

## FEBRUARY 28<sup>th</sup> WORSHIP SERVICE

### WORDS OF WELCOME

**INTROIT: HYMN #11 v. 1**      *“Bring Many Names”*<sup>1</sup>

Verse 1

Bring many names, beautiful and good, celebrate, in parable and story,  
holiness in glory, living, loving God. Hail and Hosanna! Bring many names!

**CALL TO WORSHIP:**<sup>2\*</sup>

L: We are gathered here in the presence of the one who created us, breathed into us the very breath of life and knows us completely. God knows our hungers. God loves us like a father and nurtures us like a mother. God draws us to each other and claims us as the people of God. Knowing this, let us worship God

**INVOCATION:**<sup>3</sup>

*All: We come before you, O God, and wait for the kindling of your Holy Spirit, calling us into fuller and richer lives. You have blessed us by the night’s rest and by morning’s light. Open us to your claim on us. Show us your way. Let us live in the spirit of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.*

**HYMN OF INVOCATION: # 292 v. v. 1 - 3**      *“Breathe on Me, Breath of God”* (Public Domain)

1. Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew,  
that I may love the way you love, and do what you would do.
2. Breathe on me, Breath of God, until my heart is pure,  
until with you I will one will, to do and to endure.
3. Breathe on me, Breath of God, stir in me one desire;  
That every earthly part of me may glow with holy fire.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION:** \*

L: We are quite open about our successes. We feel free to boast when we have done well, but we are not quite so open when things have gone wrong. It is hard to admit our imperfections or that what we have done or left undone has caused another or creation to suffer.

*All: In our shame and sense of guilt we find it hard to praise you, God. We want to hide that part of us from you, O God, and from others. This causes us to feel a sense of distance in all our relationships both earthly and divine.*

L: But, God sent Jesus into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Christ. Knowing that, Let’s be quite open about our shortcomings as we open ourselves to our Living God in silence

(Silent Reflection)

**WORDS OF ASSURANCE:**

L: Hanging from the cross we hear Jesus pray, *“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”* God desires a change of heart and repentance, restored relationships and newness of life - not condemnation. The reign of God has come near so repent and believe the good news. God’s forgiveness allows us to move forward into the future in newness of life. So, embrace that forgiveness, experience a new and renewed sense of hope, and rise up to new life in Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**HYMN OF RESPONSE: v. 1**    *“Freely, Freely”*<sup>4</sup>

1. God forgave my sin in Jesus' name I've been born again in Jesus' name  
And in Jesus' name I come to you to share His love as He told me to (Chorus)

**Chorus**

*He said freely, freely you have received, freely, freely give  
Go in My name and because you believe others will know that I live*

**SCRIPTURE:**

**Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16 (NRSV) The Sign of the Covenant**

17 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. 2 And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous.” 3 Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, 4 “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 5 No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. 6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. 7 I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

**Psalms 22:23-31 (NRSV) Plea for Deliverance from Suffering and Hostility**

<sup>1</sup> You who fear the Lord, praise him!

All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

<sup>24</sup> For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted;  
he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.

<sup>25</sup> From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

<sup>26</sup> The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord.  
May your hearts live forever!

<sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord;  
and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

<sup>28</sup> For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

<sup>29</sup> To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;  
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

<sup>30</sup> Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,

<sup>31</sup> and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

**Mark 8:31-38 (NRSV) Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection**

<sup>31</sup> Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. <sup>32</sup> He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. <sup>33</sup> But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

<sup>34</sup> He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>35</sup> For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. <sup>36</sup> For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? <sup>37</sup> Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? <sup>38</sup> Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

**REFLECTION: *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow & Live unto God***

<sup>23</sup> *You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! <sup>24</sup> For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.*

Many years ago I knew someone who praised God for delivering her in her suffering. She had been on the floor in her apartment and somehow managed to get to a phone and dial 911. While in the hospital she praised God for seeing her in her distress and tending to her needs. This woman saw God at work through the ambulance crew, hospital staff and other things such as giving her the strength to get to a phone. By praising God she did not discredit the work of the ambulance crew and hospital staff who tended to her needs because she knew they were vital in carrying out God's care for her, not as puppets on a string but as willing participants as they used their God given gifts for the good of others.

It is easy to offer God our praise when we have already been delivered from our time of trial, but how about when we are still experiencing it? By hearing just the section of Psalm 22 which was assigned for today's lectionary reading we are led to believe the psalmist has already been delivered from his trials; that his prayers have already been answered. But, when we read the beginning of the psalm we see a very different picture. The opening words to this Psalm are the same words we hear Jesus cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The Psalmist then goes on to share all that is going through him in this dire situation.

*Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?*

<sup>2</sup> *My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.*

I think that is a pretty good description of how each of us has felt at one time or another in our lives. With the ongoing impact of Covid on our lives and livelihoods, the enormous impact of natural disasters throughout the year on top of things that impact specifically our personal lives, many of you may be crying out these same or very similar words. But the psalmist doesn't stop there. The psalmist goes on to say ...

<sup>3</sup> *Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.*

<sup>4</sup> *In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.*

<sup>5</sup> *To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*

(Clearly the Psalmist had been taught the stories of deliverance and promise such as Noah, Abraham, Joseph, and of course Moses leading the Israelites from Egypt and being led into the promise land by Joshua. As we read further, we will see how those stories led him to trust in this God who delivers people from oppression and suffering and establishes covenants with them. By listening to the description of his suffering there is no doubt this person is in a dire situation not only physically but is being tormented mentally and is an emotional puddle of melted wax. However, it is also made evident that these stories give him hope of God's deliverance from his situation.)

<sup>6</sup> *But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people.*

<sup>7</sup> *All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads.*

<sup>8</sup> *"He trusts in the Lord," they say, "let the Lord rescue him.*

*Let him deliver him, since he delights in him."*

<sup>9</sup> *Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.*

<sup>10</sup> *From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.*

<sup>11</sup> *Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.*

(Did you notice how the psalmist fluctuates between being tormented by the reality of his current situation to drawing hope from who God is.)

<sup>12</sup> *Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.*

<sup>13</sup> *Roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide against me.*

<sup>14</sup> *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.*

*My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.*

<sup>15</sup> *My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;  
you lay me in the dust of death.*

<sup>16</sup> *Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet.*

<sup>17</sup> *All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.*

<sup>18</sup> *They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.*

(There is little left to the imagination when it comes to understanding the depth of the psalmist's despair or the direness of his situation. I may never have been in as scary of a situation as this psalmist, but I have felt the depth of despair that this author speaks of. My guess is, that many of you too at some point in your life have felt this as well. In our despair - don't we plea to God to help us, sooner rather than later, not only to be delivered, but for the strength to make it through. As we read further that is exactly what the psalmist does.)

<sup>19</sup> *But you, Lord, do not be far from me. You are my strength;  
come quickly to help me.*

<sup>20</sup> *Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.*

<sup>21</sup> *Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.*

<sup>22</sup> *I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.*

*Blaise Pascal, 17th century*

"It is the heart which perceives God and not the reason. That is what faith is: God perceived by the heart, not by the reason."

*Anne Lamott, 21st century*

"I have a lot of faith. But I am also afraid a lot, and have no real certainty about anything. I remembered something Father Tom had told me--that the opposite of faith is not doubt, but certainty. Certainty is missing the point entirely. Faith includes noticing the mess, the emptiness and discomfort, and letting it be there until some light returns."

I think that is a pretty good description of how we experience faith. Even as we trust in God, we cannot deny the different emotions that creep into our lives, the fear, the doubt, the anger, frustration, and anxiety are all a part of who we are and all a part of our faith journey as well. Isn't that what we see happening here with the psalmist? There is no denial of the fear, anguish, and even doubt. Yet, in his time of trial, it was his faith in God's providence and trust in God's promises that lead him to have hope that he would live to give praise and tell the stories of God's salvation to a gathered community and that they would proclaim God's praises to future generations. The Psalmist though drawing strength and hope from past instances where God's power and deliverance was revealed, those would not be the only stories shared with future generations; it would be the stories of his deliverance as well and praise for God in that deliverance.

We too are called to share the stories of God's providence and deliverance not only from the bible but throughout history and in our lives with the next generation who will pass the stories and their stories on to future generations giving rise to hope in and praise for the God of all creation who seeks to and does bring new life out of that which seems impossible, offers strength for the weary, is a guide for the lost, and delivers the oppressed into freedom. Sometimes we are afraid to share them because we don't want people to think we are weird and don't think others will understand or believe. Like the lady's story from which I opened this reflection, not everyone with whom she shared her praise of God understood or even saw how God was present, but that didn't matter. She shared the story freely and offered her praises freely; though not all joined with her - many did, and would come to recognize God's care and deliverance not only in her situation but in their own lives both through inner strength and through human hands.

God of Sarah and Abraham, long ago you embraced your people in covenant and promised them your blessing and that the nations of the world would be blessed through them. Strengthen us in faith, that, with your disciples of every age, even in our fear and doubt, anger, frustration, anguish and fatigue we may turn to you in faith and be moved from despair to hope. May we recall your deliverance of the saints throughout the ages and even in our own lives throughout the years; in that remembrance may we proclaim your deliverance in Jesus Christ to the next generation who will in turn proclaim that deliverance to generations yet unborn. Above all, in faith, may we live our lives unto you. Amen.

## **A TIME OF PRAYER – LIFTING UP PRAYER REQUESTS – THE LORD’S PRAYER:**

### **INVITATION TO OFFERING:**

L The God who created us also bestows blessings upon us, not only for our own benefit, but so that those blessings may flow forth from our lives and bless others. Our church’s ministries are extensions of God’s love and faithfulness made possible through the generous giving of our time, energy, and money. With love let us offer our gifts to God so God’s blessings may flow forth from this faith community.

### **PRAYER OF DEDICATION:**

L: God of all bounty and blessing,

***All: Receive our lives and our gifts that are freely and joyfully offered; guide their use and bless them so your blessings may continue to flow freely to wherever they are needed.***

### **SUMM-IT UP:**

### **SENDING HYMN: “Go Now in Peace”<sup>5</sup>**

**Go now in peace, never be afraid. God will go with you, each hour of every day.  
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong, and true, know He will guide you in all you do.  
Go now in love, and show you believe. Reach out to others, so all the world can see.  
God will be there, watching from above, Go now in peace, in faith, and in love...  
Amen....Amen....Amen.**

### **CHARGE & BENEDICTION: \***

May God bless and keep us, May God’s face shine upon us and be gracious to us, May God look upon us kindly and grant us God’s peace. Amen.

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