

Order of Worship

Christ the King Sunday, November 22, 2020

WELCOME

PRELUDE *Trumpet Tune "Bonduca"* H. Purcell

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 65:1-4, 9-13 UMH p. 789

HYMN 694 *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come* ST. GEORGE'S WINDSOR

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 43:1-2, 18-19

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 2036 *Give Thanks* GIVE THANKS

SCRIPTURE Isaiah 54:1-4

MESSAGE Pastor Rebecca Voss

GENEROSITY, INVITATIONS and CELEBRATIONS

HYMN 102 *Now Thank We All Our God* NUN DANKET

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *The King's Highway* H. Stark

WHAT IF... We Do Something Extraordinary?

As people we need “normal”, crave comfort, and codify customs. Even the most adventurous among us have our own ways of seeking security and accepting “average”. What if God is calling us to do something extraordinary? How will we know whether opening ourselves for new and potentially risky opportunities that come our way is based in faith or foolishness? Isaiah 43:1-2 says,

*But now thus says the LORD,
he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name, you are mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.*

The challenge with this verse is most of us can vividly remember times we have felt overwhelmed or burned. We have taken risks and fallen hard. We succumbed to the tempter’s smooth suggestions to take a leap of “faith” and trust angels to catch us, when we should have resisted with a “Get behind me, Satan!”. We might even relate to the Israelites whose temple, homes, jobs, and families were destroyed, scattered, and/or exiled. In that context, as well as in whatever place of feeling fooled or fearful that you find yourself, God called the prophet Isaiah (43:18-19) to say these words of faith:

*Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old.
I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

Most of us would say this year has felt overwhelming. Many of us have been burned by hardships. We’ve been flooded with loss. We’ve felt isolated and even deserted. But God promises that something new is coming that springs forth and provides a way in the wilderness and water in the desert. Something extraordinary! How can we prepare ourselves to recognize and embrace it? How will we know when an extraordinary opportunity is from God and worth the risk?

The first step is what we focused on two weeks ago: **What If We Humble Ourselves and Pray**. Praying in complete surrender to God is the only way God will hear us and we can hear God. Learning to prayerfully discern between what we think we need and what God says we need – both materially and spiritually – is a major part of our faith. Otherwise our own fears and foolishness tend to obscure God’s will. We learn to recognize, confess, and find healing in humble prayer that says, “*Not my will, but Thine be done*”.

Even before 2020, this congregation has experienced a lot of pain, loss, and grief. But God preserved a remnant of both people and hope. Many of you faithfully responded to the question (and next step) “**What If We Put God First?**” long before I preached that as a sermon last week. Almost two years ago this congregation was selected as one of eight churches in this conference that had the potential to become an extraordinary church. You began a journey called the Missional Church Consultative Initiative, or MCCI for short. Dick Rayborn came up with an easier way to think of MCCI: “My Church Can Improve”. God is calling us to something extraordinary! But God also reminds us that this is not *my* church our even *our* church. We are *God’s* church!

The foundation of the MCCI journey is laid in something called Breakthrough Prayer. I was not here yet when that prayer was written and declared at 9:03 every day by this congregation as a humble act of surrender to God. But I can tell you about another Breakthrough Prayer that was birthed in our courtyard this past summer. Jen and Dan Marzu, Martie Pahriss, and I were spread out in the fresh air surrounded by a mostly empty building. We had met to grapple with how we could safely use this building. What risks were acceptable? What groups and events were essential? What should we focus on?

The phrase “Serve the Hurting” came to us in holy conversation and prayer. We sensed a powerful but simple call to make our building a place where those who were hurting the most could find help and hope. We initially recognized that opening for groups like AA and a family funeral for Claire would be priorities. We also knew there would somehow be even bigger answers to that call and prayer. With both a big God and a big building, we envisioned and began praying that God would strengthen and expand our congregation as we fulfill our call to serve the hurting.

Through prayer, we were prepared to put God first when we were presented a month later with the opportunity to open our doors to the Warming Center and Free Clinic. God comes to us in the form of the hurting: the hungry, thirsty, poor, wounded, and stranger. None of that would have happened without this whole congregation humbling praying and putting God first. I wonder if this could have come together if we weren't forced to be apart. Together, we are beginning to do something extraordinary.

It's common for churches to think of their building as their identity. The architecture leads our hearts and minds to both history and heaven. The spaces become full of meaning and memories. For this congregation with our extra-large and often unused spaces, I've heard many comments of feeling discouraged as we look at desolate rooms. Listen to God's promise in Isaiah 54:1-4:

*Sing, O barren one who did not bear;
burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labor!
For the children of the desolate woman will be more
than the children of her that is married, says the LORD.
Enlarge the site of your tent,
and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out;
do not hold back; lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes.
For you will spread out to the right and to the left,
and your descendants will possess the nations
and will settle the desolate towns.
Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed;
do not be discouraged, for you will not suffer disgrace;
for you will forget the shame of your youth,
and the disgrace of your widowhood you will remember no more.*

Our church can become more fruitful. "My Church Can Improve". In fact, as we humble ourselves, pray, and put God first, our church – *God's church* - can become extraordinary. The opportunities ahead will probably surprise us and ask us to surrender the status quo for however the Spirit calls us to serve the hurting. We might initially respond with fear or think it is foolish. However, I believe God is telling us to continue opening our hearts, minds, and even doors even wider. At first it will likely be less for us and more for those most in need. But God says, "*Do not hold back...Do not fear...Do not be discouraged*" Amen to that!