



First Presbyterian Church of New Philadelphia

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Rev. Joseph Svancara, Pastor

***Sunday Worship Service
August 17, 2025***

*All who are able, please stand.

Announcements & Prayer Concerns

Session will meet this Tuesday (August 19) at 7pm.

Bible Study will be this Wednesday (August 20) at 10am.

AA will meet this Wednesday (August 20) at 8pm.

Our Sunday Morning Study Group will be meeting next Sunday (August 24) at 9:15am.

We are currently reading through "The Practice of the Presence of God" by Brother Lawrence. See Rev. Joe if you want to join!

The Tables of Eight dinner group will be meeting on August 30 at 6pm. The cost is \$10 per person, and RSVP is required either to the church office or Carolyn Berry.

Opening Prayer

LORD, our Creator, you watch over and purposefully position us for what is right. Make us aware of what you train us to work toward, and listen too, so we may blossom in a manner which alerts creation to your salvation at work. **Amen.**

Prelude *Lord, Keep Us Steadfast* arr. Wilson

***Call to Worship (Psalm 82)**

God stands to charge the divine council assembled, giving judgment in the midst of the gods:

"How long will you judge unjustly, and show favor to the wicked?

Save the weak and the orphan; defend the humble and needy; rescue the weak and the poor; deliver them from the power of the wicked.

**They do not know, neither do they understand; they wander about in darkness;
all the foundations of the earth are shaken.**

Now I say to you, 'You are gods, and all of you children of the Most High; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince.'"

Arise, O God, and rule the earth, for you shall take all nations for your own.

Hymn #388 *O Jesus, I Have Promised

O Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
Be Thou forever near me,
My Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
If Thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If Thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel Thee near me!
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But Jesus, draw Thou nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear Thee speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self will;
O speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
Thou guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, Thou hast promised
To all who follow Thee
That where Thou art in glory
There shall Thy servant be;
And, Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
My Master and my friend.

***Prayer of Confession**

We claim what is right and beneficial for life, but end up relying too much on others and compromising our calling:

LORD, our Creator, your wisdom and knowledge are obvious in this world if we are willing to see and accept it. But we often rely too much on others to see you, rely too much on their worldview and understanding, and miss what you desire us to have. Help us to pay attention, to understand what we have surrendered too, that we may come back to what is truly life-giving. Amen.

***Silent Confessions and Prayers**

***Assurance of Forgiveness**

The might and power of the LORD, seen in the words and works of Jesus Christ, aid us in remembering what is better and what awaits us.

The LORD gives what the world cannot, and Jesus Christ reminds us what is better to trust in and go after.

Hymn #579 *Gloria Patri

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen. Amen.

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.**

Reading of the Scriptures

All Scripture lessons come from the Revised Common Lectionary. Prescribed lessons are underlined, with pastoral inserts to preserve the integrity of the passage.

Hear the Word of the Lord:

Jeremiah 23:9-40

23 ⁹ Concerning the prophets: My heart is crushed within me, all my bones shake; I have become like a drunkard, like one overcome by wine, because of the Lord and because of his holy words. ¹⁰ For the land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course has been evil, and their might is not right. ¹¹ Both prophet and priest are ungodly; even in my house I have found their wickedness, says the Lord. ¹² Therefore their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they shall be driven and fall; for I will bring disaster upon them in the year of their punishment, says the Lord. ¹³ In the prophets of Samaria I saw a disgusting thing: they prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray. ¹⁴ But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a more shocking thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from wickedness; all of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah. ¹⁵ Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets: "I am going to make them eat wormwood, and give them poisoned water to drink; for from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land." ¹⁶ Thus says the Lord of hosts: Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you; they are deluding you. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. ¹⁷ They keep saying to those who despise the word of the Lord, "It shall be well with you"; and to all who stubbornly follow their own stubborn hearts, they say, "No calamity shall come upon you." ¹⁸ For who has stood in the council of the Lord so as to see and to hear his word? Who has given heed to his word so as to proclaim it? ¹⁹ Look, the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. ²⁰ The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand it clearly. ²¹ I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. ²² But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. ²³ Am I a God near by, says the Lord, and not a God far off? ²⁴ Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. ²⁵ I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, "I have dreamed, I have dreamed!" ²⁶ How long? Will the hearts of the prophets ever turn back—those who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart? ²⁷ They plan to make my people forget my name by their dreams that they tell one another, just as their ancestors forgot my name for Baal. ²⁸ Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord. ²⁹ Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces? ³⁰ See, therefore, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who steal my words from one another. ³¹ See, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their own tongues and say, "Says the Lord." ³² See, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the Lord, and who tell them, and who lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or appoint them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the Lord. ³³ When this people, or a prophet, or a priest asks you, "What is the burden of the Lord?" you shall say to them, "You are the burden,

and I will cast you off, says the Lord.” ³⁴ And as for the prophet, priest, or the people who say, “The burden of the Lord,” I will punish them and their households. ³⁵ Thus shall you say to one another, among yourselves, “What has the Lord answered?” or “What has the Lord spoken?” ³⁶ But “the burden of the Lord” you shall mention no more, for the burden is everyone’s own word, and so you pervert the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, our God. ³⁷ Thus you shall ask the prophet, “What has the Lord answered you?” or “What has the Lord spoken?” ³⁸ But if you say, “the burden of the Lord,” thus says the Lord: Because you have said these words, “the burden of the Lord,” when I sent to you, saying, You shall not say, “the burden of the Lord,” ³⁹ therefore, I will surely lift you up and cast you away from my presence, you and the city that I gave to you and your ancestors. ⁴⁰ And I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace and perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.

Hebrews 12:1-17

12 ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children— “My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him; ⁶ for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.” ⁷ Endure trials for the sake of discipline. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline? ⁸ If you do not have that discipline in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children. ⁹ Moreover, we had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not be even more willing to be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness. ¹¹ Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. ¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled. ¹⁶ See to it that no one becomes like Esau, an immoral and godless person, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ You know that later, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, even though he sought the blessing with tears.

Luke 12:49-13:9

12 ⁴⁹ “I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹ Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵² From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³ they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” ⁵⁴ He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens. ⁵⁵ And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens. ⁵⁶ You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time? ⁵⁷ And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? ⁵⁸ Thus, when you go with your accuser before a magistrate, on the way make an effort to settle the case, or you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer throw you in prison. ⁵⁹ I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.” 13 ¹ At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ² He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. ⁴ Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” ⁶ Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷ So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ ⁸ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’ ”

This is the Word of the LORD.

Thanks be to God!

Sermon *The Eleventh Sunday of Pentecost*

When it comes to our Christian works, our calling from the LORD, and duties under the gospel, we are puzzled when they are referred to as a “burden” according to the prophet Jeremiah. Normally we do not imagine our living as faithful disciples to be anything hard or arduous. The LORD is faithful when it comes to assigning work to his followers, not in a manner which stokes his ego but enables his power to be witnessed in all circumstances. We may bristle at what is pushed our way sometimes, but it is assigned to us out of a trust the LORD has to represent him as we are in that moment. The problem is that others tend to supplement, quantify, and condition what we are to do as a response to that work. To make our efforts to be about a person or group of

people, an institution, an ideology or idea, instead about the living creator already among us.

Jeremiah makes it clear through his proclamation of the LORD's word that the LORD is one who is not far off, sits too high in heaven, or in a location one has to prove oneself worthy of finding. The LORD is close at hand, is life itself, and connects and holds all things together by his grace and mighty will. The problem the LORD has is with those who seek to represent and speak, to presume they know what the LORD wants at all times. That was the issue Jeremiah had with the priesthood of his day, the court prophets who buttered up the king and nobility with nice-sounding words, and those subverted the true meaning of covenant living which lead to holiness. Syncretic worship was the order of the day- the bringing together of dueling religious worldviews and practices for a common reason. And often using human brute force and logic in order to do it.

Baal was often the deity used in the fusing of these religious practices with the LORD. Baal was considered the strong god of the Canaanite pantheon, associated with fertility, storms, and battle. There was some acceptance that Baal and the LORD were one in the same, simply because they had supposed similar attributes. But these were worlds apart, seen in many prophets' attempts to restore proper understanding and living under the LORD from the people of Israel. Baal was a very temperamental god who had to be called upon through erratic and emotional displays of worship. Sometimes human sacrifice was used, and even the sacrifice of first-born children- but only to get Baal's attention, not even to get a prayer answered. In turn, these practices affected how the people lived and how they saw their work. It produced a sense of injustice in society, causing the strong to take advantage of the weak, and giving the strong a reason to stay on top no matter the cost. This "burden" to an unjust deity simply enslaved the people, and made what they did seem like forced labor and compulsory service. No individuality, no common ethic, no deviation based on ability, just thankless and tireless work.

Compared to the LORD's "burden" which allowed for the people to have understanding, wisdom, of the life created and gifted to them. The word for "burden" in Hebrew (*massa*) can describe either a work or an utterance- an action or a suggestion. The LORD's suggestion, the divine utterance, produces direction and guidance into what we pursue in our day-to-day living. Whatever we listen to has the power to push us in one direction or another. So we must understand where we take that direction, that work, from.

Jeremiah criticizes the 'trustworthy' religious authorities of his day because of their mistaken ideas, and Jesus does the same thing in his ministry. Choosing the LORD, choosing to see the divine will through Jesus Christ, will cause a split with whatever we align with in this world. His words are a warning not to grip too tightly to associations and institutions we have trusted and relied upon before, because their utterances may

not point the same way toward the LORD. While it is not advocating to split with all our associations, we must at least watch them carefully for what they desire from us.

Wisdom is not always seen within those who seem to pay more attention to the weather and possible future rather than what is front and center and now. Our lives should be in response to how the LORD chooses to manifest himself and not how others want that manifestation. That is what will allow our lives to respond, produce fruit, and demonstrate where the essence of life can be found. Not in the promises of others which cannot even be guaranteed, but in how the gospel sets one up for success as they are.

That is why Hebrews reminds Christians what can be counted as trustworthy. Not in practices, rites, and institutions which demand so much but can only give so much. But in how the words of Jesus craft and shape what we want to see happen around us. In the same way we want to experience freedom, opportunity, understanding, and purpose other people want the same thing. The words of Jesus discipline and train us to listen and know what is better, allows us to think critically about all powers around us, so we can make a definitive and effective choice. We may shy away with how the LORD leads us out of certain situations and practices, but does so only out of a sense of making us better. Letting us experience truth and see what is healthier from a situation. And not so we can wall ourselves off from those others, but know how to live purposefully so the LORD's suggestions and teachings rise above. We do not have to smash or destroy any idols in people's lives, but only allow holiness from our actions to make the conditions which can crumble them to dust.

The "burden" of the LORD, of Jesus Christ, is handed to us directly so we might know how to operate in every moment. To know what we have access too, what makes more sense for our situations, and how they can be lived out in a multitude of ways. False utterances, teachings, and directions lock us and others in boxes and seek to punish any kind of disagreement. The gospel allows for disagreement, questions, and searching because it makes us realize the essence of why we live to begin with. Our Christian works, our discipleship duties, are opportunities to discover how wide the Church can be to bring understanding to all walks of life. Whenever we, or someone else, comes into the fellowship they should leave with a relief that they have been heard and responded too. Our works do not trap, they liberate, and make possibilities out of dead ends so ALL might experience what the living creator is returning all things toward.

Prayers of the People

Let us remember in prayer:

Dominic Aquino, Tom & Amy Aquino, Mary Ellen Beans, Terry Carpenter, Fritz Chambers, Michelle Chamberlain, Mary Jane Dougherty, Don Eberheart Jr., Allison Folly, Kay France, Jamie Frank, Bill & Cheryl Graham, Judy Hass, Alice & Errol Jacobs, Barry Jacobs, Victoria Kasten, Amber Loftis, David Mackey, Breanne Mathias, Will Long, Tom Netting, Ruth Patrick, Bob Pierre, Carol Phillips, Mark Preusser, Stefani

Seth, Josh Shaeffer, Marlene Singhaus, Cindy Smith, Derrick & Mandy Smith, Janis Stover, Dean & Heidi Unzicker, Simone Villarruel, Holly Waldenmyer, The Friends of the Homeless of Tuscarawas County & The Homeless of Tuscarawas County.

LORD, our Creator, you fill our lives with so many opportunities and chances to know who you are. You are one who does not remain in heaven or live far away, but you dwell with and among your creation and hold all things together by your grace. In inhabiting all living things you prove to be the source of life and wellness. As you live with us you set up our conditions in certain ways, orchestrate situations, and set each person up to live and work as you designed them too. Often times we resist this setup, this training, this discipline, because we mistake our ways to be your ways. We mistake our feelings for your plan, and let distractions and false promises rule us. But you do not have us live in this manner because of power or ego, but out of trust that you are setting us in the right conditions to represent you in the best way possible. Help us resist the call of others, the world, and of evil powers who claim to represent what is best but demand too high a price. Help us to listen to you, grant your due, and know that we are living the most authentically as your children.

We have been convinced that the sufferings of this life are devoid of your presence, but if you inhabit and control life itself then you are present in all conditions. We ask for that presence to be known among all our needs and proper guidance given to live firstly for you within them...*Reading of the Prayer List...*

Moment of Silence

We thank you, LORD, for hearing and being with us. Your guidance and attention keeps us on track with knowing and acting on what is right and beneficial, so others might see what produces life and joy abundant. So the burdens of life do not sidetrack us, but give us clarity in knowing what we can be. And so the prayer you gifted may be seen as wisdom invaluable:

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Offering our Gifts

From what we see, from what we believe, we demonstrate in our actions to help others understand where the LORD can be found.

Offertory *Lord, Hear My Prayer* arr. L Smith

Hymn #592 *Doxology

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

***Prayer of Dedication**

LORD, our Creator, your grace is never found in vain and is available for all to witness and accept with a willing heart. May our gifts aid in catching attention, and building others up into what you want. **Amen.**

Hymn #404 *Precious Lord, Take My Hand

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, help me stand.
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn.
Thro' the storm, thro' the night,
Lead me on to the light.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

When my way grows drear,
Precious Lord, linger near--
When my life is almost gone.
Hear my cry, hear my call,
Hold my hand lest I fall.
Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.

***Benediction**

Hear now, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; you will love your neighbor as yourself.

With the gospel of Jesus Christ guiding you, go into the world to live this sole purpose.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

***Postlude *Lead On, O King Eternal* arr. L Smith**

Be blessed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ wherever you may go!

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