

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This page is included each week as an ‘instruction page’ for worship.

Attached is the bulletin for your devotion and worship. It is consistent with the components of worship that John Calvin insisted must be present in Reformed worship. The format is different than in the past. You will find each component of worship in order in which they would occur.

It is my prayer, and the prayer of your session, that these worship and devotional aids will nourish you during this time that you cannot be together.

You will find the five Components of Reformed Worship in bold:

**Open with a moment of personal Prayer*

1. The Invocation

2. The Word (you will need to read the scripture cited on the top left of the first page)

**After reading the scripture sing a hymn or sing along with a hymn (Hymn suggestions below)*

3. The Confession

4. The Sermon

The Affirmation of Faith

**Read a psalm aloud as your offering to God. (A suggestion is provided below.)*

5. The Benediction

All of these components are on the insert. If you read through each in the order above, you will have moved through the rhythm of a traditional Reformed worship service. You should feel free to intersperse songs of praise, Psalm readings and personal prayer. Suggested places to do this are indicated at the asterisk (*) above.

Our prayer is that this will prove nourishing to your Spiritual health.

For your convenience, songs are recommended below:

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee — Hymn Number 59

Open My Eyes, That I May See — Hymn Number 480

A Psalm suggestion: read Psalm 46.

P.S. Note that the Affirmation of Faith is not one of Calvin’s components of Reformed Worship. It is included because it has become a standard part of the worship in the Presbyterian Tradition.

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the invitation to share in worship with you this week. I am sorry that I do not get to meet you in person, but hope to do that soon. Normally I would have shared a sermon with you that addressed your transition but I do not have a very good way to record sermons and had prepared this one for churches to use if their pastor needed a week without writing a sermon. I hope it brings you a sense of God's love and presence in your lives.

I will use this letter as the means to share some things with you about your transition. The Presbytery and I want to provide the support you need as you wait for the next person who will serve as your pastor. The Search Team is working on discerning who God has called and I believe that God already knows who your pastor will be. In the intervening time, I will be praying for you and the mission you do in this community. If there are ways I can support you, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Your session will continue to make decisions about how and when to begin to worship in-person. I am glad to provide support for that conversation as well. Please know that you are in my prayers and that the Committee on Ministry members are praying too.

Grace and peace,

Melana Scruggs
General Presbyter
Peace River Presbytery

SUNDAY WORSHIP

In Service to our Lord | First Presbyterian Church | Arcadia, FL

Invocation

God of grace, mercy, and peace, we come before you this morning looking for comfort from our fears, guidance for our lives, and assurance of your love. Open us to the work of your Holy Spirit in this time so that we might hear your Word to us. Quiet our minds, enliven our spirits, help us to focus on You. Through Christ, we pray. Amen.

Scripture Reading – Philippians 1:3-11 from New Revised Standard Version

³ I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴ constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵ because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷ It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰ to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹ having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Prayer of Confession

Holy God, in these days of staying at home we have sometimes forgotten those who do not have homes or food to eat or adequate health care. We have forgotten those who are in prison or in nursing homes and have focused on our desire to get back out to do what we used to do. Forgive us for our selfishness, for our inability to act for the least, the last, and the lonely. Revive in us a desire to serve you by serving those most in need. Open us to the joy of your love so that we might share it with others. In Your Son's name we pray. Amen.

(Take a moment for personal, silent confession)

Sermon

Joy in Lockdown

The Rev. Melana Scruggs

Not being exactly sure when you might see this sermon, I don't know how many weeks you have been staying mostly at home, not having in-person worship, not going out with friends or doing many of the things we all like to do. I can guess that it is longer than you would have liked it to be and no one knows how much longer we will have to take such precautions. Many people are lonely, tired of staying inside, wanting some sense of normalcy.

Paul might have had the same feelings as he was writing to the church in Philippi from a Roman prison. We do not know how long Paul had been in prison, nor how much longer he would remain, or even if he would ever be free again. What we do know from the letter is that Paul is thanking God daily while he is locked away, thanking God for the churches that continued to be spreading the gospel, thanking God for the opportunity to share the message with the guards and staff who were around, thanking God for all things. Paul is thankful that the Philippians have remembered him and have sent Epaphroditus to him with food, money, and companionship for a time.

Paul's prison was not the prison we know where everything is provided. Someone had to bring him food, he would have to buy the supplies he would need, so having the church remember him was important for his survival. Yet he says he would have been thankful to God even if he did not have what he needed.

This passage reminded me of our current situation. In a matter of a few days, everything changed – we needed to stay at home as much as we could, no dining in restaurants, we needed to limit our trips to the grocery, and suddenly we could not worship in the way we were used to worshipping. Pastors and sessions pivoted quickly to online worship, either recorded or live-streamed, via Facebook or YouTube or Vimeo. Fellowship time, meetings, and Bible study all moved to Zoom. People learned all kinds of skills quickly that they really did not want to learn, but this was the way to stay connected. Panic could have overtaken the church, but it did not.

There's an old story about an army officer caught in a dangerous situation that threatened to wipe out his entire unit. Turning to his unit, he said, "You, you and you ... Panic. The rest of you, come with me."

The church did not panic, the church responded with creativity, compassion, continued ministry. Churches began to share resources with one another, some offering space and technology to record sermons, some offering other tech support and encouragement, and many providing devotionals and prayers to be shared widely. People within congregations began to figure out ways to connect with others when they could not be together.

One of the co-moderators of the General Assembly has had a Stay-at-Home Hymn Sing every weekday during this time. Every morning she posts the hymn for the day on Facebook and at 5pm she goes on Facebook Live and sings the hymn, joined by people from all over the country. I have seen videos of families who have used Zoom to get everyone together. Churches have had children and youth put together small gifts and delivered them to people in the church, many of whom are alone.

Generous gifts have been given to Mision Piniel and BethEl for their work with farmworkers who have been particularly vulnerable as essential workers during this crisis. Presbyterian

Disaster Assistance has provided grants for work that churches are doing in their communities to meet the needs of those who do not have food, shelter, adequate healthcare, and the church has been creative in finding ways to provide while keeping safe distance. It has been amazing to see all the ways people have been Epaphroditus to others – that is what it means to be the church, to share in joys and hardships.

What Paul tells the Philippian church, and we need to hear it right now, is that because of Jesus Christ, we can give thanks in all circumstances, we can find joy at all times. Joy does not come from our circumstances, joy comes from inside, from the knowledge that God holds us, strengthens us, provides for us, beyond our wildest imaginings. Our joy stems from the hope we have because of the love God has shown us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nothing can take that from us.

Paul goes on to tell the church that no matter what happens to him, they need to continue the work they have been called to do. We are also called to continue the work God has placed before us. We do not know when that work will return to something more like what we have been used to doing. We can be sure that whenever we can return to something that looks more normal, it will be different than it was previously.

We have gotten a different perspective on life in these times. We have seen how quickly the worldly things in which we put our trust can disappear – jobs, investments, health, conveniences, toilet paper. What has never disappeared is our hope in the One who has walked with us each step of these months, the One who calls us to notice those who need comfort, who need food, who need someone to listen to them. If we can hold on to the things we have learned in these days about how faith sustains us, how to be compassionate and generous to others, how to proclaim the truth of the love we know in Christ through the ways we speak and act, the church could have a renewal. We might find joy abounding in the church and spilling into the culture. That joy might bring people to know Jesus Christ because they want to understand how people of faith can live in the midst of uncertainty.

It seems from what Paul writes in his letter, the guards must have asked one another what made Paul different than their other prisoners. They began to listen to him and found hope in the message he shared. Paul prays that the church will find a way to produce a good harvest for the kingdom through the ways they share the message.

This is still our calling, to share the truth of our salvation in Christ with the world. In a time of uncertainty and fear, people are more open to hearing the good news. Many of you have had more people watching your online worship than would be in your sanctuary on a Sunday morning. Some of those watching may not have heard the gospel before, but they need it now. Let's not panic or wring our hands over what is happening and how uncertain we are about what is next. Instead, let's find the joy that God gives us in Christ and share that with the world, starting today.

Let us pray: Gracious God, thank you for reminding us that because of Jesus Christ we do not have to give in to fear or despair but can trust in your ending love for us. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we might live as people of joy and share that with the world. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith (from A Declaration of Faith)

God keeps his promises and gives us hope. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus God kept his promises. All that we can ever hope for was present in Christ. But the work of God in Christ is not over. God calls us to hope for more than we have yet seen. The hope God gives us is ultimate confidence that supports us when lesser hopes fail us. In Christ, God gives hope for a new heaven and earth, certainty of victory over death, assurance of mercy and judgment beyond death. This hope gives us courage for the present struggle.

Psalm 46 (New International Version)

God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.

⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
⁵ God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

⁸ Come and see what the LORD has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.
⁹ He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Benediction

We cannot go into the world in the ways we usually have, but we can take the light of Christ into all the places we connect with people in the coming week, so that they find joy. The blessings of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.