

September 20, 2020



We have chosen to follow Jesus' commandment to care for our neighbor, especially our most vulnerable neighbors (Matthew 22: 37-40), during the coronavirus/COVID19 pandemic. While we are not gathering at the church building, we have chosen to see this as a time for us to try new ways to worship, learn, pray, and stay connected ...after all, *God is always doing new things (Isaiah 43:1-19)!*

In these difficult times, we are committed to continuing to find ways to be the church.

Don't hesitate to be in touch if you need something, especially help...getting groceries or medicine, figuring out how to do all this online stuff, or just needing to chat. We are here to help!

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Henry, the Elders, and Deacons of the First Presbyterian Church of Corona

In order to open the music, place the cursor on the title, press ctrl and click. That will take you to the appropriate YouTube location to open.

GATHERING SONG [What a Friend we Have in Jesus](#)

CALL TO WORSHIP

Thanks be to Christ Jesus who has called us into service and enlisted us in a new expedition. We have been shown much mercy since we enrolled as pilgrims in the faith.

Let us surge forward together in the company of Christ; let us prepare for a spiritual journey. We do not know just what we may encounter. The mysteries of God are many, and the will of God is often hard to track.

Let us Shoulder our packs and gear. The Spirit will be our guide. No enemy will prevail against the Church of Jesus.

We are ready to map out the uncertain terrain. We have our orders. It is enough for us to know that we start out with a perfect guide who would even give his life for us.

(From Ruth C. Ducks and Maren C. Tirabassi, Touch Holiness)

SOLO [I Want Jesus to Walk with Me](#) Alex Boye

HYMN OF CONFESSION [I Need Thee Every Hour](#)

SCRIPTURE Philippians 1:21-30

²¹ Alive, I'm Christ's messenger; dead, I'm his bounty. Life versus even more life! I can't lose.

²² As long as I'm alive in this body, there is good work for me to do. If I had to choose right now, I hardly know which I'd choose.

²³ Hard choice! The desire to break camp here and be with Christ is powerful. Some days I can think of nothing better

²⁴ .But most days, because of what you are going through, I am sure that it's better for me to stick it out here.

²⁵ So I plan to be around awhile, companion to you as your growth and joy in this life of trusting God continues.

²⁶ You can start looking forward to a great reunion when I come visit you again. We'll be praising Christ, enjoying each other.

²⁷ Meanwhile, live in such a way that you are a credit to the Message of Christ. Let nothing in your conduct hang on whether I come or not. Your conduct must be the same whether I show up to see things for myself or hear of it from a distance. Stand united, singular in vision, contending for people's trust in the Message, the good news,

²⁸ not flinching or dodging in the slightest before the opposition. Your courage and unity will show them what they're up against: defeat for them, victory for you - and both because of God.

²⁹ There's far more to this life than trusting in Christ. There's also suffering for him. And the suffering is as much a gift as the trusting.

³⁰ You're involved in the same kind of struggle you saw me go through, on which you are now getting an updated report in this letter.

ANTHEM

[How Can I Keep from Singing](#)

Dr. C. Michael Hawn, professor emeritus of the Perkins school of Theology writes

*My life flows on in endless song,
Above earth's lamentation.
I hear the clear, though far off hymn
That hails a new creation.
No storm can shake my inmost calm
While to that Rock I'm clinging.
Since love is Lord of heaven and earth,
How can I keep from singing?*

"How Can I Keep from Singing?" is a song of one who has weathered persecution and struggle, but maintains a focus on the Rock, giving thanks for all in song.

*Many hymnals ascribe authorship to Robert Lowry (1826-1899) since the song appears in his famous collection, *Bright Jewels for the Sunday School* (1869).*

Lowry was known as a gifted Baptist preacher, educator and composer of gospel songs on the East Coast of the U.S. Among his most famous gospel compositions are "Nothing but the Blood of Jesus" (UMH 362), "Shall We Gather at the River" (UMH 723), and "Up from the Grave He Arose" (322).

He also composed tunes for others' texts, such as MARCHING TO ZION, a camp meeting version of Isaac Watt's text "Come, We that Love the Lord," and NEED, a tune for Annie Hawks' hymn, "I Need Thee Every Hour."

The theme of persecution appears in a stanza that is omitted from many hymnals:

When tyrants tremble in their fear
And hear their death knell ringing,
When friends rejoice both far and near
How can I keep from singing?
In prison cell and dungeon vile
Our thoughts to them are winging,
When friends by shame are undefiled
How can I keep from singing?

The Quakers or Society of Friends certainly experienced persecution due to their nonconformist style of worship and pacifist stance toward war and violence. It is easy to imagine that this hymn would offer deep solace for the Quaker community.

Regardless of the source of the text, the melody is hauntingly beautiful. It flows up and down throughout an octave range several times. This tune -- inherently singable and memorable -- is the perfect vehicle for a text whose primary metaphor is that of music and singing.

In addition to the allusions to "song" and "hymn" in stanza one, stanza two "hear[s] that music ringing" above "the tumult and the strife." In stanza three, "songs in the night" are provided by the Savior when the "darkness gather[s] round."

The lyrical quality of the melody conveys effectively the singer's oneness with Christ and resolve in the face of oppression, as well as the spirit of the haunting rhetorical question that unifies the entire hymn, "How can I keep from singing?"

SERMON

For all my years in ministry, I have followed the common lectionary – the three-year cycle of scriptures that was established almost 70 years ago. I still do. The passage from Philippians is today's lectionary text from the epistles. I go with the lectionary discipline simply because it forces me to wrestle with the Biblical situation and message and relate to our situation and the message for us today. (and there are a lot of resources for material to help those who use the lectionary)

Paul is quite troubled as he writes to the faithful at Philippi. Paul's wrestling with whether it was better to live and continue his fruitful ministry or to die and be with Christ. One may wonder if he was depressed about premonitions of impending martyrdom in Rome (although there is still Paul's strange reference to having "fought with wild animals at Ephesus" (1 Corinthians 15:32). It is likely that a much deeper questioning of his thinking about God is taking place. When Paul says, "For to me, living is Christ," he is fully aware of what that implies for the nature of life. His state of "mind" is precisely the one he will shortly encourage upon the Philippians and that also "was in Christ Jesus" (2:5) when he "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death" (2:8). This life, at least for those who do not fully understand the message of the cross, looks an awful lot like death.

Who wouldn't, then, be torn between the prospects of death that would bring deliverance from such hardship and continuing with a life that would benefit others but at great personal cost? But Paul uses an interesting word to describe the "gain" that it would be to die. In Greek, it is the word means something that is earned or gained and can also be translated into English as "profit." Paul does not think death is a wonderful reward that he has rightfully earned through all that he has suffered in imprisonments, beatings and all the rest for the cause of Christ, notice the one other context in which he uses the word in writing to the Philippians. Paul says that all the "gains" he had received from his efforts to be faithful in Torah observance he has "come to regard as loss because of Christ." In the next verse, he goes further to call it, here in Greek to avoid the crassness of his language, *skubalon* (a crude word used for human excrement). Obviously, both words are being used in the construction of hyperbole. Paul is not suggesting the only benefits of Torah observance are the equivalent of sewage; rather, that as profitable as life conformed to God's will expressed through Torah was for him, it is still incomparable to the blessings he experienced in Christ. **In similar fashion here in 1:21, there will be some "profit" in death, but to live — really, truly live — is to follow the pattern of Christ.**

Paul was not afraid of death and shows us how "God's doing" brings us new life during times of sacrifice and suffering, deepens our faith and brings us closer to Christ.

Paul wants us to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, always showing the grace and love of Jesus Christ. He wants us to become stronger and more focused, standing firm in one spirit and striving side by side with one mind. Such strength and unity doesn't often happen in good times. In fact, it usually happens in difficult times.

Arlington Presbyterian Church, west of the Pentagon in Virginia, worshiped in a stone sanctuary for more than 80 years. The congregation had watched its numbers dwindle, and its aging building had become a burden. But instead of selling its \$10 million property and building a new sanctuary elsewhere, it took a bold stand for the benefit of its community.

The cost of housing is extremely high in Arlington, and many teachers, cashiers and first responders can no longer afford to live where they work. Arlington Presbyterian joined forces with a nonprofit group that builds affordable housing. The church sold its land to the nonprofit group, and then the group constructed a six-story building on the site of the church, with five floors of affordable housing above retail space on the first floor. On the first floor, the church now rents space for worship and other activities.

The transformation of Arlington Presbyterian was not an easy process, and there was struggle both inside and outside the church. Paul's words to the Philippians provided good advice for them — to live in such a way that you are "in no way intimidated by your opponents" (v. 28). The congregation "risked it all for the sake of their neighbors," says Ashley Goff, who became the pastor of the church after the change had begun. "It's almost like they became curious about death, the curiosity of how to die well."

Fortunately, the church did not die. More than 400 people have moved into the building, and Arlington Presbyterian is now meeting in its new space. The congregation has become stronger and more focused, standing firm in one spirit and striving side by side with one mind. They are experiencing new life after looking death in the face. And this, Paul would say, "is God's doing."

I have suggested that model to the Presbytery of Riverside consider doing the same with some of its church properties – motion to do so was not approved. We did give 10 % of the sale of one property as a donation to Habitat for Humanity.

For Paul, however, believing and suffering always go together. While it is true that Christ died for us, it is also true that Christians need to die with Christ. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" Paul asks the Romans (6:3). "We suffer with him," he says, "so that we may also be glorified with him" (8:17). Once again, our Christian faith challenges us to look death in the face.

Throughout his life, Jesus was willing to suffer as he showed love and grace to the people around him. He held nothing back but emptied himself completely. In the same way, we are challenged to give of ourselves to show the love of Jesus to others. This is a challenge for anyone who wants to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Fortunately, such sacrificial service not only benefits our neighbors, as we feed the hungry, house the homeless, visit prisoners and welcome strangers. It also benefits us, as it brings us into the presence of the one who suffered and died for all.

The apostle Paul was not afraid of death. While happy to serve the church in this life, he was equally willing to depart and be with Christ. When we accept that life must end, we join Paul in becoming stronger and more focused, as well as closer to Jesus Christ.

AFFIRMATION

[Take my Life and Let it Be](#)

Joys & Concerns

Please Pray for Teri White's newest granddaughter Colbie (Alyssa's baby). Colbie is not gaining weight and if she hasn't gained any weight by Thursday the doctor will send her to a children's hospital to run tests. Good news—Colbie had doctor appointment and has gained weight. The family thanks all for their prayers. Alice Reille fell and injured her back. She is in a rehabilitation facility.

Continuing Prayers

Continued prayers for Rochelle. Prayers for our country and elected ones. All people, law enforcement & civilians, affected by current violence in this country. Lynn Rodisch - healing. Pete - healing. Kofi - prayer. Loren Nelson - continued prayer.

Please Pray During Week of September 20, 2020 for the families of:

- ◇ Philip & Mavis Hagan
- ◇ Judy & Haley Hanson



if you have a prayer request or joy to share, contact any session member, Pastor Henry, the prayer chain at mom4tc@sbcglobal.net, or judy@fpc-corona.org.

During this time of being apart,
remember that your Deacons are
available if you are in need of help.

PRAYER

O God, in mystery and silence you are present in our lives, bringing new life out of destruction, hope out of despair, growth out of difficulty. We thank you that you do not leave us alone but labor to make us whole. Help us to perceive your unseen hand in the unfolding of our lives and to attend to the gentle guidance of your Spirit, that we may know the joy you give your people. Amen.

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ: in all my trials and sufferings you have given me the strength to stand firm; in your mercy you have granted me a share of eternal glory. Amen.

-Irenaeus of Sirmium

HYMN

[Glorious Thing of Thee are Spoken](#)

BENEDICTION May the blessing of our gracious God be upon us and flow from us to bless all those in our lives. May we be Christians for whom living is Christ -- Christ beside us, Christ before us, Christ behind us and Christ in our future, to whom be praise for ever and ever. Amen.

RESPONSE

[Where He Leads Me I Will Follow](#)