

The Greatest Promise

Sunday, October 18, 2020 || 20th Sunday After Pentecost || Pastor Christy Wright

We invite you to light a candle at 9:30 AM and join us in prayer ONLINE or over the PHONE this week ONLY

Audio worship, including music, prayers, and the sermon is available at

<https://georgewhitefieldumc.weebly.com/worship-services>

Audio worship is also available at (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#. Just dial in, enter the access code on your keypad, and you will hear the service begin with music.

Scripture Reading

Exodus 33:12-23

Moses said to God, "See, you have said to me, 'Bring up this people;' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." God said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Moses said, "If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth."

The Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." And God said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name 'The Lord;' and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," God said, "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." And the Lord continued, "See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen."

Sermon

If you've never seen me cook, there are two things you should know. Number one: I always use every single pot, pan, and utensil in the house (this has been independently confirmed by both my parents) - and I have no explanation or reasoning for it. It just always seems to happen that way. And number two: I almost never use a recipe. Or, I'll use a recipe for inspiration but inevitably, I'll get sidetracked by trying something in a different way. Sometimes it works out, and I'll make a note of what I did so I'll know what I do next time. Or, sometimes it goes terribly wrong. I can remember one time in particular when a friend shared her favorite grilled chicken recipe with an apricot balsamic glaze. It sounded amazing, and she swore by it - it was a family favorite. I was cooking dinner for my parents that night, and I figured I'd give it a try. So I cooked like I always do: I dropped some apricot preserves into a saucepan, added a glug of balsamic vinegar, let it bubble for a while, and ta-da! Dinner's ready. Did I follow the recipe? Of course not, I knew the general idea. Did it taste good?

Of course not.

My dad was very sweet though and insisted that it was delicious, but I'm not so sure. The next day, I called my friend and asked what happened, because it just seemed off. Knowing me, she asked if I followed the recipe. I responded:

Of course not.

In many ways, a recipe is like a promise; it's something that can always be counted on to produce the same results every time. So when something goes wrong, we often question the author: hey, what's going on here? Why isn't this working? Why didn't this produce the results I was promised?

In this morning's scripture reading, we hear of Moses' honest conversation with God about promises. Prior to this moment, Moses had wandered through the wilderness for years with a band of unruly Israelites who seemed to be constantly complaining about something. It was a long, difficult journey, and at this point, Moses had had it. It's almost as though he shouted up to the sky, fists clenched, *God, where are you?? You promised to be with us, promised to lead us to the Promised Land, but we are so far from that reality. Where are you?*

What is most compelling for me about this text is that Moses was so honest. He held nothing back as he questioned God about the future. Moses recounted the many promises God has made to him and to the nation of Israel, then basically called God to task: *You said all of these things. So fulfill Your promise.*

And rather than respond with an impatient sigh and frustrated explanation, God responded in the most curious way: God reassured Moses that he was not alone; that God was there, and there will be peace and comfort. And, God knew Moses' name. God, the Creator of the Universe, the Bringer of Rain, the Mountain Builder, the One whose love is vast as the seas - God knew Moses' name.

God said, "I know you by name."

How beautiful, how comforting that God knew Moses' name, knew his struggles, knew his yearning for peace within his heart and among his people. And in this moment, Moses glimpsed the glory of God - this incredibly powerful, untouchable, cosmic God, fulfilling promises *and* knowing him by name. We hear in this passage that there is still a great mystery shrouding God, for no one can truly gaze upon the Divine. God's glory is too bright, too vast, too all-encompassing for anyone to make sense of the experience.

Even though Moses couldn't see God, he felt the effects of God's glory, and we too can experience awe in God's presence: the changing seasons, the way food nourishes our bodies, the love we share with our family and friends. And we also know that God knows us by name, too, that this intimacy reaches right to our very souls. We take heart in knowing that God remembers the promises of old and of new: God is with us. And, perhaps one of the best promises? We are allowed to question God, to bring God to task, to raise our fists to the sky and shout, *Where are you??*

Many of us might have grown up thinking we weren't allowed to question God, or even be angry with God. But here, we see Moses modeling a faithful relationship with the Divine. Because here's the thing: I think God prefers our honesty over our silence. It is in those moments of openness and surrender that God's still small voice calls us by name and meets us in the wilderness, ready and willing to talk things through. God reassures us that - even when we mess up, even when we willingly make changes to the recipe and things don't turn out the way we intended - God reassures us that we can't do anything to be cast from God's presence, for we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God through Christ. So may we boldly approach the throne of God with honesty *and* humility, knowing that we don't have the answers. May we courageously ask the questions that have been on our hearts, knowing that God will meet us in the wilderness. And may we take heart in knowing that God will lead us through to the Promised Land. Of course God will. Amen.

Hymn of Meditation: Blessed Assurance UMH 369

*1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of God's Spirit, washed in Jesus' blood.*

*2. Perfect submission, perfect delight,
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels descending bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.*

Refrain

Refrain

*This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.*

*3. Perfect submission, all is at rest;
I in my Savior am happy and blest,
Watching and waiting, looking above
Filled with God's goodness, lost in God's love.*

In Our Prayers. Thanksgiving for: the gifts that make ministry possible, medical professionals and researchers. Holding in our hearts: those affected by the Coronavirus and the health of our world, those experiencing unemployment, those facing racial injustice and violence and cannot breathe under the weight of oppression, those grieving the loss of loved ones (the Armitage family in the loss of Arnold, the family and friends of Ardell Marona), those experiencing illness or health issues (Al (and family as they care for him), Barbara F., Dan D. (Vicki's husband), Kelly R., Lindsey S., the Reim family), those in nursing homes or extended care facilities (Betty, Claire, Evelyn, Priscilla), those caring for others (Carrie G., Crystal, Rachel), the United Methodist Church. *Note that this list will renew each month.*

And now, may the peace of the Lord Christ go with you wherever God may send you; may God guide you through the wilderness, protect you through the storm; may God bring you home rejoicing at the wonders God has shown you; may God bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors.¹

¹ Book of Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals

Community Announcements

- **NEXT IN-PERSON OUTDOOR GATHERING: SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25TH AT 9:30 AM. NOTE THE CHANGE IN TIME!!!** In response to our informal poll, we will be moving our outdoor worship time to 9:30 AM. Many thanks to you all for striving to follow our guidelines when we last met! Guidelines will be included in next week's bulletin.
- **TRUSTEES & REOPENING ADVISORY BOARD.** Thank you for your patience: there will be an update in next week's bulletin. Just a reminder that if you are interested in serving as a volunteer for indoor worship, please let Pastor Christy know by **Sunday, October 18th**. As of Wednesday, October 14th, we have **three volunteers, which means we only need at least two more to make indoor worship happen**. Thank you!
- **Is Your Contact Information Up To Date?** Please let Jane Dolan know if your contact information has changed. In case of church cancellation or other circumstances, we would love to be able to get ahold of you.
- **Nominations Committee.** We understand that in today's world, it can be difficult to make commitments to service, especially when everything seems so uncertain. But nonetheless, we are so grateful for our community and the gifts within. We therefore would ask your prayerful consideration for the following openings in our leadership positions; may the Spirit of God move throughout our lives and guide us toward where we are called to serve. Open positions include Financial Secretary (receiving weekly offerings, depositing them at the bank, and keeping track of income sources), Recording Secretary (attending Ad Council meetings once a month and Annual Church Conference and taking notes), and a few open positions on SPRC (supervisory committee for staff), Trustees (working as a team to maintain our property), Nominations (once-a-year gathering to assess congregational gifts and nominate leaders), and Worship (working closely with the Pastor to design services and/or offer music). If any of these openings draw you in, or if you have any specific questions about any of the positions, please reach out to Pastor Christy. Thank you!
- **NEW BIBLE STUDY.** During this election season, it can be difficult to have conversations with folks who hold differing views. Sometimes the conflict can make us feel like we have to avoid others, or perhaps even our loved ones who believe differently from ourselves. In the coming weeks, we will be sharing in a new bible study called *Know God and Make God Known*. We will be learning about Jesus' own conflict transformation techniques and how we are called to use his methods in our own lives. Guided by Melody Stanford Martin's book, *Brave Talk*, we will explore how to approach impasse with love and grace. This four week study began this week and will continue on **Wednesdays at 4 PM** for the next three weeks, concluding the Wednesday after Election Day. We will be meeting using FreeConferenceCall.com, which has a call-in feature and video conferencing over the internet. The call-in number is our regular phonenumber, (978) 990-5000, access code 719365#. If you are interested in joining by video over the internet, let Pastor Christy know and she will send you a link. If you missed last week's gathering, no worries! Jump right in.
- **Annual Church Conference Dates and Times Announced.** Our Annual Church Conference will take place by conference call on **Friday, November 6th at 7 PM**. *A reminder that all folks in leadership positions should plan to attend.* Details on how to dial in will be released shortly. **SPRC** will meet with our District Superintendent on **Saturday, November 7th at 3:15 PM**, also by phone. Please mark these important dates on your calendar!
- **Pastor Christy's Office Hours.** A reminder that Pastor Christy is available on Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 8 AM to 4 PM, Thursdays from 8 AM to 12 noon, and Sundays when we are gathering in-person from 8 AM to 10 AM. If you cannot reach her, and it is an emergency, please leave a message and she will get back to you asap.
- **Offerings** are still being encouraged during this time. Please consider mailing your offering to our church PO Box, so that we are able to continue in ministry through Christ for the transformation of the world. Offerings can be mailed to: George Whitefield United Methodist Church, PO Box 576, West Brookfield, MA 01585
- **Heifer Project - ONGOING.** Thank you for supporting this mission effort during Lent! Due to the nature of this fundraiser, being one that collects change, we invite you to continue collecting change for this mission project until we are able to return to regular church services. To date, we have received \$178.10. As we continue our mission, when we get back together, we'll decide on animals/projects.

Sonshine Phone Calls and Cards List

If you know of anyone who could be added to our Sonshine list, let Pastor Christy know.

Evelyn Armitage
(508) 867-0619
47 E Main St.
West Brookfield, MA 01585

Betty Hubbard
47 E Main St.
West Brookfield, MA 01585

Priscilla Toppin
47 E Main St.
West Brookfield, MA 01585

Claire Wirf
(508) 791-8131
(mornings)
383 Mill Street
Worcester, MA 01602

Barbara Frazier
88 Masonic Home Rd.
Charlton, MA 01507

Millie Silverberg
2473 Eastway Drive
Lexington, KY 40503

A Companion Guide

The Upper Room Daily Devotionals

Monday, October 19th through Saturday, October 24th || Written by Pastor Christy Wright

We invite you to light a candle at 9:30 AM daily and join us in prayer and devotion

If you do not have a copy of the newest Upper Room Daily Devotionals, let Pastor Christy know & she will send you one.

Monday, October 19th, 2020

Read Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world.”

In this time of preparing for winter and potentially needing to quarantine for the better part of the season if there is a larger Covid-19 outbreak, it can be easy to neglect self-care. But making time for ourselves and taking care of our bodies, minds, and spirits is probably the best thing we can do - not just now, but always. If we push aside this essential task, it can be easy to feel down on ourselves and forget who we are. One of the many reasons I love this morning's passage is that it reminds us that we are of sacred worth and loved no matter what. Because here's the thing: salt, chemically, can never actually lose its saltiness. It will always remain salty - and our souls will always remain found in God. Jesus also reminds us that we are the light of the world. The oil that lights the lamp is in infinite supply, because the oil might be likened to the Holy Spirit. So we can walk in the light, knowing that the oil that fuels us will never dry up. Thanks be to God that we are valuable in God's sight, beloved and whole, filled with love and light for the sake of the world. May we remember who we are and whose we are.

Let Us Pray Together

God of Light and Love, You remind us that our identity is found in You, and You fuel us to keep lighting up the world with Your grace and peace. You call us sacred and beloved, and we are blessed in Your sight. Help us to remember this innate truth about ourselves, so that we might share it with others in the Light of Jesus' great love. Amen.

Tuesday, October 20th, 2020

Read Hebrews 12:1-3

“Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight.”

As I prepare to go before the Board of Ordained Ministries in February, I recognize that the ordination process is a long journey, and there are many difficult obstacles - for good reason. This discernment process is important, and we want to ensure that all candidates have been properly vetted. A couple of weeks ago, I made it through the District Committee on Ordained Ministry oral exams, but I felt like I had been put through the wringer. As I'm looking over my paperwork, and at times feel overwhelmed, I can't help but be reminded of the many mentors and colleagues who have walked with me throughout my journey. They are a great cloud of witnesses who have cheered me on along the way. In the many conversations I've had with them over the years, they have encouraged me to throw off the weight of doubt and fear, and to fully pursue that to which God has called me: ordained ministry. As you reflect on your own life, what are the weights that slow you down and keep you from fulfilling God's dream for you? How are your loved ones, your great cloud of witnesses, bolstering your confidence and echoing God's call for your life? May we find our identity and greatest joy in God, who always calls us beloved and precious in the Light of Jesus' love.

Let Us Pray Together

God our Greatest Witness and Biggest Advocate, You cheer us on as we continue to pursue Your call in our lives. You are not only present from the sidelines, but also within our hearts as we strive to persevere through the obstacles of life.

Remind us of our identity in You, that we might share our hope and joy with all whom we encounter. Amen.

Wednesday, October 21st, 2020

Read Luke 18:1-7

“Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart.”

I can remember that as a child, I often tried the “annoy them” tactic to get what I wanted. I would ask again and again, hoping to wear my parents down to eventually resign and say, “FINE, yes, we can get McDonalds for dinner tonight.” But, if I remember correctly, it only worked once or twice. Every other time, I realized that they were just as stubborn as I was; but the truth is, they knew what was best for us as a family. In this morning's parable, Jesus tells us a story about a woman who was persistent in her asking, but it wasn't because she was trying to annoy the judge. Rather, her heartfelt pleas were that she would be treated as a human, a woman having lost her husband and having nothing, a woman being legally pursued for something that isn't named. Jesus contrasts the unjust judge's behavior, who eventually gave in because he was annoyed, with God's response, who hears with compassionate ears and ensures those who ask will receive in due time. For many of us, sometimes the length of time between praying and receiving a response can feel too long, but perhaps God is already answering our prayers, simply in the presence of the Holy Spirit. Maybe God is moving throughout our lives, orchestrating a more loving and more full response in due time. So we do not lose heart, for God is always near.

Let Us Pray Together

God of answered prayers, even in the silence, we know that You are near. Even in the deepest depths and darkest nights, we feel Your presence. Your Spirit meets us where we are and reminds us of the eternal bond we have with You. Help us to persist in our prayers, and to not lose heart, so that we might share this Good News with friends and strangers. Amen.

Thursday, October 22nd, 2020**Read Psalm 41:1-3****“Happy are those who consider the poor; the Lord delivers them in the day of trouble.”**

As we gear up for the holidays to come in the next couple of months, we might feel down on ourselves because this year's holidays are going to be much different from previous years. Many of us who may have hoped to travel for the holidays are now making other plans, perhaps plans to stay close to home or to outright cancel cherished traditions. It can be easy to focus on ourselves and feel bad for what we're enduring, but there are many folks in our community and beyond who have much less this year, and whose struggles have greatly increased during the pandemic. Maybe this year, we're being called to focus outward on the needs of others. Maybe this year, we are being moved to compassion out of love rather than pity. Maybe we can volunteer our time at the local food pantry in town, or perhaps donate to a cause that is close to our hearts. Either way, God delights when we take care of others in the same Light and Love that God has taken care of us. How is God calling you to serve those who are experiencing need today?

Let Us Pray Together

God of compassion and love, You provide us with all we need to live lives filled with Your abundance and grace. We are so grateful for Your providence in our lives, and we recognize the call You have given us to care for others. Move us to compassion out of love to partner with You in meeting the needs of others in Jesus' example through his ministry. Amen.

Friday, October 23rd, 2020**Read Psalm 27:1-5****“The Lord is my light and salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”**

I used to have an intense fear of thunderstorms when I was little, to the point of panicking when I heard thunder from miles away. My parents would let me sleep in their room when storms would arise, and in those moments, I knew nothing would harm me; I was safe in their presence. As I got older, my dad taught me about the science of thunderstorms and what was actually happening in the clouds and through the weather patterns. I found that the more that I learned, the less I feared thunder and lightning, but I still had a healthy respect for storms. I had found comfort in my dad's words, and though I knew I couldn't sleep in my parents' room forever, I found a different type of peace. In this morning's scripture reading, we hear of the confidence we find in God, knowing that there is nothing that we ought to fear in the presence of God, for God is our light and salvation. God is the stronghold of our lives, and we need not be afraid, even when our enemies rise against us, and even when the storms of life rage. God is our anchor, and we hold fast to the truth that God's love overcomes all and is bigger than our greatest fears. Thanks be to God that we are always held in love and light.

Let Us Pray Together

God our light and salvation, You comfort us in the midst of life's greatest storms. You quiet our fears and instill within us a peace that surpasses all understanding. When we are afraid, meet with us in those moments and remind us of the love and light we find in You, so that we might pass Your peace onto others, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Saturday, October 24th, 2020**Read 1 Corinthians 15:50-58****“Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed.”**

One of the most beautiful things about being a Christian is recognizing the mystery of our faith and learning to be okay with not having all of the answers. In this morning's passage, we hear a great mystery: how Jesus has defeated death, and that we will suddenly become imperishable and immortal through Jesus' victory. But how exactly does this happen? We know that Jesus died, and we also know that Jesus was resurrected. We're taught that through faith, we inherit Jesus' resurrection and are raised with him in our own death, obtaining eternal life. But how?? How does this work? The truth is that we may never know, not until our day of glory, but isn't that the point of faith? To embrace the mystery before us, knowing that we don't have the answers, but we believe regardless? Perhaps it is in this faith that we are changed, that there is some sort of transformation that is almost like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly: a mystery that reveals itself in beautiful wings that take us to new heights in our relationship with God, of greater trust and love that not only acknowledges the unknown mysteries, but embraces them as part of the journey. How are you being called to embrace mystery in your own life? And where is God revealing truth in these mysteries?

Let Us Pray Together

God of mystery and revelation, You walk with us through the unknowns of life and reveal the beauty of Your love. You remind us that we need not have all the answers in order to have faith in You. Teach us to not only be okay with mystery, but to fully embrace this mystery, that we might be transformed in Your light and love through Jesus. Amen.