

Psalm 46:1-7
Hebrews 13:7-16

World Communion Sunday
Midway Presbyterian Church
October 2, 2021

The Good News for Today

Introduction to the Psalm

Our psalm reading today is part of a hymn celebrating Zion as the special city to which God has pledged himself and through which he will bless the world. This psalm is the first psalm that John Calvin thought he ought to translate from the Hebrew to French. Listen to these words from Psalm 46, verses 1-7...

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

In our Epistle Lesson from the letter to the Hebrews the author declares that their leaders who spoke God's word to them should be heeded. They trusted in Christ—the One who is eternally trustworthy. The author warns against strange teachings. And he encourages the people to do good and to share what they have; it is pleasing to God. Listen to these words from Hebrews 13:7-16...

Sermon

The late writer and preacher, Lloyd C. Douglas told about once asking an elderly music teacher, "Well, what's the good news today?" The old man went over to a tuning fork suspended by a cord, struck it with a mallet and said, "That, my friend, is 'A.'" It was 'A' all day yesterday. It will be 'A' all day tomorrow, next week, and for a thousand years. The soprano upstairs warbles off-key, the tenor next door flats on his high ones, and the piano across the hall is out of tune. But that," he said, striking the tuning fork again, "is 'A.' And that, my friend, is the good news for today."

Some things never change. The navigator needs the north star, the designer and builder the plumb line, the mathematician the square root, and the musician the fixed note.

And for us Christians, The Letter to the Hebrews sounds such an unwavering note when it declares, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” For us, this is the note that never wavers. By Christ we can tune our lives, in him we can find our hope, and through him we can know the unchanging grace, truth, and love of God.

There are approximately 2½ billion Christians in the world today. And in that vast multitude there are different backgrounds, different colors, different nationalities. But we all have one thing in common—the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Today—World Communion Sunday—we recognize and affirm our essential unity. On this day the walls of the upper room fall away and we all sit at table with our Lord. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians:

We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (10:17)

Jesus Christ, the great head of the church, is our host. He stands at the head of the world’s largest table and invites all who name his name to come and remember and celebrate. Not only can we celebrate his saving sacrifice, his blood poured out for us and our salvation, until he comes again, but also we can celebrate that note that never wavers:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

For Christianity is the unchanging love of God expressed in his Son Jesus Christ. What is God like? You see him revealed in his Son—full of grace and truth.

The grace of God is the miracle of a stable child become the Savior of the world, forgiveness from a cross of pain, a second chance for anyone. The grace of God is the understanding heart of the universe; the recognition of human worth; the importance of each man, woman, and child; and the sacredness of life.

The grace of God is the welcome that awaits the prodigal limping home from the far country. It is the stability that undergirds weakness; the strength that offers encouragement amidst struggle; the compassion that ministers to our frailty. It is the assurance that Christ's forgiveness does not fluctuate, his mercy is sure, his sacrifice cannot be improved, his intercession for us abides.

The grace of God is the promise that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that we have come to know in Christ Jesus. That even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, he is with us. It is the promise that a place has been prepared for us, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The writer of Hebrews tells us to remember our leaders, those who spoke to us the Word of God. And those who bless us in their example and in their inspiration. Some of those leaders in Hebrews were martyrs and died with great courage. This same writer tells us in chapter 12 that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. And among those witnesses are Marshall and Jane Kowalski, Bill and Mary Kay, Beverly Wofford, Hazel Scarboro, Bea Heywood, and we could go on. Yes, there is the communion of the saints—God's people in heaven and on earth. "Therefore," he continues, "let us lay aside every weight and sin which does so easily beset, and run with perseverance the race set before us." Looking where? "Looking unto Jesus—the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."

At communion we celebrate God's perfect love revealed in the gift of his Son. To be sure, God's perfect love in Jesus Christ can bring us to our knees, as we measure our lives by that love, our evasions by that truth, our compromises by that cross. But then we hear these words:

This is my body, broken for you...this is my blood, poured out for the remission of sins." (1 Corinthians 11:24-25)

This is the length and breadth and height and depth of God's revelation to human beings; the love of God, the truth of God, and the grace of God:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

My friends, it's no news to you that we live in a world of turmoil and tumult.

Everywhere influences are at work to destroy, topple, desecrate, terrorize, and to bring disorder, mistrust, suspicion and hate—be it an adult leading a child astray, a suicide bomber in the Mideast, or a bias in reporting the news. Beyond that, familiar landmarks of morality have been blurred, fixed points of society have become obscured, government agencies have become untrustworthy, respected academic institutions are intolerant of views not politically correct. And it seems that nothing is sacred anymore.

In our reading today from Psalm 46, we hear of an earth that changes, of mountains shaking, of waters that roar and foam. We hear of nations in an uproar and kingdoms tottering. And the Psalmist does not speak of an unassailable city of God, a metropolis of security to exempt its inhabitants from the dangers of life. What the Psalmist declares is a God who will help the people in whose midst he has chosen to be.

The Letter to the Hebrews called the people of God to see life as a pilgrimage.

For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city
that is to come. (13:14)

A pilgrimage, but not without a Presence. For even though we may suffer, as did our Lord, he will be with us, come what may.

Change can be both exhilarating and frightening. "New occasions teach new duties," says the poet. But there is an unnerving quality as well—as directions change, landmarks fade, and fixed points totter. Midway Church has changed dramatically from the way it was twenty-

five years ago. And more changes are coming to our surroundings. Note the work has already begun on building houses just across the road.

Our state has changed. Not that long ago, Greenville stood at the heart of a thriving textile industry in South Carolina, and king cotton dominated the economy of the South. When we were first married, Hazel and I lived at Lydia Mill, just out of Clinton. I served as the Student Pastor of the Lydia Mill Presbyterian Church. That mill is closed and that mill town is not the vibrant community that it was then.

And our family situations have changed. Loved ones lost. Sickness and disability. Job changes. Sometimes we feel like a tiny boat in the midst of a vast tumultuous sea. But Christ comes to us on the waters and bids us,

Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid. (Matthew 14:27b)

Outwardly there may be every kind of threat, but we have the assurance that the One *who was in the very beginning*, and the One *who will be in the very end*—this same One *is with us today*. And so we join in communion with a multitude of others in giving thanks to God and remembering Jesus Christ and his saving sacrifice.

The Christian faith speaks to this change and always has. The first century was a time of change, and in every age since, there have been periods of upheaval and uncertainty. We live in a world of change. And yet the age-old message of the gospel has always been constant and consistent; it has sounded a note that never wavers:

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

And that, my friends, is the good news for today.

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