

MARCH 22, 2020
4TH SUNDAY IN LENT

**FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH**
WEST WAYNE STREET



GATHERING

PRELUDE O God, Our Help in Ages Past

setting by Paul Manz

GREETING & ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP

God is in the water that restores our soul.

And God is in the night when we lose our way.

God is with us during pandemics.

And God is with us in our loneliness and isolation.

God is in today and tomorrow, raising up leaders, prophets and dreamers.

And God is in the wilderness with us—every step of the way.

So with confidence we declare—

If God is in those spaces, then God is surely here.

Let us worship the God of creation.

Let us worship the God of wilderness spaces.

SPECIAL MUSIC Hope of the World

Music by: Taylor Davis, Text by: Georgia Harkness (1891-1974)

Jennifer Poiry, Cassandra Petrie and Srikanth Sriramula, soloists

Kathy Miller, accompanist

Hope of the world, thou Christ of great compassion,

Speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent.

Save us, thy people, from consuming passion,

Who by our own false hopes and aims are spent.

Hope of the world, God's gift from highest heaven,

Bringing to hungry souls the bread of life.

Still let thy spirit unto us be given,

To heal earth's wounds and end all bitter strife.

Hope of the world, afoot on dusty highways,

Showing the wand'ring souls the path of light.

Walk beside us lest the tempting byways,

Lure us away from thee to endless night.

Hope of the world, O Christ o'er death victorious,

Who by this sign didst conquer grief and pain.

We would be faithful to thy gospel glorious,

Thou art our Lord! Thou dost forever reign.

CALL TO CONFESSION

In the season of Lent we are invited to consider how we live as followers of Christ – to look at our decisions and our actions straight on, to hold them up to the example of Christ, and to make amends. In this time of silence, and in our prayer together, let us look at our lives. We pray, first in silence.

**SILENT PRAYER*

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Forgiving God, in a world filled with so much pain, we would rather shut our eyes and be blind than see things as they really are. Grant us the courage to face the reality of our world, and give us the strength to bring your light to those who walk in darkness. Help us see others as you see them, and forgive us when we do not trust you enough to open our eyes to the possibilities before us. Heal our self-inflicted blindness, O God, and lead us in the footsteps of the Light of the World, who reveals your glory in his life, his teachings, and his love. In his holy name, we pray. Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

Friends, hear the Good News: God so loved the world that God sent Jesus to us, not to condemn the world but in order that we might be saved, healed, and forgiven through him.

Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Amen.

SHARING THE PEACE OF CHRIST

The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you.

HEARING THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

NEW TESTAMENT READING

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

John 9:1-41, p. 102-103 (NRSV)

SERMON

Grace in the Wilderness

Rev. Dr. Anne B. Epling

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

We believe in a wilderness God—

Who breathed life into dust, turned seeds into flowers, and flooded the sky with stars.

We believe in a wilderness God—

Who went hungry in the desert, walked barefoot on the water, and taught from the mountainside.

We believe in a wilderness God—

Whose love could be described as nothing short of wild.

So with confidence and hope, we long to follow our wilderness God who walks with people on their darkest nights,

Who sings hope into places of grief, isolation, and suffering, and who exists in the form of untamed joy, wildfire love, and impossible hope. Step by step, may it be so. Amen.

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

SPECIAL MUSIC Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child

Traditional Spiritual, Arr. Joe Ridenour

Jennifer Poiry and Cassandra Petrie, soloists

Vaughn Roste, accompanist

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long way from home. True believer,
A long way from home.

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
A long way from home. True believer,
A long way from home.

PASTORAL PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

SENDING

CHORAL BENEDICTION The Lord Bless You and Keep You

Peter Lutkin

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord lift His countenance upon you;
and give you peace, the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. Amen.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

chorale prelude by Johann Pachelbel

Thank you for joining us today, we welcome you to join us via live stream again next Sunday, March 29.

*We invite you to mail in pledges and offerings to
First Presbyterian Church 300 W. Wayne Street, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46802,
or go online and give at www.firstpresfortwayne.org,
where you can also find update information on our events.*

Assisting with Worship:

Rev. Anne B. Epling, pastor/head of staff

Rev. Ann Pitman, parish associate for pastoral care

Dr. Vaughn Roste, interim choral director

Kathryn A. Miller, organist

SPECIAL MUSIC NOTES:

Hope of the World—Taylor Davis (b. 1980) serves as the Director of Music and Worship at St. Andrew United Methodist Church in Plano, Texas. He is a 2003 graduate of Centenary College of Louisiana and has at least 25 choral compositions published by at least five different music publishers nationally. Georgia Harkness was an American theologian, completing her doctorate in 1923 from Boston University and was one of the earliest proponents of the ordination of women. Davis's setting of Harkness's text uses an angular melody—jumping from note to note instead of stepping to an adjacent one—which perhaps illustrates the leap of faith. The use of overlapping phrases, especially at the end, is a modern compositional technique that does not render the text unintelligible due to our association of those pitches with the title's words by the point.

Sometimes I feel Like a Motherless Child—The first record of this song's performance was in 1870 by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, but the song's origins are earlier than that, with roots perhaps a century before that. The blues scale is already evident in the melody of this piece, particularly in the lowered penultimate note: this helps the music convey the emotions of grief and hopelessness of a child who has been torn from her or his parents, which shamefully happened regularly in the era of slavery in America. Yet, the repetition of the word "sometimes" might offer a glimmer of hope, as it suggests that at least "sometimes" the singer does not feel so abandoned.