

God Is In This Place**Sunday, October 25, 2020 || 21st Sunday After Pentecost || Pastor Christy Wright**

We invite you to light a candle at 9:30 AM and join us in prayer, *IN-PERSON* at Charmil Drive,
ONLINE or over the *PHONE* this week

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

Genesis 28:10-17

Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place - and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Sermon

This week was full of ups and downs, packed with meetings and appointments galore. But one thing I wasn't counting on was bringing Cosmo to the emergency vet. Don't worry, he's fine, but it was a very scary moment. We were having a playdate with one of our puppy friends in the neighborhood, and here's the thing about Cosmo: he's still very much a puppy. The faster he runs, the less coordination he has, and he often faceplants into the ground, or sometime's he'll tumble into a somersault. He's super silly to watch, but I guess he took a tumble a bit too hard. When he got up, his head was tilted to one side, and he kept shaking it, like there was water in his ear. And he seemed off-balance, stumbling around a bit confused. We separated the dogs and had Cosmo walk around by himself, but he still didn't seem right.

I remember hearing something about head injuries and potential strokes and how dangerous they can be, but I tried to remain calm as I asked my friend if I should take him to the vet. She seemed worried, so I called, but they were already closed. Then I called the closest emergency vet (45 minutes away), and they were already dealing with a huge influx of emergencies and were diverting folks to different area hospitals. Finally I got ahold of one that was an hour away, and I loaded Cosmo into the back seat and left straight away. My hidden anxiety suddenly burst from within me, and I was openly in tears at this point. For the entire drive, I was on the phone with my parents, who calmed me, even though I was afraid and thinking of the worst possible outcome. All the while, I could see Cosmo's happy-go-lucky face bobbing in the rearview mirror; he seemed absolutely fine, but I knew that we hadn't imagined what we had seen.

As the sun set in front of us, with colorful streaks of gold and rose, the hour-long car ride felt like it lasted five hours. We eventually pulled into the numbered parking spot, got checked in over the phone, and then we waited. And waited. Apparently this hospital was also experiencing a high volume of emergencies. I climbed into the back seat with Cosmo, who happily curled onto my lap, and I rested my head against the seat, hoping and wishing for answers that he was okay. All the while, I recognized just how exhausted I was; it had been a long, full week, generally all positive, but this seemed to be too much. My face was still wet when the vet met us in the parking lot, and she took Cosmo into the building. And I waited. And waited. Suddenly my phone rang, and the vet told me that everything looked normal, that his symptoms had subsided, and that it was probably just that a nerve in his inner ear had been pinched during one of his tumbles. The inner ear establishes equilibrium and balance, so if something set it off, it would make sense that the symptoms would appear and disappear with time. I was finally able to breathe, and as I thanked her and hung up, more tears streamed down my face - tears of gratitude. All the while, in this moment of crisis, I had forgotten that God was there; I had forgotten to pray; I hadn't realized that God was there and I did not know it. And in this moment of gratitude, all I could do was pray and hope to see God more clearly, even in scary times like this.

In this morning's scripture reading, we hear of a similar story of crisis: Jacob is on the run, exiled from his family and homeland. He sets off on a journey, unsure of where he's going, how he's going to get there, and how to stay safe throughout his travel. He is all alone, and when it gets dark, he decides that it's time to stop for the night, and so he finds the most comfortable thing on which to lay his head: a stone. The land is barren, empty, and he is afraid. He tosses and turns, eventually falling asleep and awakening to God's dream for him: a land that is fruitful, plentiful, and an oasis in a time of uncertainty. God promises not only descendents to Jacob, but also God's own presence and peace. As Jacob's eyes slowly blink open, taking in the colors of the sunrise, he suddenly becomes aware of God's presence, even in the midst of a long journey with what seemed like no end. And he says, "Surely God is in this place, and I did not know it."

Friends, as we continue on our own journey through the uncertain and unknown of the coronavirus, and as we prepare ourselves for winter, potentially to hunker down for the next several months, may we recognize that God is in this place, even when we don't perceive God's presence. In times of crisis, God is with us, replacing our nightmares of worst-case scenarios with dreams beyond our wildest imagination. And in times of peace, God is with us, going before us on our journey, preparing the way so we might know where we are headed and where we will rest when the night comes. Because, truthfully, it might be that we are being called as a congregation to rest for a season, for it is likely that this will be our last in-person gathering for quite some time.

Here at George Whitefield, we know what it feels like when the sun sets. But we also know what it is like to see the first light of dawn, a shimmering hope in the darkness that tells of a different story: reunion, gathering, embrace, and love. I felt this hope the first time we gathered in July, reunited after four months of being apart. It was a warmth and joy that can't be expressed in words, but it was something that filled my soul with the greatest peace. We are one people, one community, bound together by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that no matter how far the distance, and no matter how long we are separated from one another, we are a community of saints, called to love near and far. We never journey alone, for we have God, and we have one another. So as the sun begins to rise again in the east, and we look back toward the darkened skies in the west, we will know that God is in this place, that God is walking with us through the darkness, guiding our feet, providing a place for us to rest, and awakening us to a new dream.

So may we take hope in knowing that God is in this place, here and now. May we know that God is in this place, and this faith settles in our bones, enveloping our souls and renewing our minds. And may we dream God's dreams, awakening to the hope that is on the horizon, resting in the reality of God's love in all, through all, and for all. Amen.

Service of Word & Table (Adapted from Larry J. Peacock's Water Words, 2003)

If you are joining us in-person, we will be providing pre-packaged options for Communion. If you are unable to join us in person but would still like to partake in Communion, you can either use bread and juice at home, or Pastor Christy can drop elements off at your home. Be in touch with her if you'd prefer the second option, & she will gladly run them to you.

Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin, and seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray. Free us for joyful obedience, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hear the Good News: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that proves God's love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. Glory to God. Amen.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, O God, for in the beginning You brought forth life and called us to walk with You. From the dark and void You flung lights into the sky, spun a planet of land and water and filled the earth with living things and walking beings. You called us by name and invited us to journey in harmony with You and all creation. You make us restless until we finally come home to You. Even when we wandered off the path, ignored Your voice, forgotten our divine image, You have called us back, beckoned us to come close, to walk with You again and again. So as we listen to the still small voice, as we reach for Christ's hand to guide us one more step on the journey, we join with all creation and all the company of heaven in their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might. Heaven and earth are full of Your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!

Holy are You, and blessed is Your Son Jesus Christ. By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection, You gave birth to Your Church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit. You sent us Jesus, who invited us to walk with him in times of hunger and longing, in places of suffering and hoping, through denials and betrayals. Jesus still wants to journey with us, to open us to wonder and to the Word, and to warm our hearts. He sends us companions and teachers for our journey and chooses to be known in the breaking of the bread and the blessing of the cup.

When Jesus was with his friends, he took the bread, offered a blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body broken for you." He also took the cup, raised it in a blessing, and shared it with his friends. "This is my life poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin. As often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, remember me."

So, in remembrance of God's gracious gift of Jesus Christ and in anticipation of a closer walk with God, we commit ourselves to this journey as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out Your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and afar, the searching and the hungry, the hopeful and the weary, the joyful and the longing. And pour out Your Spirit upon these gifts of bread and wine, that they may become the presence of Christ, strength for our journey, and peace for our souls. By Your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one in fellowship, one in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, and one in harmony with the world and all creation. Through Your Son Jesus Christ, who walks with us and the Holy Spirit who leads us, all honor and glory are Yours, loving God, now and forever. Amen.

Though we are many, spread far and wide, separated by distance and time, we partake of the same joy and hope we find in Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ. The cup over which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

*This is the body of Christ, given for you.
This is the blood of Christ, given for you.*

Eternal God, we give You thanks for this holy mystery in which You have given Yourself to us. Grant that we may go into the world in the strength of Your Spirit, to give ourselves for others, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**If you have an overabundance of bread and juice, please return it to the earth by feeding the bread to the birds and pouring the juice into the ground rather than throwing it away. Consecrated communion elements are sacred symbols of God's love and should be returned to the earth in loving ways.*

Hymn of Meditation - God Be With You Till We Meet Again, UMH #672

*God be with you till we meet again;
By His counsels guide, uphold you;
With His sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.*

*Till we meet, till we meet
Till we meet at Jesus feet
Till we meet, till we meet
God be with you till we meet again.*

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

Community Announcements

- **TODAY'S IN-PERSON SERVICE: SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25TH AT 9:30 AM (NOTE THE TIME!)** Please note that this will likely be our last in-person gathering for a bit, due to the changing seasons and the complexities of using our indoor space. Many thanks to you all for striving to follow our guidelines when we last met! We'd just like to share a few reminders:
 - Remember to wear a mask.
 - If you are unable to wear a mask or would prefer not to, please **park your vehicle around the horseshoe and stay in your car for the duration of the service.** Once again, this is for the safety and sake of folks whose immune systems might be compromised or otherwise may be at higher risk for contracting the virus.
 - Please remember to physically distance from others.
 - Please bring your own chairs and **place them where there is a flag, and please do not move the flags.** These spaces have been measured out according to Massachusetts and health board guidelines. Thank you!
 - At this time, **the Reopening Advisory Board is not prepared to announce a date for returning to indoor worship.** We are brainstorming options for indoor worship, but we do not have enough volunteers to set a date for reopening the building at this time.
 - As always, please feel free to reach out to any of the members of the Board with questions or concerns
- **TRUSTEES & REOPENING ADVISORY BOARD.** Thank you for your patience: we had hoped to have an update for you this week, but due to schedule conflicts, we met after the printing of this bulletin. More information will be forthcoming in next week's bulletin.
- **Music Ministry.** Our Music Director, Melissa, would love to connect with you to collaborate on musical offerings this coming season. If you would like to be a part of a singing opportunity, or would like to share your instrumental or dance offerings, reach out to her at mrsqpiano@gmail.com or (508) 246-8508.
- **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 two weeks ago and will continue on **Wednesdays at 4 PM** for the next two weeks, concluding the Wednesday after Election Day. We will be meeting using [FreeConferenceCall.com](https://www.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

¹ Book of Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals

(508) 867-3667

(860) 908-7531

pastorchristygwumc@gmail.com

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 26th through Saturday, October 31st || 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 26th, 2020

Read John 8:34-38

“If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”

Many of you know that I have a dog named Cosmo, and if you've seen me walking him around town, you also know that he is *full* of energy. Because the parsonage isn't fenced in, I have a long line that I put him on outside while I sit on the back step, and he'll run around, chewing on sticks and pouncing on his toys. But this play time doesn't compare to when he gets to run off leash, like when he visits his other puppy friends who have fenced-in yards. The freedom Cosmo experiences seems to tap into his instincts, like he was made to run and be free. What a joy it is to watch him enjoying himself so fully. In this morning's scripture reading, we hear of a similar freedom, except that it is a freedom from the sin in which we can so easily find ourselves tangled. But sometimes sin doesn't present itself as a bad choice or a mistake, but rather a sort of brokenness to which we can find ourselves tied. Sometimes life can get us down, and it's important to process our emotions, but other times we may feel trapped in the uncertainty and unknown. But God doesn't desire this life for us - we were made for freedom, the freedom we receive through Jesus Christ, who affirms our call to run and be free. So even in the unknown, may we find freedom that surpasses all of our circumstances and affirms that we were made for joy and peace, regardless of the situations that surround us.

Let Us Pray Together

God of freedom, You have granted us liberation and called us to live lives that exude freedom for all people. Your Son Jesus has shown us what true freedom looks like, and You implore us to live by his example. Guide us in all we do, that we might spread Your freedom throughout all of creation, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tuesday, October 27th, 2020

Read Joshua 4:1-7

“What do those stones mean to you?”

In this morning's scripture reading, we hear of a congregation of people making a memorial of stones at the Jordan River, marking the particular time and season with a physical reminder, a monument, to that moment and to God's love and faithfulness. As we continue to move through this season of the pandemic, it is important for us to mark the time and seasons as well, because without our usual gatherings, we can feel disoriented or unanchored. So as we prepare for the winter to come, what are some ways that you can mark the time with your family and friends? Perhaps we can start an herb garden in the windowsill that gets the most light; or maybe we can set up candles in our windows as the night creeps in earlier with every passing day. When we intentionally mark moments in our lives with physical reminders of God's love and faithfulness, it becomes easier to remember God in every moment, for God remembers us always.

Let Us Pray Together

God of the small instant and long stretches of eternity, You walk with us every moment and share reminders of Your love and faithfulness. Your guidance leads us to make monuments of these moments, even when we are uncertain of the future. Help us to instead be certain of Your presence throughout our journey, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Wednesday, October 28th, 2020

Read Mark 14:32-36

“Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”

Over the past several years, I have worked in a variety of fields, from food service to youth ministry to the art world. Everytime I apply for a job, I've asked God to guide me through the process, but there were some really cool job postings that I'd apply for, only to be disappointed when I didn't even get an interview. Throughout my professional journey, I've come to realize that God should be guiding me every step of the way, that God knows much better than I do about where I should be and how to use my gifts and talents. Rather than focusing on my own success and dreams of a grand income, God has called me to discern with the Holy Spirit where I am called to serve, rather than seeking a career of prestige and honor. But this can be a difficult stance to take: not what I want, but what God desires for my life. And I must say that life is so much better with God's Spirit guiding me along the way. As you reflect on your own choices and journey, how are you sensing God walking with you? How is God correcting your course and blessing you with a sacred vocation?

Let Us Pray Together

God of our sacred vocation, You have called us to certain paths in life that bless others through You. You guide us through life's choices, and teach us to trust in Your call. Help us to walk this trail with You, fully invested in the journey You have for us, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thursday, October 29th, 2020**Read 1 Peter 5:6-11****“Cast all your anxiety on God, because God cares for you.”**

I was talking with one of my mentors this week about preparing for winter to make sure I had everything I needed for a healthy season, even in the midst of the coronavirus and the potential re-shutdown of the state and country. I've been focusing on my physical health by eating well and exercising, and I've been taking care of my emotional and mental health by turning off the news, reading uplifting books, and finding ways to express myself through music and art. Even though it sounds like I have everything under control, sometimes I find myself to be anxious and worried about the future. In these moments, I stop and breathe, taking a moment to remember that God is here, and God knows my every thought and worry even before I know it myself. I take hope in knowing that *God cares for me*, for it's not just that God cares *about* me. Caring about someone and caring for someone are two different things: God's love goes deeper in caring for us, for we are called to cast all of our fears and uncertainties on God - God can handle it. And we are found in peace, for we know that we are never alone, and that God's peace surpasses all understanding.

Let Us Pray Together

God of peace and rest, You envelop us with Your love especially in times of worry and fear. You hide us under Your wing of salvation and grace, and we are found in Your presence. Remind us that our worries and anxiety are not ours alone to carry, but rather, You implore us to drop them at Your feet as we walk in freedom with You, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Friday, October 30th, 2020**Read Matthew 20:20-28****“The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve.”**

In this morning's passage, I am reminded of the *Prayer of St. Francis*, who implores us to engage not only within our own souls in our relationship with God, but also to care for those around us. Jesus' own ministry was a testimony to this call to love God and love others, for an outward faith not only transforms the disciple, but also transforms the world as more folks learn about God's love and light. As we continue on our own discipleship journey, may we remember the joy of serving others as we pray together: *Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.*

Saturday, October 31st, 2020**Read Psalm 30:4-12****“Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes in the morning.”**

When I was a teenager, I attended three different church youth groups: one on Sunday nights (at the church where I held my membership), one on Wednesday nights (where most of my friends from high school went), and one on Thursday nights (where I heard about a theatre ministry that I wanted to take part in). I was like a sponge, taking it all in, and I couldn't get enough of the teachings, the community, and the joy of being a part of something bigger than myself. One of the songs we loved to sing was called *I'm Trading My Sorrows*. Not only was it a fun song to dance to, but it also held a kernel of truth that has stuck with me through the years: sometimes life can get us down, but through God's love, we can experience renewal even in the midst of difficult times. The lyrics quote this Psalm in saying, “I'm pressed but not crushed persecuted not abandoned; Struck down but not destroyed; I'm blessed beyond the curse for his promise will endure; And his joy's gonna be my strength. Though the sorrow may last for the night, His joy comes with the morning.” Thanks be to God that we are forever held in God's love, regardless of our circumstances. And thanks be to God that even in the darkest of nights, joy comes in the morning.

Let Us Pray Together

God our Light in the darkness, You are with us as we weep, and You are with us in the sunrise of a new day. Your great love envelops our entire being, regardless of where we find ourselves. Remind us that You are with us in the worst of times and the best of times, that we might spread Your great love to all whom we encounter, through Jesus Christ. Amen.