

GATHERING AROUND GOD'S WORD

You are invited to silently pray as you prepare to offer thanksgiving to God.

God, we greet you once again in this sacred space. We have come because we need to be reminded of your love and your expectations for our living. We are like the vine you planted, watered and protected. We know in our hearts that we need, want and desire your presence in our lives. So we come in prayer and listen for your Word to speak to our hearts and reveal again your desires for us. Amen.

GREETING

We gather in many places this blessed Lord's day. And wherever we gather, our Lord is with us, and in being with us, makes the ground upon which we stand, holy!

Welcome to worship today at Eastminster Presbyterian Church, Dallas. If you are like me, I am missing you. And, I miss hearing and seeing you as you gather in this building we know as God's house. So, today, I am going to venture out a little bit and lead this service from a few difference places. I hope to warm your hearts knowing that while we may not be gathered here, the Spirit is ever present.

I invite you to visit our website and our Facebook page for the ministries that are on-going, even during this pandemic and to celebrate with us each promise of a future mission that God sends our way.

This morning I ask that we be in intentional prayer for our neighbors and friends who living the nightmare of raging fires, destruction winds and rising water. For our sister state, Louisiana, we especially ask the healing presence of the Lord with them, and the skin-on healing hands of those who are already lending aid.

Closer to home, we give thanksgiving for and remember the life of George Falk, Jr who is the cousin of Evelyn Parker. George, 88, passed away as the result of COVID19. We continue to keep our own members and friends facing illnesses, making recoveries, and facing death, in prayer. May the prayers we lift, lift their spirits.

As we move toward loosing the hold that COVID has on us, we continue our prayers for all whose lives are touched by our educational system and we pray wisdom and care-filled preparation. For the lives, world-wide, still wrestling with this virus, we pray for healing and we pray for containment and we pray for a cure, as we are always praying for cures to those illnesses that rob quality life and life from us. For our world, our country, our leaders, as we move toward a moment in time that will either further unite or divide us, we pray. We ask our leaders to put aside all things that do not engender the goodness of God for all peoples.

The experience of Moses standing on holy ground on the mountain, witnessed in Exodus 3, has touched my heart these past couple of weeks. In visiting our children and grandchildren in California, we found ourselves high up on some majestic mountains. Not only did I think of Moses, our New Testament lesson from Matthew also tugged at my heart. I was reminded that on our adventures life has potholes, but more than that, our security during worries and the joy of our salvation come from Jesus, The Rock! The sermon title this week is: *Potholes and The Rock*, and it focuses on Matthews text in the 16th chapter, verses 21-28. I hope you enjoy the pictures of a place and experience that so touched my soul, it bought we closer to God. Upon these rocks, I truly was standing on holy ground! And with the Psalmist, I can utter with joy these words from the 105th chapter:

O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name, make known his deeds among the peoples. Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually.

VOLUNTARY

Melody Davis

*OPENING HYMN 1 *Holy, Holy, Holy*

CALL TO CONFESSION: In the everyday living of life we meet the One who fills every moment with the sacred. Together, we confess our sins, trusting in God who welcomes us with forgiveness and hope.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION: **Loving God, we could live at peace with others, but we sometimes choose the path of conflict; we could welcome those we do not know, but choose, at times, to close our hearts; we could make outsiders our friends, but often choose the safety of those known to us. Forgive us. Hold on to our shaky lives, until we learn to embrace your goodness to our hearts. Help us put aside our stumbling blocks to discipleship, so we can follow Jesus Christ as he leads us to your way of everlasting life. Amen.**

ASSURANCE OF GOD’S FORGIVENESS: In our love for others, we discover God's love for us. In our forgiving of others, we learn once more how deeply God has forgiven us

RESPONSE 582 *Glory to God Whose Goodness Shines on Me*

PROCLAIMING GOD’S WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION: Startle us, O God, with your Scripture and the stirring of the Spirit within us. Then may your Word strengthen us to live in hope. In Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.

OLD TESTAMENT READING (*Pew Bible*, page 50)

Exodus 3: 1-15

As Moses was watching his father-in-law’s flock, he led them to Horeb, known as the mountain of God. We remember that there the angel of the Lord came to him in a burning bush. When Moses tried to turn away, he hears the voice of the Lord “Moses, Moses!” Moses answered: “Here I am.” The Lord responded, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals

from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” As Moses hid his face from God, God instructed him to see the misery of God’s people enslaved in Egypt and says, “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

When Moses questions his own ability to do what God has asked because the people will question his authority to speak, God says tell them this: “I AM WHO I AM.” “You shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you. The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

ANTHEM

Take Our Lives
Sanctuary Choir

Jonathan Shippley

NEW TESTAMENT READING (*Pew Bible*, page 18)

Matthew 16: 21-28

²¹From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²²And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” ²³But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

²⁴Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? ²⁷“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

*HYMN (*LUYH 57*) *We Bow Down*

SERMON

Potholes and The Rock

Sherry Holloman

Exodus 3: 1-15 and Matthew 16: 21-28

So, is this how it goes, this Christian life? We confess that Jesus Christ is Lord of our lives, and then we have to give up those lives? We have to deny ourselves and carry crosses around all the time? Is there not another way to love Jesus and live with some joy?

Surely Peter must have been asking himself those questions, especially after the conversation he has just had with Jesus in last week’s reading when he confesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and in response, Jesus says, that upon the strength of Peter’s faith, he will build the church.

Somehow, I think taking up a cross, denying self, and losing life was not part of the deal Peter expected. It had to be confusing. One moment he was hailed as a rock then the next called, "Satan!"

To better understand, we need to look at this from Jesus' perspective. He understands his purpose is mending broken relationships between God and God's people. He knows that purpose mean death on the cross. But Peter is not quite there. He pretty muchly says to Jesus, "Why in heaven's name would you walk into a trap? If you know what is going to happen to you in Jerusalem, turn! Run the opposite direction as fast as you can and we, the disciples will run with you! Why Jesus, are you taking a risk that you do not have to take?"

Knowing his purpose and determined to let nothing or no one stand in God's way, Jesus sees Peter as Satan, the devil, a stumbling block. But this exchange is not about who Peter is. It is about what Peter does or does not do. Peter is a believer. And yet, his hesitancy to act upon what he confesses makes him a whole lot like us.

We are believers whose rocky lives are full of potholes, and so we too look to Jesus for strength to navigate living around, and even, through the potholes of life. Jesus is The Rock upon which our lives, potholes, and all find strength and salvation.

Speaking of rock and potholes, Ryan and Katy, our Cali kids, took us on an outdoor adventure in the El Dorado National Forest when we visited a week ago. To say it was breath-takingly beautiful does not do it justice. But it was a kind of beauty I did not expect. As we hiked on solid rock, we had to move with the greatest intention because every few steps eroded rocks morphed into potholes. Big potholes. Thus, its name, The Potholes. To reach the "main attraction", it is about a 1.5 hike in and back. Along the way, the drab color of the rock make the most stunning backdrop for the green trees sneaking up through the cracks of the stone, along with the sometimes calm, sometimes rushing cold, very cold, blue water that snakes in and out of the potholes.

Before traveling, Ryan described the spot as a kind of Texas "Mo Ranch" rapids experience. Once there, though, gazing down from the rocky cliffs, my first thought was not about Mo Ranch or any other place. The first words uttered in the silence of my heart were, "Thank you, God!" There was absolutely no other way for me to take in this scenery as anything but a majestic work from the hands of God!

It was a holy moment where time stood still. But, not for long. Two tiny, fearless, and adventuresome rock climbers were on the move! And all this SherBear could see was Molly and Morgan leaving the security of the solid rock and falling into the potholes, some of them with depths so deep that even daddy's feet-first diving did not discover the bottom. But would I go back again with them? Absolutely.

Two competing emotions filled me while we were there: exhilaration and fear. The more I wrestled with the two, today's gospel lesson came to mind.

Even when our faith is strong and grounded, the potholes of life, those unknown adventures, create such exhilaration, despite the fear, that we can be lured into jumping in feet-first,

leaving the security of the one rock solid foundation of our faith we know as Jesus, The Rock. But, like the breath-taking beauty and security of the solid rocks at The Potholes, no matter the potholes of life into which we might fall, The Rock, continues beckoning us back to that place we know as our solid foundation. Jesus is always calling us back from the potholes of life to remind us that we are loved because of who God is, and not because of anything we try to do to win that love.

But let us be honest. There are simply times when what we do wins out over who we are. I know who I am. I am a child of God who believes Jesus is my Rock. Yet, what I do does not always bear witness to that belief. And like Peter, my Lord still loves and forgives me, and asks that I continue exploring what it means to be a more faithful follower, potholes, and all.

Part of that faithful following is coming to Jesus when we are tired and weary, worn, and troubled. That is the part we like. But Jesus says there is another side to this disciple thing. We are to deny those things that seek to separate us from God's love and be willing to sacrifice the things of the world that make life easier for us, yet harder for others. If you are willing to follow my example, Jesus says, it might lead to some risky and rocky adventures, but it will always lead you back to a healed and solid relationship with the God who created you, who knows you better than anyone else, and whose love is out the core of your being.

Some people believe that that surely Jesus would never intentionally ask us to haul around heavy burdens just to prove we are followers. Others believe that is exactly what Jesus is asking of us. As people of reformed faith, we know a balance is needed, and that balance comes when our lives are built on the solid foundation of living as Jesus lived. It comes when we willingly sacrifice in order for others to believe Jesus is The Rock upon which we can build our lives. Jesus does not call us to sacrifice simply for the sake of sacrificing. When we give of ourselves to God and others, we most fully experience the joy of a God-created life.

Peter knows Jesus is the Messiah. He believes Jesus is his friend and those affirmations have him asking the question, "Who wants to send a friend into danger, especially if you know suffering and death are inevitable?"

So, in one emotion-packed encounter, Peter forgets that all of Jesus' life, all of his life, rests in the hands of God and he shouts out, "No, Lord! This cannot happen to you! They cannot kill you!"

Peter's anguish is an emotion I believe any of us would feel for a friend. So why is Jesus so hard on him? His answer is straightforward. Satan, through Peter, is tempting Jesus yet again; he is tempting him as he did in the wilderness with the promise of power. Jesus chooses purpose over power.

If anyone understands temptation, it is Jesus, and he is not willing for the tempter to ever win. So, he resists the plea to run and instead takes the rocky road that leads straight to the cross. And it is on that cross that Jesus is for us the symbol of unmovable faith like a rock.

Is Jesus asking Peter, asking us, to deny self by losing life so much so that we forget to live life? Absolutely not. Jesus wants the best of life that we can have. For Jesus, that best revolves around and finds grounding in loving and living from the core of who we are, God's children. The best of life, Jesus says, is following the call that God has on our lives, even when that call is not glamorous, or joyful. The best of life means that even when God's call finds us face to face with the potholes of life, we keep trusting that call also includes the ever-present, rock-solid strength of Jesus, the foundation under each footstep.

Building up that foundation comes in our willingness to be and do as God asks of us, remembering that even when we find ourselves tempted to dive into life's potholes, The Rock's presence, love and forgiveness are forever etched into our souls. Sometimes, we just have to reach out and grab the hand that is waiting to pull us back to solid ground.

On their own, potholes can deceive and lure us into some dangerous places. But, then again, potholes can call us to some risky places for the sake of God's good for all. Knowing the difference between them can lead us to rocky roads or to The Rock.

Peter was so focused and worried about death that it took the joy right out of his living. So, Jesus reminds Peter, the others, and us what the best of life looks like. Jesus says, and I am quoting scripture from the Message: "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You are not in the driver's seat; I am. Do not run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I will show you how. Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?"

I could see the majestic beauty of The Potholes calling me to come, yet I still wrestled with the desire to turn back because it looked too dangerous, too risky. I had a choice, and I am grateful I did not turn back. In my mind and heart are memories now of the forever holiness that I experienced with creation and with my family.

Likewise, we can play it safe when it comes to our faith, and we will not be punished, Jesus says. But every time God puts an uncomfortable, risky, even dangerous situation in our lives, for the sake of God's kingdom, then through the Spirit nudges us to move on and we do not; well, Jesus says our lives will be a little less best for it.

Jesus is not asking us to be irresponsible daredevils. He is asking of us that we live a life that makes a God-good difference. He is asking of us that we not spend a lifetime counting the cost of following, or so safeguarding our lives that we forget to tell those who most need to know that, in Christ, this life is good and the best of life is yet to come.

So, may our lives be so grounded upon Jesus, The Rock, that we are not afraid to dive into potholes that open up for us, and for others, the pure beauty and joy of faithful following. And, when we are tempted like Peter to find God's ways hard to follow and try to skirt life's potholes, may we hear loudly, clearly and lovingly what our Lord say to us: Get behind me Satan!

Because it is upon Jesus, The Rock, who sacrificed his life for our joyful living now and always, we find our forever firm foundation! Amen

RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

from *This We Believe*

We believe in God, who does not wait for us to find ourselves but comes seeking the lost and calling us into a new way. We believe in Jesus, who calls us to follow and gives us the power to become, both in word and deed, the children of the living God. We believe in the Spirit by whom Jesus still comes to us, calling us to follow in humble service. We believe in the Church as the body of Christ, called to respect and support one another through joys and tribulations as we travel the road towards the “promised land” of God’s future. This we believe. Amen

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH AND THE LORD’S PRAYER: Gracious God, in love you created us, and in love you sustain us, day after day. So it is with confidence that we bring our prayers to you, knowing that you hear us, and will respond.

We pray for the world around us, for the many who continue to suffer and call out for help: for those without enough to eat; for those caught up in violence and political uprisings; for those picking up the pieces after a natural disaster; for those desperate to find work to support their families. Gracious God, hear our prayer, and in your love, answer.

We also pray for family and friends who are suffering: those struggling physically or emotionally, those working to overcome mental illness; those facing challenges at home or at work; those grieving the death of a loved one. Gracious God, hear our prayer, and in your love, answer.

God, you have called us to pray for our enemies; to bless, rather than curse, those who deliberately seek to harm us. We bring their names before you now: those who have hurt us, physically or emotionally; those who have stolen from us, or cheated us of what was rightfully ours; those who have spread rumors about us, or turned our friends against us. We ask you to bless them. Open our hearts so that we may see them as you see them, and be able to respond to them with your love. Gracious God, hear our prayer, and in your love, answer.

We pray for your church around the world, that it would be a living demonstration of your coming kingdom: offering hospitality to all, ready to help in times of need, showing love to friends and enemies alike, seeking to live in peace with all. Gracious God, hear our prayer, and in your love, answer.

For our church family, our families and friends, we pray...

God, we praise you for your faithful love, and for the mercy you have shown toward us. Open our eyes to recognize your presence in our lives. Give us grace to hear your call, and courage to follow without hesitation, knowing that your way is the only way that leads to life. In the name of Jesus, our Savior and Lord, we pray, 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.

OFFERTORY SENTENCE: May Christ rule in our hearts and lives forever and may our offerings be used as powerful witnesses to his kingdom of love, justice, mercy and peace.

OFFERTORY *Lord Who Has Formed Me* Arlen Clark
Sanctuary Choir

*RESPONSE 609 *Praise God, from Whom All Blessing Flow*

*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING: Lord, may we always give our gifts to you as a thank offering for the magnificent gift of Jesus that you so generously gave to us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

GOING INTO THE WORLD WITH GOD'S WORD

* INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP AND BENEDICTION

God's children still suffer—
whether from famine, or natural disaster, or poverty or violence.
Like Moses, we too are called by God
to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.
To speak against injustice and inequality,
to speak against the political and economic powers of this world
which continue to push down the poor and the powerless.
And, like Moses, we do not go alone,
but in the strength of God who calls and sends us.
So go in confidence and hope,
knowing that the great I AM goes with you.

*CLOSING HYMN 724 *O Jesus I have Promised*