

# Worship Service “ *In Training* ”

2nd Sunday of Pentecost, Trinity Sunday, Year A

4<sup>th</sup> June 2023

2 Corinthians 13:11-13 NRSV / Matthew 28:16-20 NRSV

## Prelude

Opening Music (Video)     *Shadows*

written and performed by Mike Stern,  
used with permission

## Welcome/Announcements

## Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn     *Holy, Holy, Holy!*     120

## Call to Worship

The words God speaks are the life and sustenance of all that exists.

The life Jesus gives is the re-creation and renewed birth of all that is broken and worn.

The Spirit’s stirring in our souls is the inspiration for creativity, compassion, joy, and community.

## Invocation

Life-giving, life-restoring, life-fulfilling God; may our whole lives be worship.

In all things, may we seek to connect with and to reflect your love and your hope.

Amen.

**Epistle Reading     2 Corinthians 13:11-13     NRSV**

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

## A Time of Prayer

## Joys and Concerns

## Pastoral Prayer

**Almighty God known as wisdom before the dawn of creation,**

Lord Jesus Christ – perfect love made flesh, Holy Spirit of God – ever present,

O Hidden Source of Life wrapped up in perfect Trinity, we meditate upon the great and gracious plan which you have brought to pass, that women and men like us should look beyond creation to worship you the Creator of all things.

In the beginning, You the uncreated moved across the face of deep and brought out space and time and then material substance: The atom and the molecule and the crystalline form: Then the first germ of life and the long upward striving of all things: that swim and creep and fly: And then the miracle of intelligence and consciousness ; The beginning of mystery and the building of the first altar; And then the saying of the first prayer;

O hidden love of God, forgive us for those times when we have taken this mystery for granted and forgive us all the more for the times when we thought that we had unraveled the mystery and thought that we knew it all – the how, the where and the why.

Almighty God, let us not harbor anything in our hearts that might spoil our fellowship with you or with one another; work with us and within us: Do what you will with us; Make of us what you want of us; Change us as we need changed Use us as your will requires – Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**Hymn      *God of Grace and God of Glory*                      366**

**Gospel Reading - Matthew 28:16-20 NRSV**

Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.'

## Message – *In Training*

We can all identify, I'm sure, with the anxiety of starting something new, of taking on a new role or responsibility we've never done before. It might be a new role at work or church, a new hobby, or even becoming a parent, or maybe especially becoming a parent. It can be very intimidating taking on something you have never done before. We get a serious case of the "what ifs," what if this or that happens, what if it doesn't work, what if I utterly fail at this.

We like to feel confident, to feel comfortable knowing what we are doing and that we can do it well. Often, we prepare ourselves with training, or by reading up on what we are planning to take on, so we can anticipate potential problems and know the appropriate solution beforehand. Yet, we often find that no matter how hard we prepare, there are those unexpected problems that arise that we have to find a solution to, on the fly. And that is what causes our anxiety.

For example, and this is purely hypothetical of course, one can think they really have this whole streaming thing all figured out, and then at the end of the service you discover you only streamed for 4 minutes. Or you read all the best books on being the perfect parent, and have a strategy for every possible behavior, only to find that your children don't react like the book says they are supposed to. Like it or not, we can never start something new with complete confidence. And that is why we often feel so anxious because we don't have the comfort of knowing that we have control of the situation.

In our gospel reading this morning, the disciples find themselves in this same boat. They have been in training for three years with Jesus, being taught and observing him at work. Now all of a sudden he is leaving his position, and they have to step up to fill the role he has filled all along. It's not unlike when one's boss gets a promotion, and then you have to fill his or her shoes. You've watched them at work for years, and think you know the job, but you're just not sure of all the ins and outs of what they do from day to day. All of a sudden you go from trainee to trainer. Like us, they had their doubts, their insecurities. He had just told them they were to become the teachers of everything he had taught them, of all the lessons he had shared with them. And like us, guilt probably tagged along with that doubt. After all, they should trust what Jesus had told them. They should trust that he wouldn't leave them hanging, that the Advocate, the Spirit would be there to guide them. But that is also what makes them human.

In his book, *Spiritual Depression*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes: "Doubts are not incompatible with faith...Some people seem to think that once you become a Christian you should never be assailed by doubts. But that is not so, Peter still had faith (as he panicked in the storm in Matthew 14)...His faith was not gone, but doubts nevertheless mastered him and overwhelmed him and he was shaken.

Even the disciples were subject to human doubt. And to add to their anxiety, Jesus was also expanding the scope of the job. They had largely been traveling around Judea and Samaria this whole time, ministering and teaching those who already had a foundation in the Jewish faith, those who had a firm foundation in the scriptures that Jesus was expanding on and clarifying. Now they were to go to the ends of the earth with his message. The Great Commission includes “all nations.” This was not in the technical manual. The training barely touched on this. Sure they had a few encounters with Romans and Samaritans, but never any extensive field training in that arena. Yet Jesus gives them their final instructions, and ascends into the clouds, and has made his last physical appearance to them.

Can you imagine the panic they must have been feeling coming down from that mountain? I can imagine the discussion. How are we going to do this? What do we do next? Where do we even start? They knew their roles well as disciples and students of the rabbi. I'm sure they were skilled at organizing travel and accommodations, keeping the books of donations and handling charitable expenditures. But now they were to be the ones in the forefront, the ones preaching to and teaching others. And even more, they were to be training the trainers, teaching others to be teachers. They were faced with a choice we all face when presented with the challenge of a new role, “to go big, or go home.”

They had that choice. They could have just dispersed back home: back to fishing, to tax collecting, to being a physician, to whatever their “normal” life was before they joined this mission. Like us, they had the choice to move forward and embrace the change and uncertainty, or to choose to stay in the familiar; to offer hope in something new, or to be resigned to living in the hopelessness of the status quo.

However, this choice, like many of the choices we face in life, affected others besides themselves. If they just gave up, what hope did the world have of anything different? What chance was there of a more just life for anyone who suffered under oppression and discrimination? What would happen to hope itself? What choice did they really have? After all, so much of what Jesus said and did in their presence was concerned with the welfare of others, with the whole concept of the “other.” They couldn't just walk away and do nothing. So they took that first step at being the body of Christ left behind to carry out the work of Jesus.

And as we have learned recently from John, they did have the help of the Spirit to guide and support them. But Paul's second letter to the Corinthians shows us that there was definitely a learning curve, that like with any new challenge we take on, we learn as we go, and learn from our mistakes. Many in the Corinthian church lost their focus, their sense of world changing and “other” changing mission. They let too much of the same injustice outside come inside, and their focus shifted to the inside. They argued over whose gifts were more valued, and focused on themselves and their

insular community. So trainer Paul hones their focus back on others, on forming a just community focused on love of the other, and ensuring all were treated justly and fairly, on the picture that was bigger than the Corinthian sanctuary on a Sunday morning. How can you share the holy kiss with someone who you do not care about and value? How can you share the love and peace of Christ with others, seeking to expand the training program outside the church doors, beyond a handshake or hug once a week?

Thankfully they wrote these experiences down and took the time to record the lessons they learned. We have a training manual to start from. We have some training scenarios to reflect on. But like the early disciples and the churches they established, we learn on the job too.

We too can be intimidated by the job at hand, and we too can lose our focus, getting too caught up in our own little groups and our own little community. After all, we like comfort and having control. But we still have that same calling as those first disciples, to work towards the just kin-dom here and now. Do we go big, or go home? Do we accept the challenge of our calling as the body of Christ and work together to figure out how we can make a difference with the gifts we've been given? Or do we just give up and sink further into irrelevance?

It may sound harsh but it is the reality of our situation. We all see what is going on in the world around us. We see the ongoing struggles against centuries of systemic racism, we see the people struggling to survive in the face of trying economic times. We see the division among us as a culture, the hate and distrust fomenting every day. It's overwhelming the work that needs done, and the scope of the task is intimidating. It's not unlike any new responsibility we take on in our lives.

If we obsess over the big picture, and all the "what ifs," we can be paralyzed by anxiety. But if we take it one step at a time, and focus on the task at hand, it is more manageable and less scary. The important thing is to take that first step, and see where it might lead us. It might start with educating ourselves on what being an ally means, and what work that entails. It might mean reaching out to other faith communities and seeing how we can work together with limited resources to make a difference. It might mean redirecting some of our resources to others who are better suited for some of the work that needs done. It might mean letting go of the comfortable space in which we've made so many, and stepping into the unknown of a new endeavor. Whatever that first step is, it's important that we take it. We're very familiar with the manual, we've spent many years studying its every detail. It's time we shift our focus to on-the-job experience. We can choose to be perpetual trainees or start doing the work. Maybe like the early Corinthian church we need to start with ourselves. What work do we need to do to adjust our own biases and shortcomings? Often it's in this process we gain the understanding and insight to help others do the same work.

Many in our particular community have physical limitations but there are many ways to be involved. We all have a voice, and can speak up in the opportunities that we all have, and not choose to be silent and polite. Polite silence only perpetuates injustice. We all have something we can contribute, whether it's our voice, our financial resources, or simply our time to educate ourselves and discover what we can do from our own circumstances. What is important is that we do something, that we step up and be the body of Christ, to be the beacon of hope those first disciples decided to be despite their doubt, despite their anxiety. They started as a small band of outcasts in the backwaters of an empire, and sparked a movement that changed the world. Sadly, much more change is still needed. I hope and pray we can be the force of change, the hope that the world so desperately seeks. The alternative is more of the same. May we be the change we seek to see in the world. Amen.

## **Call to Serve**

God has abundantly bestowed upon us the gift of life. Our best response is to offer our whole lives as agents for God's mission in the world. Give as you are able to build the community of God in our homes, our congregation and around the world.

**As we listen to the following interlude played by Annie, let's reflect on what steps we can take this week to get involved, to learn about the issues of injustice around us, and find our places in undoing them.**

## **A Time for Reflection**

### **The Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Receive these gifts, even our very lives for your service. Multiply them and our effort to meet the need. We are yours God, use us we pray, **Amen.**

**HYMN    *This Little Light of Mine*        401**

### **Benediction/Blessing/Assurance**

"Remember, I am with you always, until the end of the age." Christ is with us, now and always. The Holy Spirit is in our midst, now and always. God the Creator is creating something new, now and always. We are always loved, always forgiven, always known to God and cannot be forgotten. Know this, and share the Good News. Amen.

## **Postlude**