

Order of Worship for June 21, 2020

Prelude

“Arioso”

Bach

Welcome

--Happy Father's Day

--The 224th General Assembly of the PCUSA began yesterday

--Juneteenth was yesterday

--Poor People's Virtual March on Washington was yesterday

***Call to Worship (Psalm 86:1-5)**

Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy.

Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you.

You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all day long.

Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

Call to Confession

The Lord preserves our lives. God abounds in forgiveness and steadfast love. Therefore, we are free to come without fear to the throne of grace and honestly repent of our sin. Come, all who want to confess, repent and be made whole. Come and call on the Lord who promises to hear our cries.

***Prayer of Confession**

God of the sparrow, you tell us that the very hairs on our heads are counted. You assure us of our value in your sight and promise to never abandon us. Yet we act out of a spirit of timidity and not courage. We live as if our discipleship does not have life or death consequences for ourselves and for others. We keep silent when we should speak, and say much that ought not ever leave our lips. Forgive us, we pray, for the times we allowed injustice to go unchecked and inequity to persist without even a word of protest. In your mercy forgive what we have done and left undone. Help us to acknowledge Christ in all our actions so that he will acknowledge us before you in heaven. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon (Romans 6:9-11)

We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Friends, believe the good news, through Jesus Christ we are forgiven!

Prayer for Illumination

Gracious God, you come to us when we are yet far off and you welcome us when we even begin to turn toward you. In the chaos of these days, help us not to lose sight of you, your will, your way. Quiet in us any voice but yours so that we might hear the word you have for us this day, and then grant us the faith to go out and live it. Amen.

Scripture Reading

Matthew 10:24-39

²⁴“A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; ²⁵it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household! ²⁶“So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. ²⁷What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. ²⁸Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. ²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. ³⁰And even the hairs of your head are all counted. ³¹So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. ³²“Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; ³³but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven. ³⁴“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household. ³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Sermon--“How Much Are You Worth?”

Rev. Dr. Scott M. Kenefake

Lawyer Kenneth Feinberg chaired the September 11 Victim Compensation Fund, which gave money to the family of each person who died in the 2001 terror attacks. Starting with a formula and then using his discretion, Feinberg considered the victims' age, their dependents, whether they had life insurance—and their income and earning potential. The value assigned to these lost lives varied dramatically: as little as \$250,000 for blue-collar workers, as much as \$7.1 million for executives.

Feinberg later reflected on his experience. "As I met with the 9/11 families and wrestled with issues surrounding the valuation of lives lost, I began to question this basic premise of our legal system," he told NPR. "Trained in the law, I had always accepted that no two lives were worth the same in financial terms. But now I found the law in conflict with my growing belief in the equality of all life."

Jesus sends his disciples out into a perilous world. There will be divisions in their families. There will be "those who kill the body." The disciples must be prepared to take up the cross.

And yet, in the middle of this recitation of conflict and danger, Jesus suddenly speaks of the smallest, most insignificant creatures. "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father." In the marketplace, sparrows were the meat of the poor, the ground chuck of the first century. Yet their lives—their deaths—are not beneath God's attention and care.

"Do not be afraid," Jesus says, "you are of more value than many sparrows." In 1905, these lines inspired Canadian schoolteacher Civilla Martin to write the words to "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," a gospel hymn that declares with assurance, "I know he watches me." It's not hard to understand the hymn's later popularity in the African-American church. In a world that insists that black lives do not matter, Jesus declares that overlooked, exploited, brutalized lives are, in fact, of the greatest importance to God. In a world that says the life of a rich person is worth 28 times as much as the life of a working person, Jesus says that God pays special attention to those who are poor, struggling, and suffering. God cares. We are not alone.

Jesus' calculus for the value of a life has little to do with a person's income or earning potential. To Jesus, our lives have innate value, in and of themselves.

We have value because we are creatures, like sparrows. And we humans have value because we are made in God's image. As Julian of Norwich wrote in her vision of the hazelnut, "I marveled how it might last, for it seemed it might suddenly have sunk into nothing because of its littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: 'It lasts and ever shall, because God loves it.'"

To Jesus, our value does not lead to compensation or a guarantee of safety. It means that we receive attention. The God who cares for the welfare of sparrows also keeps track of every aspect of human lives, even tallying up the hairs of our heads. When Paul's description of divine love comes to a crescendo, he promises that one day we will know fully, even as we have been fully known (1 Cor. 13:12). We are already fully known, known more deeply than we even know ourselves.

Occasionally, well-meaning Christians declare that "God doesn't care if you get a tattoo" or "God doesn't care if you have a glass of wine." While it's true that neither choice is, for most of us, a matter of eternal consequence, the idea that God doesn't care is entirely untrue. There is nothing, not even the smallest thing, that is outside the circle of God's care. And if God cares about these little details, the sparrows of our lives, then how much more God cares about the greater shape of each life, and of all our lives in community.

Community, after all, is essential to our value. Jesus speaks to the disciples as a group, using the plural forms of "you." We cannot understand our own value without recognizing that the person next door and the person across the world have the same value. God's care is not for me alone, nor only for people like me, but for all of us.

When we feel secure in God's deep attention, knowledge, and care for us—in other words, when we know that God loves us—then we are able to go forth without fear into a dangerous world. Then we can declare out loud the lessons we've heard whispered in darkened rooms. Then we can stop being afraid of those who wish us harm. When we are assured that our Creator loves us, we can remain steadfast even when our human families turn against us. We can be faithful even when our very lives are at risk. We can pick up our crosses, no matter the cost.

After the September 11 Victim Compensation Fund completed its work, Kenneth Feinberg received a call from the president of Virginia Tech, asking him to

manage the fund that would distribute compensation to the families of the students and faculty killed in the 2007 mass shooting. “I realized that Feinberg the citizen should trump Feinberg the lawyer,” he said. “My legal training would no longer stand in the way. This time all victims—students and faculty alike—would receive the same compensation.”

Choral Anthem *“How Great Thou Art”*

***Affirmation of Faith** (from the Confession of 1967, inclusive version)

The reconciling work of Jesus was the supreme crisis in the life of humankind. His cross and resurrection become personal crisis and present hope for people when the gospel is proclaimed and believed. In this experience, the Spirit brings God’s forgiveness to all, moves people to respond in faith, repentance, and obedience, and initiates the new life in Christ. The new life takes shape in a community in which people know that God loves and accepts them in spite of what they are. They therefore accept themselves and love others, knowing that no one has any ground on which to stand, except God’s grace.

Prayers of the People

Loving God, we come to you now more afraid than we would like to admit. The fear of contagion surrounds us. The fear of economic hardship abounds. The fear that justice and reconciliation are impossible creeps into our consciousness even when we want to be a people of hope. As we continue to navigate the unfamiliar waters of a pandemic and the all too familiar storms of long entrenched inequity, we admit we are afraid. We name our deepest anxieties before you, knowing that you know them before we speak them. You tell us that even the hairs on our heads are counted and therefore we pour out our hearts before you, trusting not only that you will hear our cries, but that you will answer them. Hear our cries on behalf of the oppressed and the exploited...let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. Hear our cries of lament on behalf of those whose losses are too many to name and too heavy to continue to carry... give to them your easy yoke and your light burden. Hear our cries of grief as we join with our siblings who mourn... comfort them until they see you face-to-face and crying and death are no more. Hear our cries for the sick and suffering, the lonely and the shunned... heal them, restore them, help us to seek them out and bring them home in your name. Hear our cries for those we love, those we are called to love, those we find it difficult to love... grant us your Spirit of strength and wisdom so that we can live

the commandment we know, the greatest commandment to love you with all we have and love our neighbor as ourselves.

***The Lord's Prayer**

Charge and Benediction

Choral Benediction *"The Lord Bless You and Keep You"*