our faults, our fears, our joys, our loves, our failures. I can think of two people I’d put on that list – my husband and a friend who has known me for over 50 years. I have many other friends, but do I let them know me intimately? Honestly, no.

God knows me intimately, but is it because of who He is, or because I willingly open myself to Him? How honest are we with God? We know we can’t hide anything, but that’s not the same.

*I hope I'm growing as a person of faith, as a Christian. That should be our number one objective this journey of life. That all starts with a personal **intimate** relationship with Christ and then being in prayer every single day about all of those things - being tenacious about it. **J. C. Watts***

Honest intimacy with God, with Christ, will help us to be honest, and more intimate, in our earthly relationships.

Today: Think about a relationship you have that could improve, and ask God to help you, guide you, as you open yourself.

Week 7. Saturday, March 23, 2024

Holy Moments – Empathy

Ephesians 5:1-2 (Amplified Bible) *Therefore become imitators of God [copy Him and follow His example], as well-beloved children [imitate their father];² and walk continually in love [that is, value one another—practice **empathy** and compassion, unselfishly seeking the best for others], just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God [slain for you, so that it became] a sweet fragrance.*

II Cor 1:3-4 (NIV) ³ *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of **compassion** and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who **comforts** us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God*

Empathy: *The ability to emotionally understand and share what other people feel, see things from their point of view, and imagine yourself in their place.*

Empathy is about finding echoes of another person in yourself.

Mohsin Hamid

Empathy. Compassion. Understanding. Sympathy. Comfort.

The word Empathy does not appear in any of the translations of the Bible I checked, though the Amplified Bible uses it in an explanation. Yet empathy is core to the Christian experience.

Jesus did more than understand and share our feelings. He lived a human life. He didn't have to imagine himself in our place, He walked in it! As followers of Christ, we can do no less than try to understand and share what other people are feeling and living. Our Holy Moments with God allow difference to fade and empathy to grow.

Today: Ask God to give you Empathy for others so that you may walk in their shoes, feeling their hurts and joys, as differences fade away.

Week 8. Sunday, March 24, 2024

People of a Second Chance - Hosanna!

John 12:12-13 ¹² *The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,*

“Hosanna!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!” (Ps 118:25-26)

I love Palm Sunday! Growing up, each child at church would get a palm frond. In choir, we'd process, waving the palms and singing

*Hosanna, loud hosanna, The little children sang;
Through pillared court and temple The joyful anthem rang;
To Jesus, who had blessed them Close folded to His breast,
The children sang their praises, The simplest and the best.⁹*

During the service, we sang a traditional Moravian antiphonal *Hosanna* by Christian Gregor (1765) – the Junior choir in one balcony, the Junior High choir in the other.

Hosanna! Blessed is He that comes! (answer)

Hosanna! (answer)

Hosanna! (answer)

Blessed is He that comes! (answer)

He that comes in the name of the Lord (answer)

I can still sing it. When we sang, it felt like we were there! Can you imagine the excitement? Why was the crowd there? They wanted to see Jesus, and Lazarus, who he had raised from the dead. Were they coming to see the Messiah? Not yet. They were talking about Lazarus, but even the disciples didn't understand who he was until after He was glorified (John 12:16).

But we know! When we sing Hosanna we are singing the true meaning – Save us! And He has. We have a second chance!

Today: Sing Hosanna to the Lord! Praise Him for saving us!

⁹ © 1990 Westminster/John Knox Press

Week 8. Monday, March 25, 2024

People of a Second Chance - Who are you?

Acts 9:5 *“Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied.*

John 21:12 *Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.*

According to a word search, the question “Who are you?” is asked 20 times in the Bible, but only Saul asks Jesus directly. In the Old Testament Prophets are asked. Ruth is asked. John the Baptist is asked. But Jesus’ critics didn’t have the courage to ask him directly. The disciples knew without asking.

Who are you? We have so many roles to play that it may be difficult to answer the question. I am Sally, wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, singer, baker, actress, director, crafter, reader, writer, and the list goes on. But does the list answer the question? Those are roles I play, but is that who I am?

Who I am is a sinner given a second chance. A redeemed child of God. He redeemed my life, my past, my future, my present.

God has given me a second chance and I'm not going to waste it.
Manny Ramirez

A second chance is a new start. It’s a way to live life differently. That’s what Jesus did for us. He gave us – He gave me – a way to live my life differently. To live my life with Him guiding me. Not the world. Not me. Jesus. He gave me a new identity as a Child of God.

Does that mean I won’t make mistakes? Absolutely not. But I hope I don’t make the same mistakes.

I am a child of God.

Today: You are a Child of God. Say it out loud. Say it to the world. Say it to yourself. Breathe it into your soul. Believe it.

Week 8. Tuesday, March 26, 2024

People of a Second Chance - New Identity

2 Corinthians 5:17 ¹⁷ *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

We’ve probably all heard of Nellie Bly, one of the very first female reporters who rose to fame by writing an expose after having herself committed to the Insane Asylum on Blackwell’s Island. Born as Elizabeth Cochran, she was one of 15 children. She dropped out of school due to lack of funds, but her response to a newspaper article, “What Girls are Good For” launched her career. And her new identity. But there was a cost. She traveled the world for stories and found, *“It is only after one is in trouble that one realizes how little sympathy and kindness there are in the world.”*

We are given our new identity, but the cost isn’t ours to pay. The cost for our new life was paid by Christ. The old is gone! You are not the person you were. Jesus has made you new. When he looks at you, he doesn’t see the old person. Only the new.

How about you? When you look at you, what do you see?

Anyone who's looked into a newborn's innocent eyes should realize how incredible it is to be blessed with a new life. **John Kennedy**

You have been blessed with a new life. See it! Look at yourself through the eyes of Jesus. He sees you as you are, not as you were. He sees you as his bride. He sees you as a person worth dying for. Worth sacrificing for. Is that what you see? Or are you ready to tell Him that He is wrong. That is not who you are.

The Gospel offers forgiveness for the past, new life for the present, and hope for the future. **John Sentamu**

You have been forgiven and have a new life in Christ. He didn’t die for everyone except you. He died for you. Believe and be thankful.

Today: Look at yourself through the eyes of Jesus, and thank him for the gift of your new life.

Week 8. Wednesday, March 27, 2024

People of a Second Chance - Pursue God

I Timothy 6:11-12 ¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and **pursue** righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

*Pursue some path, however narrow and crooked, in which you can walk with love and reverence. **Henry David Thoreau***

What are you pursuing? What are you striving for? Success? Wealth? Health? Love? God?

I never thought about pursuing God. I thought God pursues us. He reaches into the far corners of the earth to rescue a lost soul. He gives us our second chance. Why should I need to pursue Him?

We were taught to pursue dreams, goals, careers, people. But not God. Why not? What is more important to pursue? What is more important than God? Nothing.

*That part of Christ's nature which was profoundly human helps us to understand him and love him and to **pursue** his Passion as though it were our own. If he had not within him this warm human element, he would never be able to touch our hearts with such assurance and tenderness; he would not be able to become a model for our lives. **Nikos Kazantzakis***

We should pursue God! We should run after Him with all our speed and energy. He is our goal. He is our prize. If there is a cost, it will be worth it.

*He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. **Jim Elliot***

Today: Pursue God! Direct your energies to a closer, constant relationship with your maker, your redeemer, your savior.

Week 8. Maundy Thursday, March 28, 2024

People of a Second Chance - The Presence of God

Deut. 12:7 There, **in the presence of the LORD your God**, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the LORD your God has blessed you.

Have you noticed how frequently the Old Testament writers wrote of things happening “in the presence of the Lord your God”? They took it for granted that God was with them.

Then, they rebelled. They prayed, sacrificed, and cried to the Lord, but He did not come. He allowed them to suffer consequences.

Then Jesus came. Through his sacrifice, we are again welcome to enter into the presence of God.

Maundy means “the ceremony of washing the feet of the poor.” This is one way Jesus served the disciples. **John 13:12-17.** ¹² When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. ¹³ “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

And then a very special meal. Do this in remembrance of me.

The rest of the evening is sadly familiar. Prayer. Sleep. Betrayal. Trial. Sentence. Jesus knew all this was coming, yet he started the evening by performing a servant’s part. He showed us we can enter the presence of God by serving.

As Brother Lawrence wrote in *The Practice of the Presence of God*. “You need not cry very loud: He is nearer to us than we think.”

Today: Be still and enter into the Presence of God.

Week 8. Good Friday, March 29, 2024

People of a Second Chance -

Mine was the transgression

John 19:15

But they shouted, "Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!"

When I was little, I asked why Good Friday was called "Good". It didn't feel like a good day to me. While some people like to say it's "good" because without the crucifixion we wouldn't have the resurrection, the truth is simpler. One of the Old English definitions of Good is Holy. So Good Friday is Holy Friday.

When I think of Good Friday, my mind is filled with quickly changing, chaotic images. I imagine it was something like this for the people involved. Nothing went as expected.

It all started Wednesday, when that woman anointed Jesus' feet after dinner. What a waste of money! But Jesus said to leave her alone. She was anointing his body for burial. What did that mean?

Thursday night we were preparing for our Passover meal, but Jesus washed our feet first. During dinner, he said that one of us would betray him, and then Judas left. But he carried the coins so he was probably going out to purchase something we needed.

After dinner, Jesus broke bread and said "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup and said "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." We drank, but we didn't understand.

Then Jesus told us "this very night you will all fall away on account of me." Peter said he never would, and Jesus told him tonight he would disown him three times." Peter declared he would not, and we all said the same.

When we entered the Garden, Jesus asked us to wait with him while he stepped away to pray. But we fell asleep. Jesus returned to us, saying "Couldn't you even keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." He

prayed again, and then a crowd arrived, led by Judas. He came to Jesus, kissed him, and everything went wrong. Peter drew his sword and Jesus told him to put it away. God could send legions of angels, but it must happen this way for scripture to be fulfilled. As they dragged him off to the Sanhedrin, we ran away. We didn't realize that the next 48 hours would change the world. But it felt like it was my fault.

O Sacred Head Now Wounded

O sacred head now wounded
With grief and shame weighed down
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns thine only crown
How pale Thou art with anguish
With sore abuse and scorn
How does that visage languish
Which once was bright as morn

What thou, my Lord, hast suffered
Was all for sinners' gain
Oh mine was the transgression
But thine the deadly pain
Lo, here I fall, my Savior
'Tis I deserve thy place
Look on me with thy favor
Vouchsafe to me thy grace

What language shall I borrow
To thank thee, dearest Friend
For this, thy dying sorrow
Thy pity without end?
Oh, make me thine forever
And should I fainting be
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love to thee

Attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux (1001-1153)

Translated into English by John Waddell Alexander (1804-1859)

Music by Hans Leo Hassler, 1601; Harmonies by Johann Sebastian Bach, 1729

Week 8. Saturday, March 30, 2024

People of a Second Chance - Sabbath

Exodus 20:8 Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

What a dark sabbath day that must have been.

For the women who stood at the cross and saw Jesus laid in a borrowed tomb, spices needed to be blended. They would insure Jesus' body was properly anointed on Sunday.

For the disciples, fear. With Jesus dead, what would be next? Would they be arrested? Killed? This wasn't what they expected. Jesus was not supposed to die. They were hiding. Mourning. Hurt. How could Judas do this? Then the news – Judas was dead.

Peter, James, and John were confused. They had seen Jesus on the mountain. Transfigured. Talking with Moses and Elijah. Then the voice from the cloud. "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" They expected something big to happen –not this. Not crucifixion.

For Caiaphas and the other priests, satisfaction. They took care of a situation. Talking about love and service and talking to God without going through the Priests! Miracles. Healings. Even raising people from the dead. He had to be stopped. It was easier than they thought it would be. But then they remembered something they had to take care of. **Matthew 27:62-64a** ⁶²The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ⁶³"Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' ⁶⁴So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day.

What about Jesus? I heard once that Hell can be defined as "the place where God is not." Out of all eternity in which God, Jesus and the Spirit are one, for three days Jesus descended to the place where God is not. How terrifyingly alone. For me. For you.

Today: What if the crucifixion was the end? No resurrection. How would you feel? What would your life be like?

Week 9. Easter Sunday, March 31, 2024

Don't put a period where God puts a comma.

Luke 24:1-6a *On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" ⁶He is not here; he has risen!*

Death is the end. We all know that. Someone is alive, and then they are not. Period. End of life.

Many of us have been with someone at the point of death or soon after. The light is gone. It's hard to explain, to describe, but once you've seen it you know.

Jesus' disciples, followers, family, and adversaries all thought they had seen that moment. The blood that flowed from his body accompanied their tears. Period. End of life. End of story. And yet,

God didn't put a period there. He put a comma. He had more to tell. It started with "He is not here; he has risen!"

What happened next changed the world.

Matt. 28:16-20 ¹⁶*Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Today: Therefore, go!

2024 Lenten Devotional

Written and prepared for members and friends of
Lapeer Free Methodist Church by Sally W. Eilersen, 2024

Resources used:

Biblegateway.com

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Most importantly, I thank God for all He has taught me as I read, prayed, and wrote. I pray that these writings will bring us all closer to God during this Lenten season. Sally W. Eilersen

Holiness



2024 Lenten Devotions
Lapeer Free Methodist Church