



# Valley Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Dear Friend in Christ,

I am happy to share with you the next week of our autumn sermon series "The Whatabouts: Responding to Questions with Faithfulness." This week, we address the question "What about divine wrath?" by reading from Ezekiel, a prophet with a gift for teaching us with lots of vivid prose!

Remember, this is the Sunday that we start with the Zoom passcodes and new links!

Please use following phone numbers and links between 10:15am and 10:30am. You can join in one of two ways:

By computer, smart phone or tablet:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86757133623?pwd=OTFUQWJvU2lMMmR6bkY5SitpelRIUT09>

By Phone: 1 (312) 626 6799 ID 867 5713 3623,  
Passcode 205879

(If you need a live link to the Worship link, you can go to the homepage of our website at [www.vccbhm.org](http://www.vccbhm.org) with the passcode 205879 OR click on "Zoom Links" then the Sunday Worship link.)

I look forward to seeing you on Sunday.

Christ's and yours,  
Pastor Eric

# Valley Christian Church

## Seventeenth Sunday After Pentecost

Ezekiel 16:47-50

“The Whatabouts: What About Divine Wrath?”  
See Insert for Meditation

September 27, 2020

### PRELUDE

*“If My People Will Pray”*

### CALL TO WORSHIP

**Leader:** The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble.  
**People:** He sits enthroned upon the cherubim, let the earth quake.  
**Leader:** The Lord is great in Zion; He is exalted over all the peoples.  
**People:** Let them praise your great and awesome name, Holy is he!  
**Leader:** Mighty king, lover of justice, you have established equity; you have executed justice and righteousness for Jacob.  
**People:** Extol the Lord our God; worship at his footstool. Holy is he!

(Psalm 99:1-5, NRSV)

### HYMN OF PRAISE

*“God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale”*  
*God of the sparrow, God of the whale*  
*God of the swirling stars*  
*How does the creature say Awe*  
*How does the creature say Praise*  
*God of the earthquake, God of the storm*  
*God of the trumpet blast*  
*How does the creature cry Woe*  
*How does the creature cry Save*  
*God of the rainbow, God of the cross*  
*God of the empty grave*  
*How does the creature say Grace*  
*How does the creature say Thanks*

### INVOCATION

Eternal God, we gather today in Sunday worship to search your Word for wisdom and deeper meaning. Show us your ways, that we might follow them. Lead us to truth, that we might know it. And guide us in your steps, that we might be the people you would have us be. Amen.

### SCRIPTURE

### MEDITATION

### HYMN

*“Just as I Am, Without One Plea”*

*Just as I am, without one plea*  
*But that thy blood was shed for me*  
*And that thou biddest me to come to thee*  
*O Lamb of God, I come, I come*

*Just as I am, though tossed about*  
*With many a conflict, many a doubt*  
*Fightings and fears within, without*  
*O Lamb of God, I come, I come*

*Just as I am, thy love unknown*  
*Hast broken every barrier down*  
*To be thine, yea, thine alone*  
*O Lamb of God, I come, I come*

### SHARING JOYS AND CONCERNS

### PASTORAL PRAYER

Righteous God, we hear your voice ringing out to us through your teachers and writers of Scripture, your church leaders of years past, and in the prophets of today. We ask that you also hear our voices, as you heard the cries of your children in Egypt, as we pray to you on behalf of those most in need of your power and glory in this moment, that they might experience justice in the face of injustice, life in the face of death, and love in the face of hatred. May you be with them as we lift them up to you by name at this time...

### CALL TO COMMUNION

May we remember how Christ showed us how to face the anger and wrath of others with dignity and resolve.

### COMMUNION HYMN

*“Jesu, Jesu”*

*Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love*  
*Show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you*  
*Kneels at the feet of his friends*  
*Silently washes their feet*  
*Master who acts as a slave to them*

**COMMUNION  
HYMN**

*Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love  
Show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you*

*Neighbors are rich and poor  
Varied in color and race  
Neighbors are near and far away*

*Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love*

*Show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you*

**COMMUNION  
PRAYER**

Pray together the Lord's Prayer

**HOLY  
COMMUNION**

Partake of the holy communion (bread, juice, or  
whatever is available to you)

**WORDS OF  
INSTITUTION**

Hear the words of Jesus when He said, "Take and eat,  
this is my body, broken for you. Take and drink, this is  
the cup of the covenant poured out for you."

**SHARING OUR  
OFFERING  
WITH GOD**

Share your financial offering with the church by mail or  
bring it by the church office. Thank you for your love  
gifts.

**OFFERTORY  
PRAYER**

God who gave us life, grace, and salvation, we give  
back to you in such small measure compared to gifts  
such as those. But we ask your blessing upon our  
offerings to your church, so that they might be used to  
work your will in the world. Amen.

**BENEDICTION**

Now may the God who poured out love for you time  
and again, from your creation to this very day, send you  
forth to share that same love in the name of Jesus  
Christ. May the blessing of the Lord be with you now  
and always. Amen.

This Sunday's worship leaders

Leader: Mr. Terry Nunnally  
Pianist: Mrs. Margaret Cox  
Minister: Rev. Dr. Eric Atcheson

# I can do all things through Christ

## which strengtheneth me.

PHILIPPIANS 4:13



## MEDITATION

Sunday, September 27, 2020

“What About Divine Wrath?” Ezekiel 16:47-50

“The Whatabouts: Responding to Questions with Faithfulness,”  
Week Three

As the threats posed by Hurricanes Laura and Sally forced me into adjusting to the threat of a natural disaster I had heretofore very little experience preparing for (Kansas is, after all, not exactly known for being a hurricane hotspot for obvious reasons, and the West Coast only slightly less so), I was receiving a steady stream of saddening, disturbing, even harrowing photos from my friends on the West Coast of what their new normal was under inhuman levels of fire and smoke. Furiously red skies, smoke that obscured churches and houses alike, fires that raged all unabated painted a genuinely and literally hellish portrait. Seeing it all broke my heart for the area of the country that had been my home for almost all of my adult life until now, even as Carrie and I prepared for damage from hurricanes that, at least in here Birmingham, fortunately never materialized.

We are not so far away from a time when prominent religious leaders would look at such natural disasters, or pandemics like the one we have been experiencing for most of this year, and proclaim them as signs of God’s wrath or disfavor upon a people. Pat Robertson famously proclaimed the catastrophic 2010 Port-au-Prince earthquake a punishment by God for Haiti’s Black founders having had the temerity to revolt against their white European slaveholders. It was not so long ago that some US Christian leaders preached that HIV/AIDS was a punishment sent by God. And after a hurricane, there is almost inevitably a headline about one religious leader or another interpreting it as divine retribution for something that leader detests, you can practically set your watch to it.

But if we do not count ourselves among such doommongers (and I hope we would not) how do we answer when people asking—whether skeptically or in earnest—us, “What about divine wrath?”

This sermon series is my first as your new minister here at Valley, and

I arrived at it after multiple conversations with the search committee about how and why evangelism came to be noted as so important a trait in the congregation’s search and call profile. And specifically what I heard was a need to be equipped to talk to people about faith in a way that could answer their questions—questions to which we may or may not have all the answers, or not feel comfortable answering.

The way I experienced doing evangelism on the West Coast would sometimes come in the form of fielding questions from folks skeptical of the nature of my faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ, and I came to think of those questions as “the whatabouts,” as in, “Well, what about...?” Being honest in those moments was vital for my own integrity and for my friendship with the person asking me. I crafted this sermon series to tackle many of these questions a way for me to share with you what evangelism has looked to me and in my ministry, by trying to answer those whatabout questions, and as a way to let you into my own theology and faith.

This week’s question is, “What about divine wrath?” And this may be, for you, one of the toughest questions we tackle in this entire series—I know it is for me. I was raised to imagine God as all-loving, perhaps you were as well, and it is very difficult to imagine an all-loving God being wrathful.

But that does not mean there is not good news to be had in the notion that God is capable of anger. Just a couple of weeks ago, we talked about injustice and how it impacts God, because God has to witness it, just like us, and experiences it alongside of us. I cannot imagine that such experience would not make God angry; indeed, that evil would upset God ought to be good news to us because a God who is not upset by evil sounds like an awfully apathetic or uncaring deity.

Is there a distinction to be drawn, then, between a wrathful God and a punitive God—a God who punishes excessively or unnecessarily? I don’t think that’s grasping at Biblical straws—I think it is important to acknowledge that God is capable of anger, even if that anger is slow in coming. Which, in turn, should mean that we are slow to say that God is angry at us, rather than reach for it almost reflexively and hurtfully like after an earthquake or a hurricane.

(over)