

South Elkhorn Christian Church
Digital  *Liturgy*

EASTERTIDE

May 3, 2020

PREPARE

Locate a candle to light and communion elements to use (bread/juice or whatever is available to you).

Find a quiet place by yourself or with others.

Read through the instructions, prayers, scripture, and questions below. You can also find a guided, voice-led version of this digital liturgy at southelkhorncc.org/digital-liturgy

WELCOME THE LIGHT

Welcome to worship with South Elkhorn Christian Church. Light a candle if you are able and receive these words:

CALL TO WORSHIP

When we need a guide, the Lord is our shepherd.

When we need a doorway to new life, the Lord is our gate.

Listen for the Lord, and take a step of faith.

CENTERING & LORD'S PRAYER

Though we may gather together this morning across many places and throughout many times, with many hearts in many homes, may it be here that we come together as one church and one body to lift our hearts unto the Lord. Let us Pray!

Dear Gracious and Heavenly Father, as we come to you this morning, we lift our hearts to the needs of the world. The world that lies within our midst, and the world that extends beyond the needs of our own hearts and homes. A world that during this time seems to be in a season of disarray. A season that brings about various levels of feelings and emotions. A world that for many of us may feel lost and broken, but a world that we know is truly under your care.

May it be throughout all of these times, that we turn to you, Lord, as our good shepherd! During this unknown season, may we continue to seek to find the beauty within your creation. The beauty that lies within the stillness of our hearts when we seek to hear out your voice. The beauty that lies within the comfort of knowing that you protect us as we journey throughout all of life's great pastures.

In all of these things, Lord, as we turn to you as the ultimate shepherd, the gate keeper, the leader of the flock, we give you thanks and we give you praise for the guidance, the grace, and the glory that you have given us as your beloved flock! In the days and weeks that lie ahead may we continue to turn to you in all things. May none of us falter or fall behind, leave or go astray, but may we continue to turn to you the giver of life, for we know that when we walk and listen to you Lord that we will be blessed in all abundance.

And now it is here that we join with you as our shepherd to say the words that you 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 sins as we forgive those who sin 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.

SCRIPTURE

John 10:1-10

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

SERMON

That’s not what I meant...

Have you ever been taken out of context, misheard, or thoroughly misunderstood...

I like to call that experience fatherhood. Yes, I said you could have some candy, but I didn’t mean the whole bowl! Yes, I said you could have a drink, but I didn’t mean your brother’s!

Specificity is everything, I’m discovering...

Recently a friend who works for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination was telling me about how he preached at a local congregation and encouraged continued support of the ministry he leads. Afterwards a young adult came up to him and asked if his ministry accepts cash.

My friend was happy to tell him that, indeed, they just started accepting cash--they hadn’t even told anyone yet. He got really excited, pulled out his phone, and said, you can send the donation to this account.

He showed the Cash App screen on his phone...

The young adult, with a perplexed look on his face, slowly pulled out a \$20 bill and said, “no, I mean cash... like actual cash.”

Misunderstandings are easy, especially when context is missing and certain meanings are assumed.

I suspect you’re no stranger to this.

This passage is no stranger to this. This passage has been misunderstood and misused, especially by Christians looking to denigrate other religions or faiths, or trying to prove their own religious superiority.

That’s not what this passage is about.

Indeed, it’s quite easy to misunderstand this passage about gates and abundant life when we forget why Jesus is saying any of this in the first place. What he says is all coming out of a flesh-and-blood, real-life, here-and-now community struggle, a struggle that happened just the chapter before, and a struggle that extends into our lives today.

In the gospel of John, there’s this pattern... Jesus does something amazing. Then there’s some dialogue about what just happened as people try to make sense of it. Then Jesus launches into an extended talk, or discourse, interpreting his actions.

Sign, dialogue, discourse.

Sign, dialogue, discourse... Rinse, wash, repeat. The Gospel of John.

What we just read in John 10, that’s the “discourse” part of the pattern. Before that there’s some dialogue, and before that “the sign.”

What’s the sign?

Jesus heals a man born blind, gives him sight. He has lived his whole life afflicted not merely by the practical challenges of blindness, but by the theological stigma of sin that only worsened his condition and contributed to his poverty.

The disciples ask Jesus, “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”

Yes, you heard that right--there was an assumed spiritual connection between illness and sin. The idea was that if you were afflicted by poverty, sickness, or injury, well... you probably deserved it. You or your family before you did something to offend the gods,

and now you were getting your just desserts. It was quite a convenient theology for those in good health and with wealth. But let's not judge too harshly, it's something we are still tempted to do in one form or another... there's an enduring assumption that wealth, health and virtue are linked... especially when the wealth and health are ours.

But Jesus will have nothing of that nonsense. In fact, he flips it on its head when he asserts that the blindness not only doesn't prevent God from loving and valuing this man, but also that God will prefer this man, choose this man, not some powerful, healthy, well-to-do or religiously respected person... but this poor, maligned, blind man, God will choose him to become a symbol and sign of God's glory for all people.

So Jesus heals him. And people are shocked--how can this be. He doesn't deserve this reversal... the dialogue begins.

But it doesn't end there with the onlookers. It's brought to the attention of the religious authorities. And an investigation is launched.

The man-born-blind-but-now-healed is drug before the religious leaders to peel back the wonder and get to the bottom of this, and also, maybe moreso, undercut this Jesus fellow.

The man Jesus healed is not celebrated and welcomed and accepted, but instead driven out... and Jesus is none-too-pleased with this result. He has harsh things to say to those who would drive others out, especially those most in need of care and protection. Jesus has some pretty harsh things to say to those who would not welcome the healing and transformation that God enacts, wherever God chooses to enact it, as what really matters most. He has some harsh things to say to those who instead prefer to preserve and promote their own status, their own religious brand at the expense of the most vulnerable and most in need...

Perhaps this situation is not too far removed from those religious leaders in our day and age who seem to care more about whether or not their congregations worship in person, and take pride in defying governmental guidance, rather than the actual well-being of the vulnerable people who will show up to worship, or the surrounding community they are called to serve and love...

Now Jesus, after addressing the Pharisees directly, shifts to offer them this little "figure of speech" about sheep, shepherds, and gates. And in this context, this passage takes on a powerful message.

Jesus presents himself as the shepherd, it's his voice--one of care and concern for the full wellbeing of those God loves--that God's flock can recognize and follow. Sincere care and

concern has a ring to it, a recognizable ring.

Indeed, the blind man hears the ring of compassion in the voice of Jesus, and follows his direction toward the pasture of healing and new life. This salvation is as much this-worldly as other-worldly. Because of this healing the blind man won't wander the streets in darkness, wondering where his next meal will come from. Now the blind man can find new community and connection, removed from the stigma of sinfulness that his illness unjustly brought to him. The blind man is saved, healed, remade.

And the Pharisees, well Jesus paints this picture for them with the colorful strokes of the prophet Ezekiel. In Ezekiel 34, the kings of Israel are likened to bad shepherds, they endanger the flock of God--the people of Israel--with their wayward, greedy, and self-interested leadership. The Pharisees, as thieves and bandits, they endanger the flock, too; they endanger the flock because they don't really care about God's people or their full well-being; these leaders seem only to care for their own position, privilege and prosperity. They exploit, expel, and exhaust the flock....

They don't praise God's work when it happens, they don't accept and celebrate a man healed and made new. Instead they drive him out, reject him all over again.

"The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy," Jesus says, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

Jesus is talking about life-changing abundance for people who seem to have no real abundance, like the beggar born blind and labeled a sinner. Time and again Jesus heals, loves, and lifts up poor people, hungry people, sick people, ignored people, labeled people, forgotten people, exploited people, victimized people, exhausted people, wandering people, wondering people, unloved people, broken people, hurting people, cooped up people, anxious people...

Jesus comes not as some religious claim about who is exclusively right, someone who makes you better than others. Jesus comes as the very unconditional, all-inclusive compassion of God, speaking with that recognizable ring, bringing about an abundance of acceptance, nourishment, hope, and new life.

The Pharisees reject the man-born-blind-who-Jesus-heals... they reject him with these stunning words, "you were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?"

That is the voice of contempt.

Jesus speaks with God's own compassion, one that accepts what others reject, one that

heals what others ignore.

The blind man is the one who recognizes the very voice of compassion in Jesus, trusts it, and discovers an abundance that the Pharisees could not finally destroy. And though the Pharisees weren't willing to learn from the blind man who Jesus healed, perhaps we will. Perhaps we will learn to listen like him for the recognizable ring of Jesus's voice, embrace the compassion of God, and enjoy the abundance of everything made new.

COMMUNION

Place before you bread and a cup of juice (or whatever you have on hand to use). If you are with others, serve one another with the blessing, “The bread of life, the cup of hope.”

The Lord be with you,

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord.

It is right to give God thanks and praise.

The communion elements before you unite us in Christ’s Spirit one to another. Christ’s life, death, and resurrection unite us to God’s infinite and all-inclusive Love. All are welcome to the Table, and all are invited to remember...

THE BREAD

“The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it...”

Hold the bread and, if possible, break it.

“...and said, ‘This is my body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.’”

THE CUP

Hold the cup. If you have not already, pour juice (or whatever you have on hand) into the cup.

“After supper, Jesus took the cup saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.’”

PRAYER

Gracious and Loving God, You have made us for connection. In this time of separation and isolation send to us your Spirit. That we might experience your sustaining presence and be encouraged with hope through the fellowship of your love. Amen.

Receive and prayerfully enjoy the bread and the cup.

GENEROSITY

Prayerfully consider someone to reach out to with a word of love, encouragement, or prayer. Write a card. Make a phone call. Or identify a time to do so today (or in the week ahead).

Tithes and offerings can be mailed to South Elkhorn or you can give online at

southelkhorncc.org/give

CHANGING THE LIGHT

Now it is time to change the light. The light that was in one place at one time, is now in all places at all times.

In this very room and everywhere we go. And all God's children said, Amen.

Extinguish the candle and watch the smoke rise.

UPDATES

Visit southelkhorncc.org/blog to learn the latest on worship, building usage, and more.

Digital Worship & Wonder videos available at southelkhorncc.org/worship-wonder.

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