

ORDER OF WORSHIP – Sunday, January 17, 2021 – EPIPHANY 2B

PRELUDE “Lift Every Voice and Sing”

<https://vimeo.com/486888350>

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

The annual meeting of the congregation will be held via ZOOM meeting on Sunday, January 31 at 11:00 a.m.

OPENING PRAYER¹

You invite us, O God, to live in your ways, and you give us to each other to know and to love as we journey in this life. Show us your will for all creation. Help us to listen to your urgings with prayerful hearts so that we may honor what you have made, in the name of the holy Trinity, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

CALL TO WORSHIP¹

The One who calls you together this day yearns for each of you and for all people to hear and be blessed.

Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening.

Blessed is the One who comes bringing trustworthy words for the healing of the world.

Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening.

HYMN “Gather Us In

<https://vimeo.com/416186129>

**Here in this place, the new light is streaming, shadows of doubt are vanished away.
See in this space our fears and our dreamings, brought here to you in the light of this day.
Gather us in the lost and forsaken; gather us in, our spirits aflame.
Call to us now and we shall awaken; we shall arise at the sound of our name.**

**We are the young, our lives are a mystery; we are the old, who yearn for your face.
We have been sung throughout all of history, called to be light to the whole human race.
Gather us in the rich and the haughty; gather us in, the proud and the strong;
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly; give us the courage to enter the song.**

**Here we receive new life in the waters; here we receive the bread of new birth;
Here you shall call your sons and your daughters, call us anew to be salt for the earth.
Give us to drink the wine of compassion; give us to eat the bread that is you;
Nourish us well and teach us to fashion lives that are holy and hearts that are true.**

**Not just in buildings, small and confining, not in some heaven light years away,
Here in this place the new light is shining; now is God present, and now is the day.
Gather us in and hold us forever; gather us in and make us your own;
Gather us in, all peoples together, fire of love in our flesh and our bones.**

CALL TO CONFESSION ²

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sin, God who is faithful and just will forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Let us confess our sin together, trusting God's promised mercy.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION ²

Holy God, we confess our failures to discern the ways that racism and other demons of hostility have warped our common humanity. Claiming to be "colorblind" or "not racist," we have failed to see racism as a disease that infects us all. Yet we know that your Spirit heals the wounds in our lives and empowers us to extend that healing into the life of our communities. Empower us by your Spirit, O God, to be people who live out our baptism and live more fully into its promise that in Jesus Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, or male or female.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS ²

In Christ the dividing walls of hostility have come down so that we might live in justice, friendship and peace. Friends, hear the good news of the Gospel: in Jesus Christ we are forgiven and restored, and set on right paths.

Thanks be to God!

***GRATEFUL RESPONSE "Gloria Patri"**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUBxpypSblw>

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION ²

O God, send your Spirit to us that we might discern your Word amid the words we read today, so that in hearing your Word we may be formed to follow Christ into our world. Amen.

SCRIPTURE & MESSAGE

John 13:34

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another." (Jesus' words to the disciples at the Last Supper after Judas had departed.)

“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.”

- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Matthew 7:12

“In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.”

(from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount after sharing the Lord’s Prayer with them)

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is ‘What are you doing for others?’”

- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I John 2:9

“Whoever says, ‘I am in the light,’ while hating a brother or sister, is still in the darkness.”

“We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”

- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I John 4:16b-21

“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, ‘I love God,’ and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”

“I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.”

- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Today I want to tell you about the 3 cats who live at my house.

First, there is Joelly (fondly known as Joelly Poley). He is a feral cat that I adopted from my brother Wilbur’s house in Pennsylvania when he was just a month or so old. He was still a fuzz ball and probably was taken from his mother too soon, but he was so cute and I knew his odds of surviving in the area were small. But perhaps I misjudged him because from his colorings (and actions) one can see that he is part Siamese (and it is a part of himself that he embraces fully). Joelly likes to talk and make his opinions known. He does not like

anyone else to be talking while he is asleep. And he has rightfully taken on the role of “top cat” as he has the longest tenure in our home.

Then there is Tobey. His full name is Tobey Teefer (after Tobey Keith) but the name no longer applies as he no longer has any teeth. Tobey came from the same sets of litters in Pennsylvania as Joelly. They may or may not have had the same mother. My sister Judy adopted Tobey a few months after I adopted Joelly. Tobey came complete with a broken tail, but Judy, who is a sucker for animals who face a few challenges in life, rescued him – sneaking him into the Best Western hotel one Saturday night before bringing him home to New York the next day.

Finally, there is Penny (aka Penny Pee Pee). Penny is a recent addition to our household. Penny was originally rescued by my Great Aunt Hazel in Pennsylvania after Penny produced a fine litter of kittens in her backyard. The kittens all found homes, and Hazel brought Penny inside to live with her and her doggies never to roam no more.

Penny is a little girl. One of her front legs is injured and she walks (and runs) on just 3 legs. To add insult to injury, she is also blind in one eye due to a cataract, one of the many challenges that come with age to human and animal alike. Penny came to live with Judy and I just about 3 months ago. Her “Momma” Hazel at the age of 102 had moved to a nursing home and the person who was taking care of her in Hazel’s absence was not a cat person and had determined to have the local vet come and put an end to her life – for really – who would want such a decrepit cat?

But then Penny came to live with us. Judy and I were determined to keep her safe and give her a good home to live out the rest of her years, but she certainly did not make it easy for us! It all started one Friday evening when my sisters, Judy and Debra, set out on a rescue mission driving to PA to make the capture. Saturday afternoon came

and Judy and Deb infiltrated the homesite ready to carry out the good deed. But nobody had told Penny what was about to happen, and she was having none of it. Finally, in a sheer act of desperation, Judy grabbed Penny from behind getting ready to put her in her little cat carrier taxi which was nowhere near to where Judy and Penny were. Judy is screaming to Deb, “Get the cat carrier! Get the cat carrier!” which finally arrives but not until after Penny had managed to bite Judy’s hand and scratch her arms. Penny fought the good fight and lost the battle but the war was not over.

That is when we found out how terribly “dirty” are cats’ mouths. Judy’s hand became infected – red and swollen – and she needed to be put on a regimen of antibiotics. Thank God for antibiotics!

Once Penny reached her final destination in Victor, New York the challenge of integrating her into our family began. For a few days we kept her isolated in my bedroom – now complete with litter box, cat bed, cat toys and food and water dishes. Then there was a day or so of transition where we left the bedroom door open but deterred access in and out of the room with the use of a baby gate. Tired of forced imprisonment, one morning Penny bolted out of the room as I opened the door. Now the fun begins!

What to do about this alien, this intruder, this one who was definitely not one of us? At first the cats kept their distance, sizing each other up, getting a sense for just who these strangers were. Penny, who had always been an only cat, was not about to raise the white flag and ask for a truce. She had every intention of holding on to her place of honor. Joelly and Toby had other ideas. After all, this was their house and how dare she enter into enemy territory and expect to take over. And really, just look at her – so puny – with a broken leg – what could she possibly do to them?

The time for observation did not take long. Joelly and Tobey each took turns inching closer and closer to her only to find out that Penny was bigger than she looked. There was a lot of spitting and hissing

that took place on both sides with many peacekeeping efforts on the part of Marie and Judy. (Judy mostly. My strategy was more aligned with just let them fight it out. Judy thought I was insensitive.)

For a while one of us, either Judy or myself, determined to stay in the house when the other was out – *just to keep an eyes on things (i.e. the cats)*. Then we moved on to closing Penny off in the bedroom with the door barricaded while we both were out or in the evening when we went to bed and were not able to stand guard all night.

Of course, the challenge was how to entice Penny into the bedroom and keep the other two out at the same time before closing the door. This challenge led to another battle one evening as I attempted to get Penny to come into the bedroom to “go to bed” and she decided she would rather stay up with the boys!

In my tiredness and frustration, eager to go to bed, I came up behind Penny, grabbed her to take her to the bedroom and she whipped around and bit me! Now it was my turn to seek medical attention and antibiotics. Lesson learned? Do NOT do something to Penny without letting her know what is going on – be gentle – be patient – be considerate – take it one step at a time no matter how tired you are – no matter how much it may be for her own good.

Before too long, Tobey accepted the fact that he was on the bottom rung of this society, and he could live with that. The battle for top cat between Joelly and Penny continued.

How could both of them possibly share the same bedroom? The same Mom? The same litter box? The same food? It took a while for them to sort that all out. But then, lo and behold, the impossible became possible. They found that it really was possible to share the same Momma with the same bedroom with the same litter box. But Momma Marie enforced one separation rule – that when it comes to mealtime – each will eat out of their own designated food bowls – no pushing the other out and taking what is not theirs to take.

Progress is being made. All 3 cats can sit in the same room together, sometimes closer than others. Sometimes it is tolerated, sometimes it is enjoyed, and sometimes someone just can't take it any longer – insecurity and vulnerability raises its head – and lifts a paw to swat at the other. But the other has learned not to run away – not to retaliate – but just to continue to be there – and the challenge ends as quickly as it began.

The past few weeks have been calmer. There is a mutual acceptance that everyone belongs here. There is a mutual understanding that each one of them, Joelly, Tobey and Penny are loved by Judy and Marie – that there can be life together even if there are things about the other that we do not like. And from time to time, it really seems to me that they do like one another and would even like to be friends – but these things take time my friends, time and patience and love.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH from A Brief Statement of Faith of the PC(USA)

We trust in Jesus Christ, fully human, fully God.

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:

**preaching good news to the poor and release to the captives,
teaching by word and deed and blessing children,
healing the sick and binding up the brokenhearted,
eating with outcasts, forgiving sinners,
and calling for all to repent and believe the gospel.**

Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,

Jesus was crucified,

**suffering the depths of human pain
and giving his life for the sins of the world.**

God raised this Jesus from the dead,

**vindicating his sinless life,
breaking the power of sin and evil,
delivering us from death to eternal life.**

With believers in every time and place,

**we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

Alleluia. Amen.

HYMN "Help Us Accept Each Other"

<https://vimeo.com/449692900>

**Help us accept each other as Christ accepted us;
teach us as sister, brother, each person to embrace.
Be present, Lord among us and bring us to believe
we are ourselves accepted, and meant to love and live.**

**Teach us, O Lord, your lessons, as in our daily lives
we struggle to be human and search for hope and faith.
Teach us to care for people, for all, not just for some,
to love them as we find them, or as they may become.**

**Let your acceptance change us, so that we may be moved
in living situations to do the truth in love;
To practice your acceptance until we know by heart
the table of forgiveness, and laughter's healing art.**

**Lord, for today's encounters with all who are in need,
who hunger for acceptance, for righteousness and bread,
We need new eyes for seeing, new hands for holding on:
renew us with your Spirit; Lord, free us, make us one!**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE ²

JOYS AND CONCERNS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Continued prayers for Darwin Plassche who remains at Strong with pneumonia.
Lord, enfold him in your healing arms and grant him your peace.

Continued prayers for the Plassche and Connor families as they grieve the passing of Crystal Connor, and we rejoice that she has returned home to the comfort and peace of your everlasting arms.

Prayers for others known to our congregation to continue to grieve the loss of loved ones:
Vera Forster and Jennifer Wilson.

Prayers for Rev. Marie's brother-in-law who suffered a stroke on New Year's Eve and prayers of thanksgiving that he is home receiving physical therapy and is doing well.

Prayers for those known to us who face continuing health challenges:
Barb, Sarah, Linda, Carol, Rita, Judy.

Prayer of thanksgiving for Carl DeFave's message and leadership last Sunday.

Prayers of thanksgiving that Rev. Marie's niece and husband, Rachel and Alex, welcomed new baby Ethan Thomas into this world on January 30. All are doing well.

Continued prayers of for those who are waiting expectantly for the gift of new life in infants soon to be born in the months ahead.

Holy One, you have called for justice to roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. On this Sunday, as we remember the life and legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., help us to embody the justice and righteousness that he sought for our country.

Help us to embody his dream of a beloved community and of a day when justice is a reality for all Americans, not just a few. Inspire us by his example and by the power of your Spirit at work within us to live in solidarity with all who have been marginalized in our world. Give us ears to hear their cries, and hearts to move us to respond.

Indeed, during these tumultuous days of political and social reckoning, give us courage to pursue accountability for all who have incited and inflicted violence upon the nation – and courage to recognize our own complicity in the racism that has warped our common life.

Animate courage in us so that we might confront realities that deform and deface our country and participate in your reconciling and justice-seeking work in our midst. Hear our prayers also for peace in the days ahead as we navigate transitions in the nation’s leadership. Grant all of our elected leaders wisdom and patience and courage to work together for the common good and to restore a spirit of partnership among us.

God, our help in time of trouble, we continue to pray for the global community as it grapples with an ever-worsening pandemic. We pray that you would give each of us determination to take personal responsibility for measure that protect us all. We pray especially for the well-being of those hardest hit by the strains of this scourge, and pray for those in leadership in communities, states and nation as they negotiate ways in which to aid those most afflicted.

Please add your own prayers for the week ahead as the transition of leadership in this nation takes place on Wednesday.

Then use the following link to conclude this segment of your prayer before moving on to the Lord’s Prayer. This is an extended piece of music (almost 4 minutes) so if you are not able at this time to rest and relax into the music, please come back at another time when you are able to do so.

PRAYER RESPONSE “O Lord, Hear My Prayer” music of Taize

<https://vimeo.com/154749415>

**O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer; when I call answer me.
O Lord, hear my prayer, O Lord, hear my prayer, come and listen to me.**

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 sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory forever.
Amen.

HYMN "God of Grace and God of Glory"

<https://vimeo.com/419014516>

**God of grace and God of glory, on Thy people pour Thy power;
Crown Thine ancient church's story, bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour, for the facing of this hour.**

**Lo! The hosts of evil round us scorn Thy Christ assail Thy ways!
From the fears that long have bound us free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days, for the living of these days.**

**Cure Thy children's warring madness, bend our pride to Thy control;
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss Thy kingdom's goal,
lest we miss Thy kingdom's goal.**

**Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore;
Let the gift of Thy salvation be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving Thee whom we adore,
serving Thee whom we adore.**

CHARGE & BENEDICTION (based on Amos 5) ²

Let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for us all.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God,
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with you now and abide with you always. Amen.

POSTLUDE He's Got the Whole World in His Hands

<https://vimeo.com/417863699>

¹*Feasting on the Word, WORSHIP COMPANION, Liturgies for Year B, Volume 1*, edited by Kimberly Bracken Long, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville KY.

²*Presbyterian Outlook 2020, Liturgy written by Roger Gench and provided for free distribution.*

MORNING PRAYER

As I rise this day, O God, I give you thanks for breath and life, for the people I will see today, and for family, neighbors and friends, and for those whose ways are challenging to my serenity Help me to give thanks especially for the people who pull me to new understandings and show me sides of life that I have not known or do not welcome. Urge me to follow you today; in Jesus' name. Amen.

EVENING PRAYER

As the evening comes and the time for rest draws near, O God, I give you thanks for another full and mystifying day. I have not done everything I had hoped to do. I have not forgiven myself or others as I ought. I ask now that you, who know me through and through, will lead me to let go of what I cannot change and seek anew tomorrow for a more enlightened path. I long for your guidance and your care. Guard my sleep, and let me rise renewed; in Jesus' name. Amen.