

# Worship Liturgy

Living Hope Kuna United Methodist Church

11<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost

*August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020*

**INTROIT:** Trina Moore, Accompanist

## **WELCOME**

I am Scott Allen, pastor of the Living Hope Kuna United Methodist Church. I have asked my wife, Laurie, to help with this service. Also, Wendi Homan and Trina Moore will be providing music, and Ted Wimer is helping with organizational and technical issues.

Recently I have lost much of my sense of time, but I am aware that within the next few days our congregation will reach our five-month anniversary of preparing these video worship services.

Though I'm not planning on serving a cake, I do think we are entitled to a bit of celebration. Regardless of the change and adaptation the Covid-19 pandemic has required of us, we have met the challenge. We are still here. We are still worshipping together, though, admittedly, in a different kind of way.

As we look forward into the future, I do not want the frustration we have all experienced these past five months to overshadow our accomplishments, and there are many. Nor do I want to suggest that we have met all the challenges we will have to face, that we are approaching the finish line, that there will be no more trials or tests to endure.

The pandemic is not expected to go away soon. We will most certainly encounter more struggles in the next five months. But let us encourage each other with what has sustained us so far, God's compassionate love. This is where we will find our hope and guidance.

May we never stop reminding ourselves that God has not and will not abandon us. Nor has this community of faith packed up and left town. We continue to be committed to serving as a viable conduit of God's love and grace.

Please join in the responsive call to worship:

## **CALL TO WORSHIP**

(L – Leader, C - Congregation)

L: Come, gather together,  
lift up your voices in celebration and song

**C: We are here to worship God  
We are here to give God our praise**

L: Have you come to seek refuge?  
Have you come to be empowered?

**C: We are here seeking the nourishment of God's love,  
the rejuvenation of God's grace, and the empowerment  
of God's justice and righteousness**

L: You are welcomed and accepted here  
Prepare yourself for the coming of God's Spirit

**C: We give thanks for God's persistence and love.  
We give thanks for the liveliness and compassion  
of this community of faith**

**HYMN: Come! Come! Everybody Worship,  
(verses 1-4)**

Come! Come! Everybody worship  
with a prayer or song of praise!  
Come! Come! Everybody worship! Worship God always!

Worship and remember, to keep the Sabbath day.  
Take a rest and think of God; put your work away!

Come! Come! Everybody worship  
with a prayer or song of praise!  
Come! Come! Everybody worship! Worship God always!

Worship and remember, the Lord's unending care,  
Reaching out to love and help, people everywhere!

Come! Come! Everybody worship  
with a prayer or song of praise!  
Come! Come! Everybody worship! Worship God always!

Worship and remember, your blessings great and small.  
Give to God an offering: show your thanks for all!

Come! Come! Everybody worship  
With a prayer or song of praise!  
Come! Come! Everybody worship! Worship God always!

Worship and remember, how Jesus long ago  
Taught us how to talk to God; something we should know!

Come! Come! Everybody worship  
with a prayer or song of praise!  
Come! Come! Everybody worship! Worship God always!

## **MORNING PRAYER**

Almighty God,

We have shifted our attention from other distractions so that we might spend this time focusing on our relationship, with you, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. It is our hope and desire to experience the redeeming hope of your Holy presence our lives. We ask that you respond to our desire and move among us speaking the Word you would have us hear.

We have prepared ourselves for this holy encounter by focusing our hearts upon your love and our minds upon your wisdom. As we listen for your comforting and challenging voice, may we become even more aware of the many miraculous ways our lives are touched by your amazing love.

Our God of compassion and of all justice, we give you thanks for the blessings we have already received, as we give thanks for the nurture and sustenance you have assured us you will provide in the days ahead. For it is your presence and your empowerment that helps us meet the daily challenges we face.

Thank you for the meaning and purpose that emerges from our discipleship. May you continue to guide us along our journey of faith as we offer our own unique gifts to be used in your service.

You are the Creator of life and the source of all that is. You are the source of all we find precious. Yet, we must confess, that sometimes all the temptations and distractions we encounter have influenced us to be selfish, egotistical, concerned more with what we can acquire than focused upon what we can share.

There have been times when we have acted in ways that do not reveal a trust and reliance upon your will for our lives. There have been times when we have acted as if we have doubted the goodness of your love. There have been times when our actions have revealed our weaknesses rather than the strength that comes with committed discipleship.

We ask for your forgiveness, humbly requesting that through your great grace, we can be spared the destructiveness of our own sin. May you, in your righteousness, grant us this pardon, and guide us in ways to think of others before thinking of ourselves.

There are those among us who are especially troubled, who are acutely experiencing a loss, who are hurting and anxious or worried. We ask that you speak a word of encouragement for all who have special needs, as we join in unison to offer the prayer Jesus taught us to pray:

**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 have trespassed against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, the glory for ever. Amen.**

**SPECIAL MUSIC:** Wendi Homan, vocalist

**SCRIPTURE:** Genesis 45:1-15

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, ‘Send everyone away from me.’ So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it.

Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come closer to me.’ And they came closer. He said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest.

“God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, “Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. I will provide for you there—since there are five more years of famine to come—so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.”

And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.’

Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

## **SERMON: "What Goes Around, Does Not Come around"**

Genesis Chapter 45, verses 1-15, is the continuation of the story that began all the way back in Chapter 12, when God told Abram to leave his country and immigrate to a land that God would show him. To help put the text that Laurie just read in its proper context, I want to review some of the details of what has taken place up until this time.

Abram and Sarai lie to Pharaoh.

Upon Sarai's suggestion, Abraham sleeps with Hagar, Sarai's slave-girl. But when Hagar becomes pregnant, Sarai has her beaten up, badly.

God changes Abram's and Sarai's name to Abraham and Sarah.

Abraham and Sarah laugh at God, an extremely disrespectful gesture. Then Sarah lies to God, denying she laughed, an even more disrespectful gesture.

Abraham lies to King Abimelech.

On the basis of that lie, King Abimelech decides to take Sarah as his wife which nearly causes King Abimelech's life.

Sarah becomes pregnant with Abraham's child and Isaac is born.

Sarah happens to encounter Hagar and Abraham's son, Ishmael, and has the two cast out and banished.

Abraham willingly agrees to murder Isaac, whose life is spared due to God's intervention.

Isaac marries Rebekah.

Esau and Jacob are born.

Rebekah instigates Jacob's stealing of Esau's birthright.

Jacob falls in love with Rachel, and agrees to work for Rachel's father, Laban, for seven years in exchange for her hand in marriage. On Jacob's wedding night, Laban secretly substitutes Rachel's sister, Leah, as the bride. The next morning, when Jacob discovers that he's been tricked, he ends up having to work for Laban for another seven years, finally marrying Rachel, but she bears him no children.

Rachel arranges for Jacob to sleep with her maid, Bilhah, which produces two sons.

Leah follows suit, and gives Jacob her maid, Zilpah, who bears two more sons for Jacob.

Rachel finally has a son named Joseph.

Joseph's brothers become envious and sell him to Midianite traders who sell him Ishmaelites who take him to Egypt. The brothers lie to their father, claiming they know nothing about what's happened to Joseph.

Joseph gets thrown into prison, where two years later he interprets a dream for Pharaoh. Pharaoh is so impressed with the interpretation that he hires Joseph to be his second in command.

There is another famine.

Joseph's brothers travel to Egypt to see if they can acquire food. Joseph recognizes his brothers, who do not yet recognize him.

So... after an extra-marital affair, some lies, an assault, the ridiculing of God through laughter, more lies followed by even more lies, jealousy, the theft of a birthright, more extra marital sex followed by even more extra-marital sex, and the human trafficking of a family member, a brother, we have now arrived back at chapter 45.

What happens next?

After all the heartache and misery Joseph's brothers have caused him, Joseph is happy to see them. In fact, Joseph is overjoyed about reconnecting with his family. He is so moved by the experience, that he breaks down and cries, uncontrollably, as an expression of the tremendous joy he feels about being reunited. He cries so hard, that he can be heard all the way to Pharaoh's house, quite a great distance away.

Speaking for myself, that is not what I expected. That is not how I think I would have responded to that kind of a family reunion. I would not have been so touched by these brothers who had sold me off into slavery, and then covered up what they had done by lying to their father.

In fact, I can't imagine getting all sentimental about running into them again. Rather, I would be tempted to seek vengeance, and as Pharaoh's number two, the means to accomplish that goal would certainly be available. Kings are very familiar with how to cause pain and regret. I can't help to think that I would want to punish them, make them starve, or at the very least, have them suffer for a while.

Can you identify with what I'm saying here? You can admit it. No one else is going to hear you.

Joseph has a different response, even though the cultural dynamics would have expected him to take revenge. Joseph welcomes his brothers with open arms, then breaks down and cries, uncontrollably bawling. To cry like that would have been considered extremely shameful, particularly for a man of Joseph's importance

*(continued)*

and status, the assistant to the pharaoh. To demonstrate that kind of raw emotion, to reveal a vulnerability like that, would have been an indication of weakness, of his unsuitability to serve in his position.

As if he hadn't disgraced himself enough already, Joseph goes and offers his brothers immediate refuge that includes land and food for the next five years, insuring they can get through the famine.

At this point, Joseph is suffering from a complete absence of honor in the eyes of his peers. In the eyes of his community, and the culture of his day, there is nothing he could now do to bring more shame upon himself.

But he manages to do it anyway. He forgives his brothers. But not only is he forgiving his brothers, there is the sense that he is also forgiving all the individual members of the previous generations I just mentioned, forgiving all their backstabbing viciousness, sleeping around, lying, cheating, and a rape and couple of other things I didn't mention. Joseph is offering all of them refuge and forgiveness.

It is hard to enough to try to understand and explain the warrior image God, a God of revenge and punishment, if though that image is found throughout the Old Testament. But if you think that is tough, how do you explain a God that forgives heinous behavior going back multiple generations.

But that is what Joseph is modeling here. On one level, Joseph is providing an image of a forgiving God, a God who weeps when being reunited with his family who has betrayed him. But there is also the sense that Joseph is modeling God's forgiveness of all, everyone, for whatever they've done, going back through his entire ancestry.

How can you try and conceptualize this, how generous and comprehensive God's forgiveness is intended to be? One of the ways we attempt to do this is that we try to translate forgiveness into terms that are understandable, by emphasizing God's grace as a one-time event. It is easier, a little more palatable, to think of God like that.

I remember one of the times I encountered this kind of thinking. I had just arrived in southern California to begin attending seminary. I met a woman when her Baptist Church had rented the camp I managed, Camp Sturtevant. For the record, this was at least six years before I had the opportunity to meet Laurie.

Some weeks later the woman and I went out on a date and had dinner together. Afterwards, when I took her back to her home, she showed me a water glass she had hidden in her purse and stolen from the restaurant.

I was flabbergasted. What do you say to that, on a first date?

Rather than making a comment, I asked her a question, saying, “Is this something you do often?”

She nonchalantly replied, “Yes.”

I asked another question. “Do you think that’s right?”

She replied, “It’s fine. I was saved when I was five years old and I gave my life to Jesus. I’ve been forgiven. My salvation is guaranteed. A glass here or there just doesn’t matter.”

I question that her pastor would have agreed with her summation of Baptist doctrine, but that is what she believed. She had reconceptualized God’s forgiveness to be a one time event, because that is something she could better understand. In her mind that was more tangible.

But I could not disagree more with her about this. The miracle and mystery of God’s grace is not that it is a single occurrence, but God’s grace is foundational to the way God relates to in the present and the future.

There is no singularity in God’s forgiveness. We are forgiven, not once, but continually, always. That is who God is and what God does. No ifs, ands, or buts.

If you take this truth seriously, it completely alters your decision making process. You are not tempted by the thinking that what you do doesn’t matter because you’ve already been forgiven. Instead, you are given an opportunity to do what is right, to work towards that which demonstrates justice, to choose to love one another and experience the accompanying fulfillment, knowing that if we fall short of our goal, which we will, God will forgive us, again.

The reason I am focusing upon this aspect of the story is because I think we sometimes forget the power of God’s forgiveness and occasionally we need to be reminded that

there is nothing that makes less sense than God’s grace, or is more powerful. That is one of the messages within this story, that there is absolutely nothing reasonable about God’s forgiveness. It is not something we are supposed to try to understand, intellectualize.

All we are encouraged to do is to accept it. And there are times when even that is difficult to do. We come up with all sorts of crazy reasons suggesting we need to earn it, which we can’t, or reasons for why we don’t deserve it.

There is some truth to that. We don’t deserve God’s grace.

But that in no way negates that God wants to give it to us anyway, in spite of how foolish we think that may be.

Our God is a forgiving God.

Which seems to me to leave only one question.

What are we going to choose to do about that? How are going to respond?

**DISCIPLESHIP MOMENT:** Ted Wimer

**HYMN:** The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve

The Spirit sends us forth to serve; we go in Jesus' name  
to bring glad tidings to the poor, God's favor to proclaim.

We go to comfort those who mourn and set the burdened free;  
where hope is dim, to share a dream  
and help the blind to see.

We go to be the hands of Christ, to scatter joy like seed  
and, all our days, to cherish life, to do the loving deed.

Then let us go to serve in peace, the gospel to proclaim.  
God's Spirit has empowered us; we go in Jesus' name.

**SUNG BENEDICTION: God Be With You**

God be with you till we meet again; by his counsels guide, uphold you,  
with his sheep securely fold you; God be with you till we meet again.  
Till we meet, till we meet, till we meet at Jesus' feet;  
Till we meet, till we meet, God be with you till we meet again.

*Living Hope Kuna United Methodist Church*