

March 31, 2020

Dearly Beloved,

As we continue in this time of social distancing and practice being emotionally present with each other, let us also remain intentional to be emotionally present with God – to worship God – offering our sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving.

Morning Prayer, the Bulletin Insert and a Sermon for the Week are on our web-site for you.

We are a liturgical church. Liturgical means that our worship is the work of all the people in the presence of God. God has purposed us for worship. “Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:4-10).

We are a holy priesthood; we are not spectators, the audience at a worship service. We are the worshippers. Whether we gather in a public building or in our household, we are the people of God meeting God to worship God. Worshiping God ennobles our faith, encourages and strengthens our love for God and for our neighbors. Our worship at home or at church is focused on God. The music, words, prayers of our worship both describe our experience of the presence of God and are our experience of the presence of God simultaneously.

It may feel awkward or un-churchy to worship at home with your household. I urge you not to wait until public assembly is again permitted to resume your worship practice. Different times call for different ways. You know the proverb: the more things change the more they stay the same. Worship isn't about 'proper location.'

Remember Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well. “But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24) Notice Jesus doesn't say in a group or in a building – worship in spirit and truth. These are comforting words for our time, when we cannot gather together.

What might it mean to worship in spirit? Here are some ideas from Luther Reed's book 'Worship: A Study in Corporate Devotion.

Worship in the Spirit of Obedience: as true disciples we are willing to obey Christ's commands. Obedience to Christ is expressed in faith and fellowship with him. Obedience is the way of life and salvation. Worship with your household for Christ's sake, because the Father is seeking your worship.

Worship in the Spirit of Reverence: in humility we approach 'the All-Holy with reverence and ascribe to God majesty and might. We do not approach the presence of God casually or thoughtlessly. Sanctify the time, set it apart to focus, to be worshipful. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8)

Worship in the Spirit of Sacrifice: as St Paul wrote: we dedicate our bodies as a living sacrifice, consecrated and acceptable to God. This is our spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1) Household worship whether Morning Prayer or participation with an online service is not a time for multi-tasking. Set aside the mundane. Sabbath is a day of rest. We are holy people, set apart by a Holy God to worship in spirit and in truth.

We worship in the Spirit of Inspiration: God has breathed into the breath of life and we now breathe out prayer, songs and praise in thanksgiving. Like drawing water from a clear, cool well of living water, we draw inspiration for holy living from worshiping God. We glimpse the kingdom of heaven, the mystery of God's presence active in the world. Light no darkness can overcome.

In these dark times salvation through Christ Jesus is the good news we are all yearning to hear. Worship (not news feeds) brings the Good News into our daily life. We worship at home or in church in the Spirit of Permanence. God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is present with us as it was in the beginning, is now and will be even unto the end of the ages.

Amen.

Let us each make the obedient sacrifice of self to come before the Lord our God, to reverently worship in spirit and in truth, to humbly receive those gifts of wisdom and inspiration that bless our neighbors and strengthen our faith as we proclaim the Good News of Christ Jesus in word and deed to the glory of God the Father. We have work to do – now is the time to worship.

Faithfully, Reverend Margaret