

Sunday, March 29, 2020

Good morning everyone and welcome to worship with Nelson United Methodist Church. Today is Sunday March 29th and we are on the 5th Sunday of lent, so we will be talking about the cross purpose of redemption.

And so, as I welcome you here this morning, I want to thank you for doing your social distancing and staying safe at home. We do miss you; these pews seem very empty this morning but I can picture all of your smiling faces out there and we're sending you love and blessings this morning.

I do want to remind you that any time and any Sunday that you would like to watch us from home, if you are under quarantine, or if you are under stay at home orders, or if even after this is all over and you are not feeling well and you would like to tune in, we will be here at 9:00 on Sunday morning so that you can do that.

I also want to remind you that I will be doing weekday devotions every morning at 9:30 from my dining room table and you can find that on the Windham United Methodist Facebook page. And let's just make an effort to grow together and to stay together as we walk through this very crazy season of our lives.

We want to start this morning with our call to worship and the call to worship this morning comes from author Max Lucado. And he says:

We are building our lives on the promises of God.

Because God's word is unbreakable.

Our hope is unshakable.

We do not stand on the problems of life or on the pain of life.

We stand on the great and precious promises of God.

Let us pray. Father God this morning we come to you with gratitude that you have allowed us to see a new day. Yesterday and today have been very rainy days. And yet Lord, we know that the rain refreshes the earth. And so, Lord as this rain refreshes the earth, so too let the rain of your spirit refresh us. Bring us to the point of lifting up our eyes to you, instead of placing our eyes on all the problems around us. Help us to trust you. We stand on your great and precious promises.

Join with us this morning as we sing Amazing Grace

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch; like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed!

The Lord hath promised good to me,
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We've no less days to sing God's praise
Than when we first begun.

This morning, we want to make sure that we take the time to pray together and lift up all of our concerns. I have part of our singers here with me this morning with Pam and of course, my husband Joel here helping us do this service. And I'll tell you, it's a blessing to be in the church this morning in the building and have part our friends and family with us.

We want to pray for Bob because he's got a pretty sore back this morning and we want to continue to cover the healing of that toe anything else Vickie? (no).

All right, George, Pam. Anything? (Pam) Just thinking about the world. Okay, yes, we are thinking about the world this morning. And so, I want you to stop and take a deep breath and think about the person that God has laid on your heart this morning because I know he has somebody in your heart whether there's somebody else in the church family, somebody in your family in your community or someone that you know that is struggling at the moment. And we want to lift them up in prayer.

So, join me, our Father, we come to this building and we are thankful you have called us by name, called us to become your own and set us apart to serve you. And to worship you is a privilege to worship the everlasting God this morning. Lord, we come with many things on our hearts.

We think of our loved ones in this congregation and we lift up Bob especially this morning and we pray that you would touch his back and that toe and that you would bring about speedy healing for both. We know that it's difficult with back issues. And so, Lord just give him comfort this morning and begin to work on that toe so that that healing can begin.

We pray that we would not be so swept up by the mass hysteria in this world that they would lose sight of the peace in the comfort and presence of God in our lives and we think about our community Lord. And we continue to ask you to pour out your blessing on Nelson and on the Garrettsville area and Windham. All of our surrounding communities that people might be able to place their trust in you.

These are difficult times and without that confidence in you we are easily shaken. And so, lift our eyes to the hills, from whence cometh our help, our hope, comes from the Lord. We continue to pray for our nation and for our world. Father, there are so many that are suffering. There are so many that have lost loved ones, it almost impossible to stay up with the count anymore.

But Lord, you alone have control over the situation and we ask you to stay the course of this virus. We ask you to spare the lives of those who are suffering, to bring peace and comfort and gentle memories to those who have lost loved ones. To bring wisdom to our doctors so that they would know what to do next. To bring wisdom to our leaders. And we ask all these things in your precious name and we pray as Jesus taught us to pray:

Our father which 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 the power and the glory forever. Amen

Now, normally, this would be the time where we would take our offering. And obviously we can do that this morning. But I know that there are many of you that are asking how can I give. And it is still possible for you to send your tithes and offerings into the church. You can do that by mailing them to Nelson United Methodist Church, PO Box 210, Garrettsville, OH 44231. And we are checking the mail, so we will be able to process those donations and those tithes and offerings.

And we do want to thank you for keeping up with all the spiritual disciplines. With prayer, and with worship, and giving, of course, and with all of the other things. We do the scripture reading and the study, and reaching out to others. Those spiritual disciplines are what strengthens our spiritual life and so we thank you for that.

And we pray God this morning that he would touch the lives in the hearts of those who are listening, that if they are able to give more than they would do so with cheerful hearts knowing that you provide for us and will continue to provide for us even through this storm in which we're walking at this time.

Lord we pray your blessing upon those gifts. The gifts of money, the gifts of time to serve other people, the gifts of the talents that are shared even here this morning. And Lord, we pray that you would accept our gifts. And that you would bless them so that your kingdom would grow on this earth and so that your children might be blessed in Jesus name. Amen

We will be singing When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

When we survey the wondrous cross
On which the Lord of glory died,
Our richest gain we count but loss,
And pour contempt on all our pride.

Our God forbid that we should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, our Lord;
All the vain things that charm us most,
We'd sacrifice them to His blood.

There from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flowed mingled down;
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, from His head
Spreads o'er His body on the tree;
To all the world then am I dead,
And all the world is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature ours,
That were an offering far too small;
Love that transcends our highest powers,
Demands our heart, our life, our all.

Two scripture readings this morning. The first one is an Old Testament reading and it comes from Leviticus. Will we read Leviticus chapter 25 verses 47 through 49. So, Leviticus chapter 25 verses 47 through 49.

Now a sojourner or a stranger close to you becomes rich and one of your brethren who dwells by him becomes poor and sells him to the stranger or sojourner close to you or to a member of the stranger's family. After he has sold he may be redeemed again, one of his brothers may redeem him or his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him, or anyone who is kin to him and can take him and his family may redeem him or if he is able, he may redeem himself.

Then we're going to move to John chapter 8. And we'll be reading verses 31 through 36.

Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed him, if you abide in my word you are my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, we are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone, how can you say we will be made free? Jesus answered them, most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore, if the son makes you free, you shall be free. And this is the word of God for the people of God. And all God's people said, Amen.

For the past few weeks, we've been asking, why did Jesus go to the cross? What is the purpose of all of this? And we keep asking the same question because the cross impacts our lives in many ways. Ways that if we were to list them, we wouldn't be able to exhaust them all. The cross shows the love of God. The cross shows that God shares our suffering. The cross shows that justice and mercy are what God is about so that he can be just toward us and he can be the one who justifies us. The cross repairs our broken relationship, God reconciled reconciles us himself in the cross.

And today we look at the cross from the other angle, the cross brings us redemption. Titus chapter two verse 14 says Jesus Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify us to himself, a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

So, what is redemption? Well it is a reclaiming of something that was lost. It's a buying back of something that was sold into slavery. In books or movies, a person who makes a mess out of their life might find redemption in a lot of ways. Sometimes they find it in a new relationship. Sometimes they find it in a change of attitude or maybe a new purpose. In sports, if a baseball player really muffs a play, he can redeem himself by hitting a home run. In business, a salesperson who fails to meet their sales quota redeems themselves by making a huge sale, which obviously, of course redeems them in the eyes of their managers. In marriage, an inconsiderate husband often redeems himself with flowers or the purchase of an expensive gift.

But all of that type of redemption is only temporary and it really, really does not do much for us. Redemption, in God's sense, is recovering of more than just a reputation and more than just a relationship. It's recovering a lost soul and finding room for it in the household of God. When Paul talks about redemption, his readers would have this vivid image of what it meant because they understood

from the Old Testament that people were sold into slavery. They were sold into slavery because they couldn't pay debts. They were sold into slavery because they no longer had enough money to survive on their own. Sometimes they even sold themselves into slavery as a slave so that they would be able to remain alive and to care for their families.

So, in places like Rome there were slave markets, and people were very accustomed to what those slaves' markets were like. They might have seen women poked and prodded and paraded in front of jeering men and other buyers. They might have seen men that were captured and humiliated and sold to the highest bidder.

They were used to the idea of slavery. Reclaiming freedom is something different. What does redemption mean to a slave? A slave could only hope that someone would bid for them and that their bid would be high enough to purchase them and that they might have the good grace to set them free.

That just seems really foreign to us. Jesus, in John, 8 has a discussion with people who prided themselves on their position as free men. To the Jews that believed in him, he talks about this idea of redemption from slavery to sin and becoming a servant in the household of God.

So, what does that mean for us who are so unaccustomed to the idea of slavery. Well, we experienced it in the United States during the Civil War era so we have some ideas. But I want to say today that it is possible for free people in the United States and free people around the world to be slaves. It is possible for them to be slaves to sin, and perhaps we're not as free as we really think we are.

Some of us have recognized that we have been addicted to destructive behaviors, perhaps something like alcohol or gambling, or gossip. The screen that our eyes are anchored to through which you're viewing this service can be the addiction that keeps you from living the rest of your life vibrantly if all you do is look at that screen. Maybe it's more subtle, but it's just as deadly.

Unkind words, avoiding the truth, lustful thoughts. Paul talks about being enslaved by elemental spiritual forces. In Colossians, he says make sure that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy.

We're constantly bombarded by spiritual and cultural forces that are designed to take us captive. Media companies, gaming companies, clothing brands, have strategies to own people. To make them people who will purchase only their goods. They have strategies telling people from a young age, influencers on social platforms like Facebook and Instagram and even Tick Tok set the direction of our culture. And marketing firms trying to direct people's needs and wants and content providers, some real and some that are fake, trying to define and shape our reality.

The strongest form of slavery though was found in ourselves. We are people that can be enslaved by our past. We have our failures, our inability to compete and in the realm of attractiveness or popularity, we even have bad choices to which we become enslaved. And some of us are consumed by shame and by fear and anxiety, even insatiable egos. Some of us are driven by the need to prove ourselves.

Jesus says, anyone who sins is a slave to sin. Then he went on to say of those who are enslaved, if the son sets you free, you are free indeed. So, what's the difference between being bought from something and a true redemption of Jesus? Well, Jesus made a personal investment in us.

You know, some time ago, there was a comedian named John Oliver and he was a very wealthy man and he purchased \$14.9 million of medical debt. The debt was uncollectible because it was so old and yet the persons who owed that debt were expected to pay it back. And John Oliver purchased that debt for only \$60,000. And so, it was kind of a bargain. He went beyond that. And he became a hero to many people because they received letters saying that their debts were forgiven, but he never personally got involved. Sure, his bankroll was affected, but he was never going to be available to those persons should they need him in the future.

God did not forgive our debt from the safety of heaven. He became personally involved. Philippians two six through eight says Jesus, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient, even to death on the cross. Jesus was personally invested.

Early in my ministry, I used to take groups to the local prison. It was a medium security prison, and we would go out on Sunday mornings, and then we would do services there and then we would stay for a little lunch afterwards. And I was happy to see a lot of the men show up from the church because what those men needed, were Godly men who could show them how to live out their faith and what it really meant to follow Jesus as a man.

And I watched the men from the church and the men in that prison grow closer in relationship as they learned more about each other and they talked with each other. And as they prayed with each other. The men from the church showed them how to be free even though they were incarcerated. They began to understand what it meant to live life as a follower of Jesus and to know the freedom that comes from that, in spite of circumstance. Men that do that, they give up their comfort zones. They walk through the gates of humility and honesty, and they make any impact on people's lives.

Well, in the Old Testament, the right of redemption wasn't given to everyone. But it was reserved for kinsmen, relatives. You probably remember the story of Ruth. Ruth was a Moabite, who had married an Israelite. And they were in Moab, she and her mother in law and her sister in law, were all widows. There was no future for them.

And then Naomi, her mother in law, wanted to go back to Israel, Orpah stayed behind. She was going to stay with her own family and make her own way. But Ruth, so in love with her mother in law, so delighted by how her mother in law, so touched by her mother in law's heart, decided to go with Naomi. It's where we get the scripture reading that we hear a lot of times in weddings. Wither thou goest, I will go, where thou lodges, I will lodge, your people will be my people and your God will be my God.

Naomi was quite a witness and so they went back to Israel. Now, the Hebrew language has a special word for kinsmen who have the right to redeem someone. It's called the goel. Boaz was a kinsman of Ruth's husband's and so it fell to him to redeem Ruth from the life of hopelessness.

Now, the book of Ruth provides this picture of him. She and her mother in law, now destitute, go to the field to pick up whatever is left over in the corners of the field. Because in that day and age, the grain left at the corner of the field was set apart to be used by those who were destitute. It was part of an offering that those farmers, those land owners gave to God by serving others.

And so, in desperation she went back to the field at night and she offered herself to Boaz. It was a little bit risqué. But Boaz took a different approach. He chose not to take advantage of Ruth's desperation, but to redeem her from a hopeless situation. He redeems the property of Ruth's husband and he takes Ruth as his wife and in a twist of God's providence, other blessings come because of that. And Boaz becomes the grandfather of King David which means that he is in the family tree of the messiah and so is the foreigner, Ruth.

The goel has the right and the responsibility of redeeming and restoring someone to the stature that they should be. Jesus paid a price for our redemption. Jesus said in Mark 10:45 that the son of Man did not come to serve. I'm sorry did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

And that word ransom is paid to somebody who holds a hostage. Who would be that someone? Our enemy? The word ransom has a broader meaning too, it refers to the means of freedom. And The means of freedom for us was the cross.

Hebrews 2:14-15 says since children have flesh and blood, he to, meaning Jesus, shared their humanity so that by his death, he might break the power of him that holds the power of death. That is the devil. And freed those who all their lives were held and by their fear of death. Yet the idea of a ransom reminds us that freedom from sin and fear and spiritual death and powers comes at a price. And that price was the life of Jesus Christ.

First Peter says it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish. A lamb. What is Peter referring to?

The greatest redemption story in the Old Testament is found in the exodus from Egypt. The Israelites were slaves and God brought them out of Egypt, the Bible says, with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, freeing them from slavery and in Exodus 6 God spoke to his people through Moses. I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. You will no longer have the constant struggle with them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment and I will take you to be my own people, I will be your God.

There are two verbs to redeem in Hebrew. And in taking his people God chose the verb related to goel, without having price. Did God pay that price? Well, yes, a lamb was slaughtered. The blood was placed on the lintels of every household that was a believer in the God of Israel. He brought in to those households persons from Egypt. And so, they were a mixed multitude that left and the blood of the Lamb that was sprinkled on the doors of those houses, allowing the Angel of Death to pass over that house. From there, we get the celebration of Passover.

God paid the price to redeem his people. So how do we live in freedom that Jesus obtained for us on the cross. Well one of those things is we need to start recognizing our worth. We have a constant struggle, it seems, to prove our worth and it enslaves us. It's not that we are worthless, but if our worth comes from our work, then we feel guilty when we're not working and we're resting. When we try to relax, we feel we're unworthy because we're not being productive.

If our worth comes from the approval of others, then they control our behavior. There was 104-year-old woman that celebrated her birthday and when asked what the best thing it was about being 104 years

old, she said, No peer pressure. So, for 103 of those years was she controlled by someone else's opinion of her. If Worth comes from meeting the expectations of our culture, then we're compelled to measure up to society's standards, in our physical appearance in our possessions in our vacations in observing the newest trends, if our worth depends on self-approval, we have the hardest master of all, because it seems like we never measure up.

Pastor was in a bank seated across from a professional banker, and next to that advisor were cards in a stack. And they said, I am worth: and then it had a line and the Pastor assumed that that was where you were supposed to write the amount of your bank account. Does our worth really depend on your bank account. How much are you worth to God?

There was a large animal veterinarian that was working on a dairy farm and the owner began to lay into his stepson really telling him about how worthless he was, and how he should have just left him where he was. And when the man was finally done, the veterinarian looked at him and said, I'll give you \$1 for him. Things got pretty quiet.

What would Jesus do for you? Paul says, in Galatians, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith and the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Not \$1, his whole life. So, when you feel worthless, and you're controlled by shame or insecurity or fear, and you think you have to prove your worth, you need to remember what you are worth. You were worth the life of Jesus Christ.

And that in itself is amazing. And then freely choose to be not the slave, but the servant of God. First Peter 2:16 says live as free people but do not use your freedom to cover up for evil. Live as God's servant. Live as free people. Servants of God.

When we're young and we go off to college, sometimes we get trapped and tied up in all kinds of things and we wind up not studying, we wind up not doing things we need to do to succeed. And it even gets to the point where we know it's kind of hopeless and we've really messed up for sure and we understand it's time to go home and live under the disciplines that we were raised under until we have the strength to go back to school and apply those disciplines to our own life.

A lot of people think freedom means doing what you want in the language of slavery. Who owns you? You might answer nobody owns me, I'm my own person. But who owns a piece of you? What owns a piece of you?

Because Jesus died for us, we are fully redeemed. The devil can't have us unless we offer ourselves as slaves to sin. And no one can control us and make us out to be less than we actually are. Because our worth is found in Jesus Christ. Freedom comes from holding to Jesus' teachings and living those out. Freedom comes from knowing the purpose of the cross.

If you want to be free choose to give your life, your whole life, in service and in relationship to the one who loves you enough to die to set you free. Trust the one that gave himself for us to redeem us from all of the wickedness in the world. And to purify us and call us his own, eager to do what is good. Amen.

We are going to close with a hymn that we don't hear very often anymore; There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood.

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains:
Lose all their guilty stains,
Lose all their guilty stains;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away:
Wash all my sins away,
Wash all my sins away;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed ones of God
Be saved, to sin no more:
Be saved, to sin no more,
Be saved, to sin no more;
Till all the ransomed ones of God,
Be saved to sin no more.

E'er since by faith I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die:
And shall be till I die,
And shall be till I die;
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

When this poor lisping, stammering tongue
Lies silent in the grave,
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save:
I'll sing Thy power to save,
I'll sing Thy power to save;
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,
I'll sing Thy power to save.

We give you thanks, o Lord, for the gift of redemption. For that purpose, you went to the cross. And for that reason, we lift our voices in prayer and praise this morning. Let us continue to look to you. The lamb who went to his death for us so that we might be redeemed and restored and called your own. And let that theme of your redeeming love be our theme till the very day that we die. Let it be on our lips and let us sing it with all our might so that others too might understand what you came to do and the love that redeemed us. Amen

Have a wonderful blessed week. As always if you need to reach me if you just want to talk if you're lonely or bored, call me. My number is on your bulletin and I will be looking forward to hearing from you. Likewise, if you have any prayer requests.

We are still family, and we are the church. We're just not in the building. We are sent out to do God's work. You are loved, be blessed. Amen