

## Sunday morning worship

October 10, 2021

### Call to worship (from Psalm 9)

Praise the Lord, with all your heart! Tell of all the wonders that God has done!

Be glad and rejoice in the Lord! Sing praise to the name of the Most High!

Our God is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble,  
the One who has never forsaken anyone who seeks him.

The Lord will judge the world in righteousness, and govern the people with justice!

### Opening prayer

We do praise you, O God, and sing with joy as your people! We tell of your works on our behalf in the past, we see you working among us now, and we know that you will never forsake us in the future. Help us to praise you not only with our voices, but with our very lives as well. May all who meet us exclaim, "Those are the people of God!" Through our love for others may we praise the One who has done so much for us! Amen.

### Scripture reading James 1:2-5, 12

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.*

### Sermon "Lost in Translation"

Why do we use words to communicate? That seems like a silly question, but it's a good one. We could use hand gestures such as are used in American Sign Language. We could draw pictures, or even just point to what we're talking about. But words are a quick way to discuss things, actions, and concepts. When I say "dog," you immediately know that I am talking about a small, furry animal with 4 legs and a tail. Even if that dog is a Great Dane, we're on the same page. Of course, words can be confusing because their meanings sometimes change over time. When I was a teenager, a "thong" was something you wore on your feet, what we now call a "flip-flop." Today, though, a "thong" is worn on a very different part of the body! The confusion can be even worse when we are using words of another language. A friend of mine who taught dance for several years in Italy told me about an episode that happened not long after he moved to Italy. He thought that he was telling the dancers to get up on the stage. When they all roared with laughter, he realized that he had asked them to get up on the ashtray! Yes, words can be confusing, even though they are necessary for us to communicate.

The most confusion arises when we are translating from one language to another. We can't avoid that when we're reading the Bible in English. The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, and the New Testament in Greek. Those languages don't translate easily into English. Hebrew is a very ambiguous language; the same Hebrew word might be translated as several English words. We run into the opposite problem when we translate from the Greek, which is a language that is much more precise than English. For example, the word "love" in an English New Testament might mean the Greek word "eros" (physical love), "philia" (brotherly love), or "agape" (caring about the welfare of someone who is not in your family). Three Greek words; one English word for all of them. There are even Greek words that have *no* English equivalent, so we have a hard time translating it at all. James used one of those words in this morning's

scripture reading. It's the word that I translated as "perseverance." Listen again to what James says. *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces **perseverance**. Let **perseverance** finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. Blessed is the one who **perseveres** under trial...*

I want to consider that one word for just a minute so that you can more fully understand what James is saying to us. The word that is translated here as "perseverance" is, in Greek, pronounced "hoo-poe-moe-nay." It's translated all kinds of ways in different Bibles because English doesn't have one word that captures all its nuances.

Some Bibles translate it "patience." When I think of patience, though, I think of Grandma patiently waiting in her rocking chair, just passing the time until something happens. That's not at all what hoo-poe-moe-nay means.

Other Bibles translate it as "endurance." That's misleading, too. Some endurance is just gritting your teeth and hanging on until something is over – like enduring a toothache until the dentist has time to see you. Both "patience" and "endurance" can be misleading translations.

Sometimes, it's translated as "steadfastness," the quality of being firm and unwavering. That's closer to what James means. He certainly wants us to be firm in our commitments, but sometimes we do waver when we hoo-poe-moe-nay.

The Bible that we use translates it "perseverance," doing something despite delay or difficulty. That's the closest of the four choices, in my opinion.

There is still another translation that I like even better, although I have never found it in a Bible. That translation is "continuing resistance." It is a translation that captures the active quality of hoo-poe-moe-nay. When you hoo-poe-moe-nay, you *do* something! It may not be a large something that you do – in fact, in many cases, it is a very small thing – but when you hoo-poe-moe-nay, you actively resist something; and you *continue* to resist it! One of my friends likes to say that "Hoo-poe-moe-nay" is "Keeping on keeping on." Keep going! Don't stop! Slow down when you need to, but forge ahead! The best example of hoo-poe-moe-nay that I know is the story of the little Dutch boy who held back the sea by putting his finger in the dike. You probably know the story. The little boy was walking home in the evening after visiting his grandfather when he noticed a trickle of water coming from a hole in the dike. He stuck his finger in it and yelled for help; but no one came. He stayed there all night, cold, hungry, and frightened, until someone came looking for him in the morning. Because of his action, the dike was repaired and the town saved from flooding. That's hoo-poe-moe-nay: continuing resistance to something.

Of course, James wasn't talking about the danger of flooding from a broken dike. He was talking about dangers that the early Christian community faced. That community of faith had to deal with all kinds of difficult situations! Christians who had come from Judaism were told over and over again by their Jewish neighbors that they were heretics. Christians from pagan families risked rejection. And all of them faced hostility, if not outright persecution, from the Roman government. James told them to hoo-poe-moe-nay: continue to resist! Be *patient* when it seems that the hostility will never end. *Endure* the criticism from friends and family. Be *steadfast* in your faith. And *persevere* – keep on keeping on!

He says the very same thing to us today. We may not experience the same level of hostility and criticism that early Christian communities faced, but we face other situations that call for active resistance. The one that may be the most crucial, for our entire planet, is our worship of wealth. Capitalism tells us that "Greed is good," and we have bought into it hook, line, and sinker. The rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. Opportunities are drying up as huge corporations value profits over human dignity; and our planet itself is dying as plastics clog the

ocean, continuing development destroys habitats, and animals die as the climate on which they depend changes almost overnight. Our Christian faith calls for us to actively resist all this; but who can do anything about it?

One woman did! Her name was Marjory Stoneman Douglas. When you hear that name, you probably think of the Florida high school that was named in her honor. 17 people were shot and killed there by a gunman back in 2018. She deserves to be remembered for much more than that, though! Marjory was a journalist, an author, and a conservationist. It is not an overstatement to say that she saved the Everglades. When she moved to south Florida from Massachusetts in 1915, the Everglades were thought to be a worthless swamp. She became convinced that the Everglades was vital not only to the health of the plants and animals living there, but to south Florida as well. In 1947 her book *River of Grass* was published, saying "There are no other Everglades in the world." That began the movement to save the entire area from development. Of course, she was resisted by agricultural and business interests who wanted to benefit from that development; but she kept on keeping on. During her lifetime, the Everglades were made a National Park with all the protection that offers. When she was 79 years old, she successfully resisted the construction of a jetport in the northwest Everglades by organizing the group the Friends of the Everglades. She made her voice heard to all kinds of groups from local government councils to the Army Corps of Engineers. During one speech to that group, an officer dropped his pen and bent down to retrieve it. "Colonel!" she said. "You can crawl under that table and hide, but you can't get away from me!" In 1993, when she was 103, she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Until her death at the age of 108, she continued to be a voice for the Everglades, keeping on keeping on. She is rightly called the Grande Dame of the Everglades.

We Christians are persevering in all kinds of things. Environmental destruction, political corruption, and corporate greed all call for us to resist the abuse of our fellow human beings and of our beautiful planet! Choose a cause that is close to your heart and find a way to resist. Environmental protection is my issue of choice; but there are many, many more. Maybe you want to take up the cause of children who go to school hungry wearing shoes that are two sizes too small. Go for it! Maybe your heart is in the oppression of Native Americans who are crowded on reservations that offer little in the way of job opportunities. That's a great cause! And we hear all the day that Black Lives Matter. They do indeed matter; and Blacks welcome non-blacks to join them in their struggle for real equality.

But, you are probably thinking, I'm not Marjory Stoneman Douglas! I don't have her skills! Well, you may not be able to write a book, but you can write to your local, state, and national representatives. You may not ever give a speech to the Army Corps of Engineers, but you can talk to your neighbors. You may not be involved in stopping the development of a jetport, but you can stop buying items with plastic packaging and carry reusable tote bags. Keep on keeping on! Of course, we are facing huge odds. But we are not alone. Millions of people are resisting right along with us! Some can do that in large ways; others do it in small ways. And don't forget: God is helping us, too, to hoo-poe-moe-nay against the forces of oppression. Remember what James said at the close of this morning's reading: *Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.* God is on our side. We'll make it through all right.

#### Pastoral prayer

O God, just as the disciples heard Christ's words of promise, help us to hear your words spoken in each of our common, everyday experiences:

coffee on our table in the morning;  
the simple gesture of opening a door to go out, free;  
the shouts of children in the parks;  
a familiar song that calls forth memories;  
a beloved tree that offers us shade in the summer heat.  
These simple things speak to us of your mercy, and tell us that life can be good.

Though these everyday gifts, help us to remember those who do not receive them:  
those on whose tables there is no bread;  
those who are prisoners in hospitals or prisons, and whose doors never open;  
children whose feet have no shoes, and whose eyes have no hope;  
songs that glorify war and death;  
barren areas whose trees have been cut down for human profit.  
May we learn that we participate in the ministry of Jesus Christ when we work continually for the good of the last and the least.

Let us pray now for all for those whom Christ loves:

We pray for the affluent in developed and developing countries, that they may not succumb to materialism. Help us to discover our own worth in terms of what we can become as human beings rather than in what we own or consume.

We pray for countries where there is exploitation of natural resources, where the earth is desecrated to satisfy the lust for profit. Save us from misusing what you have given for all to share.

We pray for all tribal and aboriginal peoples who are threatened with the loss of their ancestral lands. Help us to remember that the land is yours, and that we hold it in trust for future generations.

We pray for all minority communities who are faced with the loss of their cultural identity. Help us to respect each person's way of life.

We pray for the refugees forcibly uprooted from their homeland to live as aliens in foreign lands who reject and ridicule them. Help us to find human solutions to this human tragedy.

We pray for all peoples separated from one another because of religious or political differences. Help us to work for tolerance, dialogue, and good will among peoples of different faiths and political convictions.

And we pray for all who commit themselves to God's mission to establish human relationships based upon freedom and justice. Save us from the sin of indifference and give us the courage to work for justice and responsible freedom.

In his life, Jesus identified with the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized in his own society. Help us, O God, to identify with them through him; and give us the perseverance to continue to work on their behalf. It is Jesus' name that we pray all these things; and we join now in the prayer that he taught us to 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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass 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.

*Note: This prayer was adapted from two other prayers, both of which are included in the Chalice Hymnal. The first was written by Rubem A. Alves of Brazil; and the second is from the 7<sup>th</sup>*

*Assembly of the Christian Conference in Asia which was held in India in 1981. Although that conference was held 40 years ago, the concerns are just as pressing today in 2021.*

### Offering

In the book of Galatians (6:9), Paul writes, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." Part of doing good is sharing what we have with others. I invite you now to continue your ministry by sharing a portion of what you have through this morning's offering.

### Prayer of dedication

We give you what is yours already, generous God! We ask that you help us to use it wisely for the good of this world that you love so much. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

### Benediction

Now go forth to love and serve the Lord!

Despite the resistance of the world, persevere! Don't give up!

Continue to work for the welfare of every human being  
and this good creation that God has given to us!

And the God who created you will surround you with grace;  
the Christ who redeemed you will bring new life out of every situation;  
and the Spirit who guides you will empower you to keep on keeping on,  
today and forever. Amen.

Tuesday, October 5

Good morning! This is Pastor Lynn with today's thought.

This past Sunday, for Worldwide Communion, you were invited to come to worship with a bread that represented the heritage of your family. Pastor Alecia and I wondered how many of you would do that. We were surprised and delighted that so many of you who attended worship in person brought bread with you! You brought Bavarian pretzel bread, Scottish oatmeal bread, Mexican tortillas, Indian naan, English muffins, and Middle Eastern pita bread (forgive me for the breads that I have missed) and we celebrated Holy Communion using Hawaiian sweet bread! All those breads were donated to St. Patrick's soup kitchen after worship to help to feed our hungry neighbors. The marvelous diversity of breads got me to thinking about the diversity of all of you. We are not all the same. We have different interests, talents, and gifts; and that's a good thing! Although we are all made in the image of God, we are not made in the fullness of that image. How could we be? But we all have some of it! For some, that image is manifested in artistic creativity; for others, in knowledge; for others, in wisdom; for others, in skills in practical areas like plumbing or electrical work. None of these gifts are better than any of the others! If anyone ever tells you that you "should" be this or that, remember that you are part of the image of God, and use the gifts that you have with joy and gratitude! Oatmeal bread, pita bread, and tortillas all have their place at our table. And so do you. Blessings on all of you!

### **Thought for the Day – Oct. 7, 2021**

Hello. This is Pastor Alecia with Today's thought. This week Pastor Lynn and I attended an on-line clergy workshop dealing with streaming church events on-line. The presenter opened with three questions designed to make us think about the changes the pandemic has brought to our churches.

The first question was, "What has the pandemic made us yearn for in our church?" in other words, what do we really want to be able to do again? What is essential to us as church?

The next question was, "What will we not miss from before the pandemic?" What can we let go of? What is non-essential to our church life?

And lastly, "What new things have come into being because of the pandemic?" What new ways of being church or doing ministry have been created over this past year and a half?

These are spiritual questions that can help us discern the future life of the church: What is important for us to start doing again? What is deadwood we no longer need? And where is new growth and creativity happening? These are good points for us to reflect on as we begin our time of transition in the church.

These are also good questions for us as individuals as we look at how the pandemic has changed our lives: What's important to us? What is not needed? And what is new in our life?

I'm reminded of Jesus' parable of the vine and the branches from the Gospel of John, chapter 15. Jesus says The Father is the vinedresser. He cuts off any dead wood that doesn't bear fruit, He prunes the fruitful branches so they will produce more fruit, and He encourages new growth for the future harvest.

We have certainly been pruned in this past year; both as a church and as individuals. It is fruitful for us to look at how God has used this time to prepare us for new growth, new priorities, and new ways of ministry. Blessings to you all as you ponder these questions.