

Order of Worship

Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 21, 2021

WELCOME

Hello God, thank you for this day.

It's 9:03 and we need your help.

Guide us by your Holy Spirit to reach new people,

Connect us all through Christ's love, and

Empower us to love and serve others. Amen.

PRELUDE *Pavanne in A Minor* W. Byrd

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 51:1-3, 10-15 UMH 785

HYMN 417 *O For a Heart to Praise My God* RICHMOND

SCRIPTURE Jeremiah 31:31-34

PASTORAL PRAYER AND 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass 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.

HYMN 576 *Rise Up, Ye Saints of God* FESTAL SONG

SCRIPTURE John 12:20-33

MESSAGE Rev. Rebecca Voss

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN *God, the Father of Your People* HOLY MANNA

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Herlich thut much verlangen* C. Engelbrecht

PRAYER CORNER

Please pray for Marilyn Zahn's continued recovery. She is back at Stone Crest after a brief hospital stay. Lord, surround Marilyn and her family with your comfort and peace as her body and soul finds full healing in your presence.

Thirsting for God SERVING Pastor Rebecca Voss

An extended family of more than a dozen people were seated in my section at the O'Malley Farm Café in Waunakee. As their server, I filled a large oval tray of water glasses to bring out with their menus. Distributing the first few glasses went smoothly, but as I set the glass down in front of the matriarch of the family, my tray became unbalanced. About 10 glasses of ice water landed in the shocked woman's lap. I did all that I could to help the shivering lady get dry and warm, but my confidence in serving well was shaken. I was so embarrassed, wishing the earth would just swallow me up.

Today's text from the Gospel of John talks about both serving and being buried in the ground. Jesus explains to Philip and Andrew, *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."* (John 12:23-24). Technically speaking, we know that seeds are living throughout the planting and growing process. The important part is that a seed has to go through a time of dark and damp in order to germinate, sprout, and grow. These dark and damp times may feel like we're dying inside. Jesus uses it as a metaphor to explain that following him isn't all sunshine and rainbows. It often begins with dirt, dark, and death.

"Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." (John 12: 25) For people who are grateful for our lives, this isn't exactly a word of comfort. This is an example of Jesus speaking in hyperbole, much like he did in Luke 14:26 when he said we are to hate our relatives if we want to follow him. The Bible – even Jesus' words – is not meant to be taken literally all the time. Sometimes we can read and interpret it at surface level, but that's not usually how the people wrote, read, and understood things in biblical times. We read the Bible *spiritually* – in a way that helps us discern more deeply between good, better, and best until we love God more than anything else in our life.

"Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor." (John 12:26). A life of love is seen in a life of service. Jesus, who loves more perfectly than any human ever has or will, is also our ultimate example of serving. He went to the last, the lost, and the least and served them with great love.

Last weekend I was driving downtown with our daughters and some of their friends, and they noticed a group of men hanging out in the 400 block. I explained that several of them are regulars at the Warming Center, and that my husband (who works the 12:30-8:30am shift at the Warming Center) has gotten to know them pretty well. I pointed out “Rick” (*named changed to protect his identity*) and explained he has trouble bending over to get his socks and shoes on, so their dad kneels down and puts Rick’s socks and shoes on for him almost every morning. That was beyond the girls’ comprehension and comfort zone, but it’s one of the reasons I love my husband. His life of love is seen in a life of service.

Serving the way Jesus did – and wants us to - requires dying. Dying to our disgusts, dying to our fears, and dying to our sense of entitlements. Ironically, the verses highlighted so far are sandwiched between these two passages which seem to be the opposite of serving and dying: “*Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified’*” (v. 23). What Jesus goes on to say about serving and dying doesn’t sound like glory to our human ears. But Jesus has empathy for us when we’re confronted with dying to ourselves and serving others. He says in v. 27a, “*Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – ‘Father, save me from this hour’*”?

This is not what anyone listening to Jesus would have predicted he would say. Ancient philosophers praised people who were not afraid when faced with trouble and even death. But Jesus was in touch with the reality of his own emotions. He authentically admitted that even his own soul was troubled and that part of him wanted to avoid the pain of dying. But he comes around and says, “*No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour.*” (v. 27b).

My daughter Joy and I like listening to the soundtrack from Hamilton, and the refrain from My Shot, “*Rise Up*”, gets me moving every time. A hundred years before Lin Manuel Miranda wrote those lyrics, William Merrill wrote another “*Rise Up*” we just sang:

*Rise Up, O saints of God! Have done with lesser things.
Give heart and mind and soul and strength to serve the King of kings.*
Before we can rise up to serve, we have to be “done with lesser things”. We have to give our whole life – heart, mind, soul, and strength – to rise up to follow and serve God. Perhaps our life feels like little more than a seed buried in the ground, but as we die to ourselves, we are assured our new life will rise up to bear much fruit.

As Jesus rises up to resist the temptation of preserving his life instead of serving with his life, he says in John 12:28a, *“Father, glorify your name.”* What does all that mean? When we pray and live to glorify God, we commit to serving. Serving is a spiritual discipline defined in the Renovare Spiritual Formation Bible as, *“Loving, thoughtful, active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world, through which we experience the many little deaths of going beyond ourselves.”* (p.2309). It requires obedience, like Jesus demonstrated first in his life of faithful service of setting lives free and would later through how he laid down his life on our behalf.

God’s heavenly voice replied in John 12:28b-29, *“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”* *The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, ‘An angel has spoken to him.’* Different people in the crowd heard different things. Some only heard a garbled rumble, and others recognized it as an angelic voice. But it wasn’t for his benefit that God supernaturally affirmed him. *“Jesus answered, ‘This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world, now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’* *He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.”* (vs. 30-33). In other words, Jesus is saying that he would rise up on the cross, that he would rise up from the grave, and that he would rise up from earth to be enthroned in heaven. It’s for our sake that he also calls us to rise up to serve. As L.M. Miranda sings in “My Shot”,

*Don't be shocked when your history book mentions me
I will lay down my life if it sets us free
Eventually, you'll see my ascendancy*

At Ginghamburg UMC in Ohio they avoid the word “volunteer” to describe people serving God. What’s the difference between volunteering and serving? Volunteers share their time and skills by choice and convenience, but servants give their lives with a sense of call and commitment. Volunteers are motivated by how it makes them feel, and servants are motivated by how their service empowers others. Volunteers go when and where and how they want, but servants follow where Christ goes and do what God asks of them. May all of us at First UMC of Wausau love and serve God, die to ourselves, and rise up to love and serve others. Amen!