

**Sunday, May 10th, 2020**  
**Mantua Center Christian Church**  
**MCCC Home Worship**

**You will need:**

*A candle and match*  
*Bible*  
*Paper*  
*Bread and Juice (if desiring communion)*

**Order of Worship**

**WELCOME PANEL on the Video**

- Welcome to Worship
- Today you can gather
  - *A candle and match*
  - *Bible*
  - *Bread and Juice (if desiring communion)*

**GREETING & CALL to WORSHIP - CHAD**

The Peace of the Risen Christ be with you. Welcome to worship this week with the Mantua Center Christian Church. Together...we are seeking to have Open Minds, Open Hearts, and Open Arms to live and love like Jesus.

On this day, of course, we want to to give a lot of love to our Mothers. For our biological and spiritual moms. For all the extraordinary women in our lives who have shown us the face of God. Happy Mother's Day and Bless each of you and thank you for all the ways you light our way.

Today in worship we will be reflecting on Unity....

- We all want to come together, to find common ground, to unite our hearts and minds in strength and purpose for the good of all. Yet is so often escapes us...
- What is the basis for our unity in Christ?
- What should we look for in the world to unite around?
- We're not going to solve it. But lets think and pray and worship together asking God to give us clarity and vision.

Family in Christ, let's turn our minds and hearts from other things and light a candle to remind us of God's abiding presence.

*Light a Candle*

## **OPENING SCRIPTURE - Natalie Langham**

Ephesians 4:1-6

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. <sup>4</sup>There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, <sup>5</sup>one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup>one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

## **OPENING HYMN - Lord I Lift Your Name on High** by Rick Founds

### **MOMENT with ALLY**

#### **PASTORAL PRAYER - Sarah Smith**

Creator God, all you ask of us is faith the size of a mustard seed: small, considered a weed by some for it's dogged growth in the cracks of the established; breaking boundaries where invited and not. A task that seems so easy, and yet, in practice is so hard.

To grow, we must first be buried. As the light is blocked out by the soil that will strangle us, soil that will nourish us, soil that will temporarily separate us from being able to see your vision, we cry out in the darkness. Where is our creator? Why have we been left alone? We are afraid. We grieve our previous closeness to each other: other seeds from the same plant, other seeds from the same package. We mourn the loss of the other, not knowing that they too have been planted - six feet away and smothered in their own darkness.

To grow we must first be watered. A torrential downpour soaks through the hard shells we have built around ourselves. The water cracks us open, shattering long held beliefs, for better or for worse. And it comes everyday: medical professionals opening up about their exhaustion, their grief, their sanity; the news telling us another record of deaths has been set; the stay at home order being extended yet again. We are cracked open by the water, and grow in every direction we can stretch ; searching for your light in the darkness, not even realizing we are changing, only aware of the pain of new growth.

And, Lord, will we grow. We will fill the spaces we are given. As we recognize that for the plants around us to survive, to thrive, to be given the chance at life that many of us take for granted, they need their own space. We will live in our own spaces: despite the discomfort as our roots start to overlap, despite the revealing that not all our pots are equal, despite the grief that some seeds we were planted with will never have the chance to flower. In the grief, in the discomfort, in the anger, we do not even realize

that we have finally grown back into your light.

To survive, we must receive sunlight. Some days remind us of a lazy summer - we see street parades and news of masks being made, babies being born. Little streams of sunlight that warm us with comfort. There are days though where we feel scorched - the light is too bright and too close. We are burned by the tempting mirage of returning to a normal that never truly existed. We are burned by privilege - taking for granted the home that we can shelter in, the nonessential jobs that take care of their employees from home, access to healthcare. In our rush to grow, will we remember that not all plants can handle direct sunlight? Can we balance our times in the light and the shade so that every plant in the garden can survive?

Cultivator of this cosmic garden, you ask us for faith the size of a mustard seed. You promise to tend us, giving us space on the vine. However, you never promised us a pleasant growth. Give us the strength to weather the process. Give us grace when we steal another's sunshine. Give us wisdom to know that darkness is not inherently evil and light not the ultimate good. May we look to you for direction on how to best thrive in the garden in the coming months. Amen.

## **SCRIPTURE & SERMON - Chad Delaney**

*1 Corinthians 1:10-19*

Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but that you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose. <sup>11</sup>For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is that each of you says, 'I belong to Paul', or 'I belong to Apollos', or 'I belong to Cephas', or 'I belong to Christ.' <sup>13</sup>Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? <sup>14</sup>I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, <sup>15</sup>so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. <sup>16</sup>(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) <sup>17</sup>For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup>For it is written, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

### **In Essentials Unity**

This week we hear some of the Apostle Paul's opening words to the Corinthian Church. Paul had invested a lot in that church. It was there he preached and taught and gave

them the message about the Risen Christ. Who they are, their way of being, everything they did would somehow reflect his teaching. He is thankful for them and believes in them....but they got issues, too.

Of course we don't know exactly what's up, but it appears there are different teachings floating around depending on who it originated with. Perhaps Apollos had a different view on something than Cephas or Paul. So in order to solve their differences, the churches sat down together, did non-violent communication exercises, and they all found peace and unity in Jesus Christ. Oh wait...Yeah...no. The early church was divided up into camps. I belong to Paul. I belong to Apollos. Citing who they believed in and listened to. Quarreling over stuff that Paul apparently thought wasn't worth arguing over.

On the one hand I find this a bit comforting. Even since the very beginning the early church didn't always agree on everything and somehow, somehow the Gospel was still proclaimed. On the other hand, I find it disturbing....why is it so hard for us humans to agree on what is most important and then devoting our energy in that direction? You'd think that the church would have found a way to do so after all these years.

Human beings have always found extraordinarily creative ways to disagree with each other. Religion. Culture. Politics. Money. We just can't seem to help ourselves...always struggling to see the big picture and to figure out what really, REALLY matters.

In seminary I heard a phrase that I really connected with but also have been vexed by over the years. "In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Love." It's a beautiful idea.

The original iteration of this was coined by a German guy named Peter Meiderlin waaay back in the 1620s. Peter was a 17th Century Lutheran theologian in a religiously divisive and changing time, but Europe was also embroiled in the brutal Thirty-Years War. By the war's end in 1648, there were over 8 million fatalities. From military violence, famine, and disease....so much devastation. And religious tension between Christians had a strong hand in starting it.

So these words... "In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Love" were not just a cool theological idea---but perhaps A DESPERATE plea for people to find a way to come together. Peoples' very lives were at stake.

Here we are in the 21st Century and problems with "coming together" remain. In the current situations the culture and political wars are raging still with trying to figure out

what's "essential." Questions raised on wearing Masks, PPE, the pace of re-opening, our Response. Can't we figure it out? But recognize that much as I love that quote...there is a powerful weakness in it...who gets to decide what's essential? Who gets to decide what is most important?

Often we give that power to those who hold power, prestige, and privilege. Leaders of our politics and economy. Religion and celebrity. Most often disproportionately represented by race, color, creed, and wealth. People Motivated only by money. Motivated by keeping power and influence. People for whom the question "What's good for me and mine?" is the first, second, and third question asked. And so many voices proclaiming that individual liberty comes over everything else and it should be survival of the fittest.

Are these the voices we really trust to decide what's essential? To decide what is best for the common good? For the most vulnerable among us? And for those of us who identify as Christians, what do voices sound like that resonate with the life and ministry and attitude of Christ?

What the Apostle Paul expresses in our passage 2000 years ago is something as Christians we can remember now. Paul tells them they catch a glimpse of what unifies them by looking to the Cross. What do you see there? In the first century that cross was meant for intimidation, fear, and death...but now--in Jesus--the cross became a symbol of God's stunning victory over the terrors of the world. What was meant to exert power and domination would be proclaimed ineffectual and powerless. What was meant to instill hopelessness, became a sign of new life and God's redemptive purpose. It was an absolutely astonishing reversal.

The thoughts of the wise, became foolish...and the foolishness of the cross would actually display the very power of God. Strength seen in humility, servanthood, and emptying of the self. Power known in looking out for the least of these, the hurting, the sick, the vulnerable. The way of Jesus really turns the world upside down. In the cross (of all things) Christians would remember Jesus--who he was and how far love was willing to go...Paul says this is what they should be unifying around.

He put it this way to the church in Philippi--

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in*

*Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.*

Family of God, as we navigate this time of pandemic there are going to be a thousand choices, options, and decisions to make that maybe we've never had to make before. So many voices, opinions, and differences about what is essential or what we should do. It's going to be hard in so many ways...no question about it. Where do we focus our hearts? What will ground and give substance to your thinking and doing and being? What will unify around as a people?

As a Christian, might we center our hearts and minds on the attitude of Christ? To keep the Cross before us that reminds us that the humble, the least, the servant to all...would embody the Gospel and display the power of God. That we might look not to our own interests, but to the interests of others. To empty ourselves for the good of all, and especially for vulnerable, the poor, the least of these. To love our neighbors.

These are difficult times, as we seek to unite, as we seek to define what is essential and important...as we journey forward...may we take with us an extra dose of compassion and courage and patience knowing that God will have an endless supply for us. And let's not forget who we are and unite around who Christ lived, died, and rose for us to be.

May it be so. Amen.

### **SPECIAL MUSIC - "One Bread, One Body" Pat Strainer**

#### **COMMUNION**

Meditation and Prayer - Nora Brant

Words of Institution - Sarah Smith

### **CLOSING HYMN - Be Thou My Vision #595**

#### **BENEDICTION - Sarah Smith**

Thank you so much for checking in with us for remote worship this week. If you are new to Mantua Center and want to see more of our videos, feel free to subscribe to our channel to see more. We are blessed with your presence whenever you choose to swing by. I sincerely hope that you and your family are doing well during this time. I know I miss seeing you in person.

Happy mothers day to all of the people out there who would consider themselves mothers. You have touched the lives of the people around you. For those of us with the ability to, reach out and contact a person that you would consider a mother figure. Maybe it is not your own mother, but a mother you look up to, someone who has touched your life or the lives of others in a motherly way.

Our theme this week was unity. Did you know that the Disciples of Christ was founded around the idea that Christian unity was one of the most important missions of the church? To this day, we promote the idea that no matter the circumstance, no matter how fractured the world gets, we seek connection and community with others. That is the beautiful thought that I will leave us with this week. May the peace of the Lord and Sophia's wisdom enfold you until we meet again. Amen.

**BENEDICTION SONG - "All In All" by Pat Strainer**