

Prelude: “There Is A Place of Quiet Rest” [Annie Schulz & Molly Enns]

Gathering Thoughts: Doug Schulz

Welcome to the worship service of Grace Mennonite Church for this first Sunday in July, and the fifth Sunday following Pentecost. We are pleased to have Waldo Pauls with us today to present a reflection on the Scriptures. Waldo is one of our former pastors at Grace and a present member. Waldo’s time as pastor was marked with rich times of warm fellowship and meaningful worship, and we’re so glad he is here to preach again today.

Music today will be provided by our Music Coordinator Annie Schulz along with singer Diana Lantin and Molly Enns on flute. I am associate pastor Doug Schulz. Sound technician is Ted Kopp.

Call to Worship: [written by Christine Longhurst]

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls— come and worship!
Even if you’re tired and worn out— come and worship!
Lay down the heavy things you are carrying— come and worship!
Listen to what Jesus wants to tell you— come and worship!
See if you can discover how Jesus wants to use you— come and worship!
For Jesus is humble and gentle, and he will give us everything we need to follow him.

Prayer: Lord God, as we continue to live in trying times facing the unknowns created by the pandemic called COVID-19, help us to remain true to you in faithful desire to trust your faithfulness and to respond to your grace and goodness as servants of yours in this world. May our service of worship today strengthen us in comfort and confidence and courage, in every way we need. And may our thoughts and expressions in words and music honour your gracious holy name. AMEN

Scripture: Psalm 145:8-14

8 The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

9 The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

10 All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your faithful shall bless you.

11 They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power,

12 to make known to all people your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.
14 The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Hymn: “Joyful, joyful, we adore thee” [HWB #71]

*Joyful, joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love.
Hearts unfold like flowers before thee, praising thee their sun above.
Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away.
Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!*

*All thy works with joy surround thee, earth and heav’n reflect thy rays,
stars and angels sing around thee, center of unbroken praise.
Field and forest, vale and mountain, blooming meadow, flashing sea,
chanting bird and flowing fountain, call us to rejoice in thee.*

*Thou are giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever bless’d,
well-spring of the joy of living, ocean-depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our brother, all who live in love are thine.
Teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine.*

*Mortals, join the mighty chorus which the morning stars began.
Love divine is reigning o’er us, leading us with mercy’s hand.
Ever singing, march we onward, victors in the midst of strife.
Joyful music lifts us sunward in the triumph song of life!*

Prayers of the People: [adapted from HWB #721]

Almighty God, from whom comes each good gift of life,
we remember your loving-kindness and mercies as we join in praise.
For the beauty and bounty of the world, and the joys each season brings,
we give you thanks, O God.

For the work we have been enabled to do in life, and the truth we are permitted to discover; for whatever good there has been in our past,
and for all the hopes which lead us on toward better things, we give you thanks.
For the joys and comforts of life; for homes and families; for our friends;
for the love, sympathy, and goodwill of persons near and far, we are thankful.
For all cultures, wise government, and just laws which order our common life;
for education and all the treasures of literature, science, and art, we give you thanks.

For the discipline of life; for the tasks and trials which train us to know ourselves and which bring us to accept one another;
for the desire and power to help others; for every opportunity of serving

in large ways or small, we give thanks, O God.

For the gift of Jesus Christ, and everything which is ours as his followers;
and for the presence and inspiration of your Holy Spirit every day, we thank you,
God. God of all grace and love, we praise you with our words for all the richness
and meaning that life holds for us.

Deepen our awareness of your love as we live in this world as your servants, by
faith.

And help us live by the prayer you taught us, saying:

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 and ever. AMEN

Hymn: “What a friend we have in Jesus” [HWB #573 – v.1 & vv. 2&3 blend]

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry ev’ry-thing to God in prayer!

Oh, what peace we often forfeit, oh, what needless pain we bear,

all because we do not carry ev’ry-thing to God in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, ‘cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our ev’ry weakness – thou wilt find a solace there.

Scripture: Matthew 11:25-30 [Read by Waldo]

25 At that time Jesus said, “I thank[a] you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.[b] 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Reflection: Waldo Pauls “Horizons of Hope – God Is Faithful”

It’s good to be with you today or whenever you might be listening to or reading this message. Think of how isolated we would have felt if this pandemic had

happened 20 years ago before we had all the technology that we have today.

Now you've heard the two passages read that I'm going to be focusing on and I'll mainly be looking for insights we can glean from the verses of Psalm 145. This psalm has been given the title - a psalm of praise of David - and it's interesting that it's the only psalm out of the 150 in total that is given this title. Many contain praise but if you read this one in its entirety you'll recognize that it contains a comprehensive expression of praise for God as king. I'll just be concentrating on verses 8-14 that we heard earlier.

Another thing you'll notice is how often the word "all" is used. In these particular 7 verses it occurs 8 times. Obviously the word "all" refers to everyone in this world so that includes believer and non-believer, people of all nationalities and ages and economic status, people who are feeling good about life and those who are in the midst of despair and depression. Over these last weeks we've been witnessing demonstrations that include the slogan - "Black Lives Matter!" It's so true that our friends of color have been discriminated against - not only in the US and Canada but around the world. God sees what's happening and he may be thinking - "It's about time people started to be more sensitive to the racial prejudices of our world." At the same time it 's also true that white lives matter, brown lives, red lives, yellow lives - whatever color in which we've been created matter to our God. This time of Covid may have left you feeling alone and passed over by God. That's not so! God continues to be active in all of our lives today, whether we can tangibly feel him close to us or not.

As I look more specifically at these verses we read in verse 8: "The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love". You may not remember where we first heard those words in Scripture so I'll remind you that they come from Exodus 34:6. God himself spoke these words to Moses on the occasion of Moses being given the second set of the Ten Commandments after he had smashed the first ones on the rocks on his way down the mountain. It wasn't that his hiking sandals had slipped on the path, rather he had observed the children of Israel worshipping a golden calf and we read that: "his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces." (Exodus 32:19) God's chosen people had sinned in the most offensive way possible, worshipping an idol instead of the God who had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. Yet God's response was one of grace and compassion. Do we act that way when our help is rejected? More often we might react with the thought; Fine then - you're on your own!

A term that describes God's care is simply the word - love. Verse 8 - compassionate, rich in love. Verse 9 - compassion on all. Verse 13 - loving toward

all he has made. In 1 John 4:19 we read: "We love because he first loved us." Throughout Scripture we read of God's love toward people. Not everyone responds to that love but God demonstrated a love toward us that was incredible in its dimensions. There are many reasons why we are drawn to a love like that and in these verses we read that God is gracious, slow to anger, good to all, faithful to all his promises, upholds all who fall, lifts up all who are bowed down.

Now when we read those reasons to praise most of us would agree that they are legitimate and should cause us to praise. Yet sometimes that still isn't enough. Sometimes we get looking too much at our own personal situation where we feel that life isn't fair or that we have been abandoned by God. One reason can be health concerns and many face the issue of illness and other scenarios that leave our lives in a less than ideal situation. Over the years as a pastor I've visited many people with cancer and other debilitating conditions and I would share verses of hope and comfort and try to assure them that God was with them and would see them through. Then over the past few months I've been dealing with the news that I have a high risk prostate cancer and have now begun treatment. It feels a little different when you're the one affected rather than the one who is trying to offer comfort. It's then that our faith is tested as to whether it's only a declaration of words or a conviction of the heart.

Recently I was reading in 2nd Kings chapter 13 and a phrase struck me where it said that Elisha suffered from the illness from which he died. Wait a minute, wasn't he the prophet who requested a double portion of the spirit that Elijah had - and his wish was granted? Yes he was. Here was a person filled with God's spirit and doing his work in miraculous ways and yet he had an illness that eventually killed him. If that's true then it means that no matter how strong and positive our faith may be it doesn't spare us from the ordinary circumstances and illnesses of daily life. We are all subject to the weaknesses that these earthly bodies of ours encounter and we shouldn't expect that somehow we will be spared and it's always the next person who is afflicted.

These 7 verses are part of a chapter of praise to God for his love and compassion and grace and power but never once does it say that we will simply move smoothly through life without difficulty until we finally have a peaceful death with a smile on our face. Rather this God we praise is one who is worthy of our allegiance and he will walk with us and give us hope through all that we encounter.

In the Matthew passage the words in chapter 11:28-30 give us the secret of living as overcomers as Jesus says: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I

am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Both the old and new testaments give us testimony to the faithfulness of God as we reach out to him and accept his love and grace. The sermon series for this summer is entitled - Horizons of Hope and my specific title today is - God is Faithful. In verse 13 of our passage in Psalm 145 we read: "The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made." Whatever situation that we find ourselves in today, may we find peace in the reminder that God loves all of us and that he is faithful to all his promises.

God, this morning we give you thanks once again for your presence in our lives and your promises to us. Grant us the strength to remain faithful to you as you are to us. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Hymn of Response: "I heard the voice of Jesus say" [HWB #493]

*I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Come unto me and rest.
Lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was, so weary, worn, and sad.
I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad.*

*I heard the voice of Jesus say, "Behold, I freely give
the living water, thirsty one; stoop down and drink and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream.
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him.*

*I heard the voice of Jesus say, "I am this dark world's light.
Look unto me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found in him my star, my sun,
and in that light of life I'll walk till tra-v'ling days are done.*

Benediction: [II Thessalonian 2:16,17]

16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Sending Hymn: "They that wait upon the Lord" [HWB #584]

*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.
They shall mount up with wings as eagles.
They shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
Teach me, Lord, teach me, Lord, to wait.*