



At-Home Worship Kit

Occidental and Eagle Rock Presbyterian Churches

March 15th and 22nd, 2020

Welcome everyone to the At-Home Worship Kit. These are certainly interesting and taxing times and the church leadership is highly thankful for everyone's flexibility and willingness to change things up. As much as we love being together, sometimes the most loving thing to do is not to be together, and that's the case right now. While we know that God protects us, we also know that that very same protection comes through the thoughtfulness and carefulness of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. By not gathering together, we are saying that we value the health and lives of those around us who are most vulnerable. And that right there is the love and protection of God.

But just because we won't be together for worship service, it doesn't mean that we can't worship God! Here you will find two "services" that you can do at your leisure over the next two Sunday mornings. You'll find prayers, sermons, and some elements for thought and reflection. You can go through this on your own, or, if you live with other people or family members, you can gather around and go through the services together. You can divide up the liturgy and take turns leading. You might even find that someone is a gifted preacher! Have fun with this, and use this as an opportunity to find some different ways to give praise to God.

God is with us wherever we might be. Our God is good and will see us through even the most difficult of times. While we might not meet in person, I am still available to talk on the phone, email, or text. Just reach out!

Pastor Erik Dailey

March 22, 2020
At-Home Service for the Lord's Day

Welcome

Welcome to the first At-Home Worship Service. Find a comfortable place to sit. Take a few deep breaths, and bring yourself to a place where you're ready to hear from God. If you'd like, put on some music you enjoy that can bring you to a worshipful place. You might be at home, but God is still there with you, waiting to hear from you, and waiting for your listening spirit.

Call to Worship

The Lord is my Shepherd—I shall not want. I seek the grace of God and my cup runs over. I seek the strength of God and my cup runs over. The Lord is my Shepherd and I lack nothing. I will worship the Lord with all my heart.

Call to Confession

As part of our worship, we come to God and acknowledge that we fall short, that we don't live up to God's desires for our lives. But we also know that God's mercy is abundant. And so we pray our prayer of confession to God, knowing that God's forgiveness will never run out.

Prayer of Confession

Master, Savior, Shepherd, Messiah—we know you by many names, Lord. Your presence fills our lives—all that we are and all that we have comes from you; all that you do declares your love for us. Yet when trouble comes, when adversity plagues us, we wonder where you are; we even wonder who you are. How quickly we forget that you are always with us. Dispel our gloom and despair. Change our garments of darkness into robes of dazzling light. Spread your table before us, and feed us from your hand. Lead us in the paths of righteousness, for it is in your name that we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Even in the darkest valley, though death's shadow may threaten us, we need not fear, for the Lord is with us. God will comfort and shelter us. No one can snatch us out of the Lord's hand. God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Know today that you are forgiven and be at peace. Amen.

Sermon Introduction

Today's sermon comes from The Rev. Jeff Bryan, a fellow Presbyterian pastor and long-time friend of mine (Pastor Erik). This sermon was originally preached during our time together in seminary, in Miller Chapel, the campus place of worship, and was later published in a compilation of sermons written by young preachers.

Sermon

“One Red, One Blue,”
The Rev. Jeff Bryan

Psalm 23 (KJV)

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
²He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
he leadeth me beside the still waters.
³He restoreth my soul:
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
⁴Yea, though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil:
for thou art with me;
thy rod and thy staff
they comfort me.

⁵Thou preparast a table before me
in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil;
my cup runneth over.
⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life:
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

It never could have happened in winter. I know it was not in the spring, and I am certain it was not in the summer. It must have happened in the fall. I know it wasn't winter, because I was wearing my super-cool, oh so rock-and-roll, red Saucony sneakers, and everybody knows: Jeff Bryan does not wear sneakers in winter. I hate it when my feet get cold. And, I hate it when my feet get wet, too. So it could not have happened in the spring. It rains in the spring in New Jersey, and in those days Jeff Bryan wore rain boots. And I know it didn't happen in the summer, because this story is set in Miller Chapel, the center of Princeton Theological Seminary's campus, where during the academic year they held worship services every weekday morning. There are no chapel services in the summer. It must have been a Friday, too, because it was a Communion service. Every Friday was a Communion service. I should know—during my three years at seminary I went to Miller Chapel every time the doors were opened. Believe me, it was not because I was the most spiritual student, the most pious, or even because I wanted to look good in the eyes of my peers. No, exactly the opposite: I went to chapel every day out of need. And on that day, nothing could have prepared me for what glorious, heavenly foolishness awaited.

This story is set in the fall, on a Friday in Miller Chapel, Princeton, New Jersey, and in a time in my life when I was on a spiritual plateau. All my major spiritual revelations and show-stopping epiphanies were months past, and I was coasting. Well, not coasting exactly. It was more like I was stalling. Perhaps you know what I mean. I could not pray. I could not lift my heart to God. My religion bored me. I couldn't read the Bible without falling asleep. My faith was so watered down, so distant, so empty; or worse: a performance, a repetition, the preservation of a faith that once was, not the passion of a faith that is. This had gone on for

months. Whenever I tried to talk to God, my tongue stuck in my mouth and I couldn't form a word. So, I prayed only one prayer: Psalm 23. For about a year, day in and day out: Psalm 23. Most times, when I went to chapel services, I just sat there quietly and listened to other people pray. Sometimes, I tried to join in, but mostly I just stalled, and inevitably returned to Psalm 23. Like two inmates locked up in a prison cell, when you spend a year with only one prayer in your heart, you either learn to like each other or somebody gets killed. Psalm 23 and I became good friends.

Nothing against all the others, but I've always preferred the King James Version. It's the translation they use in funerals on TV, and it's the version they used in the small Baptist church of my youth. I dissected every word of this good friend, this psalm of David, number 23. Sometimes, and even now, I have to struggle to get past the first phrase, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want." I interpret that line this way: I will never lack. I will never go without. I will always have what I need, because the Lord takes care of me. It's like that old hymn says in an octave I cannot reach, "All I have needed thy hand hath provided. Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!"

When I prayed the second sentence of Psalm 23, I would pause on the green pastures and the still waters, and I would thank God for all the wonderful blessings in my life—my health, my friends, my family (some living, some recently departed). Or, I would sit in my melancholy and recall all the good things, all the green pastures and still waters where God restored my soul, all the straight and narrow paths through which the Lord has led me, and all the wide roads to destruction from which the Lord has pulled me kicking, screaming, and unwilling, to repent. I would remember all the times I walked through the valley of the shadow of death, and how the strength of the Lord was all I had. Do you remember those times—the weakest and darkest days in your life—how the Lord carried you through?

When I walked into Miller Chapel on that Communion service Friday, in the cool, gold and red-leafed autumn, I walked into worship with two friends: Psalm 23, and Andy, a man after my own heart. In those days Andy wore punk rock, powder blue, Puma skateboard sneakers. Andy and I sat on the left side of the chapel, close to the front (a little too close to the front for my comfort). In those days, and honestly even now, I preferred to sit toward the back, where my inability to pray and my insecurity in the faith were hidden by the fact that everyone was sitting in front of me and looking the other way. No one knows you're struggling when you can see them and they can't see you. But not this Friday. It must have been Andy's idea. We were sitting in the front. I can't remember who preached; I can't remember what hymns we sang; I can't remember what seminary professor presided over communion, who gave the invitation to the table, or who began to pray. And as usual, I had no words of my own, but I had Psalm 23, and the words of the psalm and the communion scene began to merge. And the words whispered like thunder in my soul: "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

A table. God prepares a table before me. It is the same table at which Jesus Christ sat the night he was betrayed. It's the same table at which Peter and James and John and Judas and my mother and my grandfather and all the saints of the ages have sat. The table of fellowship. The table of Communion. The real presence of Jesus Christ. I looked at the table that the Lord prepared for me that day in the chapel—the same table prepared for us month after

month here in this church—and it became real to me that this table is prepared in the presence of our enemies.

Do we know our enemies? Who are our enemies, exactly? For me, the enemy was history: the horrible, unrelenting sins of our ancestors, untold tragedies, those experiences in grade school and high school that multiplied every baseless fear. For me, the enemy was a voice in my head, a voice that had become habit, the voice of accusation and humiliation, a voice that told me I was weird and worthless, a voice that told me I was no good. The enemies. Do we know our enemies: those who taught us to hate ourselves, those patterns of thinking that hold us hostage, the people, places, and things in our lives that have opposed God's great desire for us to be God's joyous children? Do we know our enemies? Are they inside us? Are they outside us? Is it an experience, a person, a time, a system?

I began to cry that day, sitting in Miller Chapel, on a Friday, beside my friend Andy. I began to cry, because our God prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies. Miller Chapel had become a living scene from Psalm 23, where all my enemies had to stand back and watch while the Lord threw a party, in my honor. The voices and the experiences and everything that had ever held me back had to stand still and shut up and witness as the Lord of Lords anointed my head with oil and declared me his beloved child, while the Prince of Peace, Jesus himself, poured my drink until my cup overflowed and the wine ran down my hand. Oh I cried and I cried.

When I try to tell myself that I'm worthless, the Lord prepares a table in the presence of my enemies. When we think that we are not worthy of anyone's love, the Lord throws us a party in the presence of our enemies. When, out of selfishness, we think we deserve everyone's love, the Lord prepares us a table in the presence of our enemy, pride, and reminds us that it is his humble, broken body that he gives away. And then Jesus calls us to do the same: to be merciful and generous just like him. When we hurt ourselves, when we live false lives, even when our faith is dead, our Lord Jesus Christ gives us his broken body and says, "I love you. I loved you when no one else would. I love you even when you don't love yourself." Christ promises us in this meal that his goodness, his mercy, is inescapable. We are completely submerged in the grace of God, and his love will not let us go. We will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

I kept crying. I could not stop. Psalm 23 and the Lord's Supper had ganged up on me. And then something silly, something ridiculous, something absolutely amazing happened. Andy, my old friend and chapel buddy, put his arm around me. He reached down, and he yanked the super cool, oh-so-rock-and-roll red Saucony sneaker off of my left foot. Then he took the punk rock, powder blue, Puma skateboard sneaker off his own foot. And he traded me.

So there I sat, looking like a clown, with my face a sobbing mess, and a pool of tears collecting between my two miss-matched shoes, one red and one blue. So there I sat, with all the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection given to me in a simple, humble, and mysterious meal: complete acceptance, complete approval, complete communion, and a love that knows no bounds. So there I sat, the real presence of Jesus Christ there in the bread and wine, and also in a weird way, the real presence of Christ in my friend Andy. I walked out of Miller Chapel that Friday, in the autumn, dressed like a fool—a fool who had but a glimpse of the truth, a brief glimpse of the truth of Christ's incarnation and the power of the Holy Spirit. "I love you. I love you, my brother. And today I'm gonna walk in your shoe, and you're gonna walk in mine.

Today, I'm gonna carry whatever it is that brings your tears. I will wear your humanity, and you're gonna wear the reminder of my loving spirit. My brotherhood and my love walk with you wherever you go." I didn't mind all the hushed comments, the questioning stares, and the judging glares as I walked around town that day. I was a fool in their eyes, and I was a fool in the eyes of my enemies. But that's all right, because they had to stand back, and shut up, and watch. Because I was, and I am—and church, we all are—the beloved child, the guest of honor at God's great feast.

Prayers of the People

Take a moment to think through the names of people in your life who need God's presence. Who's hurting? Who mourns? Who lives in fear? Who has great needs? Who are these people? Think about those people, near or far, as you go through the following prayer. Feel free to say their names out loud or even write them down here in the margins. They are the people God has placed in your heart today. Lift them up to God.

Let us pray.

Lord God, may we who are merely inconvenienced this week remember those whose lives are at stake. May we who have no risk factors for illness remember those most vulnerable. May we who have the luxury of working from home remember those who must choose between preserving their health and making their rent. May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close remember those who have no options. May we who have to cancel our trips remember those who have no safe place to go. May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of economy remember those who have no margin at all. May we who settle in for a quarantine at home remember those who have no home at all. As fear grips our country, let us choose love. During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other, let us yet find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbor. So in confidence, we pray the prayer you taught us, saying, Our Father...[Lord's Prayer]
Amen.

Charge and Benediction

You might not be coming or going today, but wherever you are, you are a light for Christ. Represent Christ to those who need to hear the good news. In the name of Christ, be at peace.
Amen.

March 29, 2020
At-Home Service for the Lord's Day

Welcome

Welcome to the second At-Home Worship Service. Find a comfortable place to sit. Take a few deep breaths, and bring yourself to a place where you're ready to hear from God. If you'd like, put on some music you enjoy that can bring you to a worshipful place. You might be at home, but God is still there with you, waiting to hear from you, and waiting for your listening spirit.

Call to Worship

Let us start this service well, by reminding ourselves that it is not we who chose Christ, but Christ who chose us, that we are not here because of our goodness but because of Christ's grace, that we are not here to enlighten ourselves, but to allow Christ to enlighten us, and to worship God with heart, soul, mind and strength.

Call to Confession

As part of our worship, we come to God and acknowledge that we fall short, that we don't live up to God's desires for our lives. But we also know that God's mercy is abundant. And so we pray our prayer of confession to God, knowing that God's forgiveness will never run out.

Prayer of Confession

Loving God, we take this time today to come before you, but as we do, we are aware that all is not right within us. We neglect your word, we forget to speak with you, we make plans without turning to you, we do things that we know are wrong. We do not always put you first in our lives. Forgive how we have failed to love you with all our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength. Gracious God, we believe that you offer to us and our world a whole and good life. For all that we have done to deny this life to each other and to ourselves, we ask your forgiveness and your mercy.

Assurance of Pardon

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as you choose again this day to love God and to love one another, know that God has forgiven you that which is past and offers to you a new and full life. Praise be to the name of God, now forever. Amen.

Sermon Introduction

Today's sermon reflects on what it means to love our neighbor. As we're worshipping at home today, we're doing it out of love for our neighbor, because sometimes that love comes in the form of distancing ourselves from our neighbor. Granted, that doesn't happen often, but it's still all about love!

Sermon

"The Greatest of All Time"
Rev. Erik W. Dailey

Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?"²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one;³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other';³³ and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'--this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

What's the greatest movie of all time? In my opinion it's *On the Waterfront*, with Marlon Brandon, where he gives the greatest performance of his career. Most movie critics believe though that the greatest movie ever is *Citizen Kane*. Others might say *Casablanca* or *Gone with the Wind*.

How should we rank the greatest books? I'm in agreement with many literary critics that James Joyce's *Ulysses* is the greatest book ever written. Others might argue that it's the *Catcher in the Rye* or *Things Fall Apart* or maybe even the *Da Vinci Code*.

It's fun to list and rank things. It's fun to argue about who or what should be on a list of the greatest whatever. You see these lists everywhere, especially in magazines where there's always talk of the 20 greatest vacation spots to the 10 best diet supplements. We love to put things into lists. It helps us create order and hierarchy and it gives us fodder for discussion. But these lists are often fickle, and they change with the whims of culture.

In our Scripture reading for today, Jesus is asked to give a ranking, not of movies or literature, but of the commandments of God. In Mark 11 and 12 Jesus is in Jerusalem teaching. He's using a standard form of rabbinic teaching where he dialogues with people: they ask difficult questions and he gives answers. The religious leaders of the time, the Scribes and Pharisees, taught this way, by getting together and debating interpretations of the Laws of Moses. They would delve into the minutia of every law, often creating laws on top of laws. Well, through his ministry and teaching so far, Jesus has been critical of the religious authorities. He criticizes them for putting religion above faith and just practice. So while he is teaching in Jerusalem, the angered Scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus some difficult and loaded questions. They want to discredit him as a teacher and possibly get him in trouble with the Romans. Jesus however shows his wisdom and easily deflects the questions of the Scribes and Pharisees. He impresses the crowd with his knowledge and piety.

Well, one of the Scribes actually seems to like what Jesus is saying. He's impressed. So he asks Jesus one very difficult question, a question that the religious authorities would often debate, "what is the greatest commandment?" Even two thousand years ago people loved to give rankings. But this is truly a great question and Jesus answers it eagerly. He says that the

number one commandment from God is “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” That’s number one. But apparently Jesus liked the Scribe’s question so much that he decided to give the Scribe a bonus: the second greatest commandment. Jesus states that number two is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There it is, the top two commandments.

The Scribe, unlike any of the other religious authorities, responds positively. He approves of what Jesus has said. He agrees that these really are the greatest commandments. I believe that Jesus liked this question because it boiled the law down into its essential elements. It got beyond all of the laws on top of laws and showed the foundation of God’s commands. The Scribe affirms this and says these commands are “much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” These commands transcend religion and get to the core of the Godly life. Jesus praises the Scribe for his perception.

But let’s take a closer look at these two commandments, especially since they are numbers one and two on the list of top commandments. First is to love God with all of you heart, soul, mind and strength. This is a quote from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, a passage known in Judaism as the Shema, a title derived from the Hebrew word for “hear” as in “hear O Israel.” This passage is very sacred in Judaism. The religious authorities would not argue with Jesus that this passage is important. It is recited often in Jewish devotions and it says a tremendous deal about how we should relate to God. According to this commandment, love is the basis of our relationship with God. We relate to God through love. We do not serve God out of compulsion or fear, but out of love, and in response to the love God has shown us. Also, we are called to love God with our whole being. We are to love with our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength. Our whole character is to be united in love for God.

Jesus prefaces the command to love God with the confession that the Lord is one. By saying that he affirms that there is only one, singular, undivided God. This is a bold statement in a culture of polytheism. But when we love God with our whole being, our heart, soul, mind and strength, we are undivided, as God is undivided. There is so much in the world that wants to divide our devotion, and we have to work hard to remain un-severed in our devotion to God. The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. It’s often known as the golden rule. Don’t do to others what you wouldn’t want them to do to you. Jesus however states it in a positive form. This command comes from Leviticus 19:17. If you have a pew Bible, open it to Leviticus 19:17, because it’s interesting to look at this verse in its context. Love your neighbor seems to be in there with some rather strange laws. Verse 9 says that you shall not reap to the edges of your field. Verse 13 says you shall not keep the wages of a laborer until morning. And verse 18 says “you shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” It seems like “love your neighbor” is kind of buried in there. How were the Israelites supposed to know that this is the second greatest commandment when it’s right in with the discussion of harvesting? Shouldn’t it be in bold with a heading that says “number two greatest commandment?” Shouldn’t Moses have said “make sure you notice this one!”

Well, a closer inspection of the laws surrounding “love your neighbor” shows that this command actually permeates all of the law. It’s the basis for all of these commands. It’s the groundwork for how Jesus wants us to live, and it’s still relevant today. Let’s look closer at

some of these other laws in Leviticus 19. Verse 19 says that you should leave some of your crops un-harvested. Why? So that the poor and needy can come and take them. We might not practice this today, but the spirit of neighborly love is still relevant. We can work at soup kitchens, support Harvest Hope, and abstain from buying food from companies that oppress farmers and laborers.

Verse 11 says that we should not steal or deal falsely with one another. This is certainly relevant today. To love our neighbor we should not use deception to get ahead. We should live truthful lives. Verse 13 says that you should not defraud your neighbor; you should not steal; and you should not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. Today, we shouldn't profit off of dishonest companies. We shouldn't wear clothes that were made in sweatshops, where the workers aren't paid fair wages.

Verse 15 says you shall not render an unjust judgment. Today, we shouldn't support politicians that look out for financial concerns before human concerns. Verse 16 says you shall not profit off the blood of your neighbor. Today, we shouldn't invest in companies that profit off of war and violence.

Finally, verse 18 says you should not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people. Today, we should regularly extend forgiveness, and not hold malevolent feelings in our heart where they fester and turn into broken relationships.

Love your neighbor as yourself might just be one small line in the midst of many laws, but it's the foundation of all of God's commands for ethical living. Jesus highlighted it as the second greatest commandment because it's the starting point for all of our communal lifestyle decisions.

What are the greatest commandments? Love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbor as you love yourself. That's the sum of all the law and the prophets. We might not all have the opportunity to become ethicists or biblical scholars, so we might not be able to fully interpret all of the law. But Jesus shows us that every decision we make should rest on the foundation of loving God and loving neighbor. That is how God wants us to live.

Prayers of the People

Take a moment to think through the names of people in your life who need God's presence. Who's hurting? Who mourns? Who lives in fear? Who has great needs? Who are these people? Think about those people, near or far, as you go through the following prayer. Feel free to say their names out loud or even write them down here in the margins. They are the people God has placed in your heart today. Lift them up to God.

God, sometimes prayer is out of an abundance of caution. Nothing has hit close to home yet, but I feel shadows in the valley of death. I hear the cries of those around me. I can taste the panic in the air. How can I not pray? Out of an abundance of caution, I am lifting my eyes to the hills, from whom does my help come? My help comes from the Lord my God. You are my rock and my salvation. I pray for the miracles of this age: for people being connected to one another in this isolating time, for those who are struggling financially to experience generosity and hope while work is scarce and stability is scarcer. Lord out of an abundance, out of your abundance and our caution I pray that we all practice responsibility and community. Help us to hold onto

peace, Encourage us with good courage, help us to grasp and hold onto all that which is good and remind us, especially in trying times, to render no one evil for evil. In your abundance and our caution, I pray. Lord, I now come to you to pray as you taught us, saying, Our Father...[Lord's Prayer].
Amen

Charge and Benediction

You might not be coming or going today, but wherever you are, you are a light for Christ. Represent Christ to those who need to hear the good news. In the name of Christ, be at peace.
Amen.