



Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

August 30, 2020

Prelude:

Surely the Presence

Lanny Wolfe

Gathering Thoughts:

Dear Brothers and Sisters, we have watched with hope and concern for you and our community as this pandemic continues to ebb and flow. We still do not know with certainty when we will be able to fling open the doors to invite each of you to join us as we worship and praise God with thanksgiving. In response to our inability to invite each and every one of you to join with us as we worship in the Sanctuary, we are exploring innovative ways to allow as many as can possibly and safely gather to worship. Keep your eyes focused upon the details that will be forthcoming from the church leadership team. Looking forward to seeing each of you either in person or via zoom.

Let Us Rejoice as We Worship:

God gives us one day at a time:

Time that is long enough for laughter to follow any tears;

Time that is deep enough for prayer and silence to dance together;

Time enough to help someone in need;

Plenty of time to notice beauty and praise the Maker;

Sufficient time to build a bridge for forgiveness or tear down a wall of resentment;

The right time to embrace friends, smile at strangers, play with children, sing praise to God.

Praise God for this day we are given.

Opening Hymn: “Make Me a Captive, Lord”

Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free;

force me to render up my sword, and I shall conqueror be.

I sink in life’s alarms when by myself I stand;

imprison me within thine arms, and strong shall be my hand.

My heart is weak and poor until it master find;

it has no spring of action sure, it varies with the wind.

It cannot freely move till thou hast wrought its chain;

enslave it with thy matchless love, and deathless it shall reign.

My power is faint and low till I have learned to serve;

it lacks the needed fire to glow, it lacks the breeze to nerve;

it cannot drive the world until itself be driven;
its flag can only be unfurled when thou shalt breathe from heaven.

My will is not my own till thou hast made it thine;
if it would reach a monarch's throne, it must its crown resign;
it only stands unbent amid the clashing strife,
when on thy bosom it has leant, and found in thee its life.

A Time of Prayer:

Behold, Lord, empty vessels that need to be filled. Lord, fill them. We are weak in the faith; strengthen us. We are cold in love; warm us and make us fervent that our love may go out to our neighbors. We may not have a strong and firm faith; at times we doubt and are unable to trust you altogether. O Lord, help us. Strengthen our faith and trust in you. Amen.

A Reading from the Scriptures:

Romans 12:9-21 (NIV)

9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. 18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' 20 No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Musical Interlude:

Christus, der ist mein Leben

Schwartz

The Message:

“Brilliant Designs”

Performance running shoes are often colorful and attractive, with sleek designs that make you want to hit the pavement and go fast. But not many have the brilliant design of the Adidas “Futurecraft.Loop,” which is 100 percent recyclable.

Yes, that's right: A performance running shoe made with all-recyclable materials and no glue.

Raincoats will keep you dry, but the plastic in most of them will eventually sit in landfills for many years. In addition, plastic comes from fossil fuels, which put carbon in the air. Now you can choose a raincoat made from fast-growing algae. Yes, algae. It mimics plastic in every way, but also consumes carbon from the atmosphere.

"The jacket lets you put on a future where we are no longer dependent on fossil fuels," said Charlotte McCurdy, the creator of the raincoat.

Other brilliant designs include a typeface designed to increase legibility for people with low vision, a prefabricated "hospital room in a box," a credit card that monitors your carbon footprint, and an electric motorcycle that is largely 3D-printed.

All of these are hailed by Fast Company magazine in September 2019 as "award winners that are reshaping our world." The winner in the category of social good is "The Water Box" in Flint, Michigan. This mobile filtration unit plugs into the public water system and pumps out safe, lead-free drinking water.

Recyclable running shoes. Carbon-negative raincoats. Hospitals in a box. Mobile water filtration units.

Brilliant designs.

Of course, innovative ideas are nothing new. Flip-phones were great when they were first introduced, because they were so easy to use. Answer by flipping it open; hang up by flipping it closed.

Remember the Rubik's Cube? It was eye-catching and beautiful, and its design made you want to grab it and play with it. Yes, it was hard to solve, but the puzzle didn't require an instruction book.

Going back even further, you find pencils and scissors. These are great products that you use every day, "extremely intuitive in their functions," says Massimo Marrazzo. It's hard to improve on the design of the pencil and a pair of scissors.

Pencils can be tricky, however, when you put words on them and then begin to use them. Wanting to send an anti-drug message, someone designed a pencil with the phrase "Too Cool to Do Drugs." Good message, right? Wrong. As the pencil was sharpened, it read:

"Cool to Do Drugs."

"Do Drugs."

"Drugs."

Not a very brilliant design.

Back in the first century, the apostle Paul had some innovative ideas about what it meant to be a true Christian. He shared his design with the followers of Jesus in Rome, using words as surprising today as they were when they were first written.

For starters, Paul encourages us to do the opposite of what people expect of us, especially when we are attacked. Instead of fighting fire with fire, Paul says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them"

(Romans 12:14). The approach that most people take is: “Don’t get mad, get even.” Heaping curses on evildoers is acceptable behavior in most faiths and cultures. But Paul says, “bless.” The Christian design is to offer good to a persecutor instead of fighting back, counterattacking, or evening the score.

“At this point Paul stands firmly with Jesus,” says pastor and scholar N.T. Wright. “In both Jesus’ teaching and his own practice there was a strikingly new note: Hostility was to be met with prayer, and violence with blessing.” As Jesus himself said in the Sermon on the Mount, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).

Pastor Peter Marty tells the story of a woman named Martha, who had a terribly difficult childhood. “Mom regularly beat me with a strap,” she recalls. “She was mean even when I did nothing wrong. My dad was cruel for reasons I don’t understand. He’d pack my lunch for school and often put a rock in it instead of a sandwich. As hungry as I was after school, I dreaded coming home.”

Marty asked her how it was that she and her husband managed to raise a beautiful child of their own after the hellish childhood she had endured. So often, abused children become abusers, and the cycle of violence continues. Martha said, “I was determined to do the complete opposite of what my parents did for me.”

Do the opposite. Love instead of hate. Bless instead of curse. “Do not repay anyone evil for evil,” says Paul, “but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (Romans 12:17). That’s a brilliant design.

Paul also encourages us to live according to the values of the kingdom of God, instead of the values of the world. The world is “dog eat dog,” with people competing fiercely and being willing to harm each other in order to succeed. But the values of God’s kingdom invite us to “live in harmony with one another” (v. 16).

The world is full of climbers who want to show off and be accepted by powerful and influential people. But the values of God’s kingdom encourage us to “not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are” (v. 16).

In the summer of 1985, professor Henri Nouwen left his position at Harvard Divinity School and joined a movement called L’Arche, which means “the Ark.” He moved to France and spent nine months living with people with learning disabilities, and sharing life with them. Then Nouwen joined the L’Arche Daybreak community in Canada and served as its pastor until his death in 1996.

Nouwen took seriously the instruction of Paul to “associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.” He moved from Harvard to L’Arche, he said, so that he could be “closer to the heart of God.” In the L’Arche Daybreak community, he supported a young man named Adam, who was severely disabled. As he cared for Adam, he came to a deeper understanding of his faith and what it means to be loved by God. Within L’Arche, the focus is on loving those who feel alone and abandoned because of a mental disability. It’s a brilliant design.

Finally, Paul encourages us to conquer our enemies in an innovative way: “If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads” (v. 20). Paul does not want Christians to be passive in the face of their enemies, rolling over and playing dead when confronted by evil. No, says Paul, take action: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (v. 21).

In his book *The 48 Laws of Power*, Robert Greene tells of a speech Abraham Lincoln delivered at the height of the Civil War. In it, Lincoln referred to Southerners as fellow human beings who were in error. An elderly lady chastised him for not calling them irreconcilable enemies who must be destroyed.

“Why, madam,” Lincoln replied, “do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?”

The unexpected and innovative design of Christian life is to overcome evil with good, instead of fighting evil with evil. If our enemies are hungry, we feed them. If they are thirsty, we give them something to drink. In the end, we destroy our enemies by turning them into friends.

“To transform an enemy into a friend requires one person to step forward and initiate the change,” says blogger Suzanne Kane. “That’s often propelled by love, the kind of human emotion that forgives all slights, looks past harsh statements, past injustice, social pressure and aggressive actions and finds common bond.” Such a transformation is often grounded in what Jesus said during the Sermon on the Mount: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

When faced with an enemy, don’t attack them. Instead, “Golden Rule” them. Feed them. Give them a drink. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

The apostle Paul challenges us to do the opposite of what people expect of us, blessing instead of cursing. He invites us to live according to the values of the kingdom of God, instead of the values of the world. And he encourages us to conquer our enemies with kindness.

Yes, there is evil in the world, and Paul knows it. “But God’s people are to meet it in the way that even God met it, with love and generous goodness,” says N.T. Wright. God knows that “the way to overthrow evil, rather than perpetuating it, is to take its force and give back goodness instead.” That’s what Jesus did on the cross, and what we are challenged to do in daily acts of love and sacrifice.

This is a brilliant design, right up there with hospitals in a box. And it’s a design that is never finished, but one that we need to work on every day.

Musical Interlude:

Here, O My Lord, I See Thee

A Time of Prayer – *let us remember all of our brothers and sisters on the prayer list, especially those who are having a difficult time during this period of social distancing. Please share your prayer concerns so that they may be added to the prayer list by emailing your*

concern to Pastor Dave at dbhanks92@comcast.net or by calling him direct at 978-821-9571. He is available every evening and on weekends. During this time we suggest that you create a prayer partner with whom you can pair up until we are able to worship together at the church.

Lord God, we give you thanks for all your gifts to us — for daily food, for health, for each breath we take, for freedom to choose, and for the gifts of your word, your power and your love. Our hearts are truly overwhelmed, O God, when we consider how you have entrusted so much to us. May we be worthy of that trust. May we be a people who are unafraid to live as fully and as richly as you want us to live.

Help us, O God, as followers of Jesus, to multiply all that you have given us, to risk spreading your word and perhaps see it misunderstood, to gamble by loving those whom others think worthy only of hate, to take chances by doing good to those who have not done good to us. Help us be faith-filled and desire to increase your glory and your goodness in this world. Make us people who share in both word and deed that which you have given to us.

We pray for the church gathered wherever it is, that it may encourage all of its members to discover, develop and use all their gifts, those of nature and those of grace.

We pray for those who are poor in body or in spirit, for those oppressed and heavy laden, for those sick or in despair, especially each person whose name is on our prayer list. Minister by your Spirit and by us, to all those for whom we continue to lift up in prayer, and help us walk faithfully in the path of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We offer these our prayers in the name of Jesus, who always hears our cries for help. And now let us pray together as Jesus taught us to pray in saying.... “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.”

Closing Hymn: “Lift High the Cross”

(Refrain)

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.

1. Come, Christians, follow where the Master trod,
our King victorious, Christ the Son of God.

(Refrain)

2. Led on their way by this triumphant sign,
the hosts of God in conquering ranks combine.

(Refrain)

3. Each newborn servant of the Crucified
bears on the brow the seal of him who died.

(Refrain)

4. O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
your death has brought us life eternally.

(Refrain)

5. So shall our song of triumph ever be:
praise to the Crucified for victory!

(Refrain)

Benediction:

Let your lives witness to Christ's love.
Let your words bring reconciliation.
Let your thoughts be of peace.
Let your touch bring healing.
Let your actions count for justice.
Be a sign of hope and a beacon of joy.
Go and may God's blessing go with you. Amen.

Postlude:

A Mighty Fortress

PRAYER LIST

Amy Belli
Carolyn Barney
Jack Brigham
Becky Colwell
Diana Escarbie
Cathy Fontaine

Chuck Funk
Bob and Pat Goguen
Linda Hurd
Mary Jackson
Tom Kazanjian
Sarah Kee
Bob and Doris Lane
Diane Lane Cormier
Linda Long
Lorraine Michaud
Audrey Painchaud
Maria Piazza
Melanie Pouliot
Jackie Reiss
Martha Quinn
Del Sampson
Elwin Shepard
Ron Smith
Carole Ann Sumner and Henry
Donna Thorne
Daniel Tousignant
Marilyn Wales
Mary Wayman

All who are experiencing difficult times and situations

All who are lonely or depressed

All who are personally dealing with the affects of the COVID-19 Virus

All medical personnel – doctors, nurses, testing staff, first responders

Our Church and all of its members and friends

All members of our armed forced who have committed themselves
to the protection of liberty

Rollstone Congregational Church

United Church of Christ

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Moderator: Paul Stansel 978-337-1608

Church Organist and Musician: Gavin Klein



Blessing for a Face Mask

God of health and wholeness,
of neighbor love and kindness
bless this mask, my slight shield
against great ills:

Bless the fabric that repels the drops,
the ties that go behind my ears,
the wire that fits snug against my nose,
the folds that cup my chin.

Make me grateful for my mask
even when it makes me hot,
even when I look funny in it,
even when I'm dying to take it off.

Bless me also, and everyone
who for their own and others' sakes
put on this holy inconvenience every day,
our minds made up to love.

— REV. MARY LUTI