

“The Fierce Urgency of Now”
A Rocky Mountain Conference Worship Experience
Fall 2020

Read Only Version

Welcome - Rev. Sue Artt

I join you this morning with the efforts of our conference staff and with the efforts of others in the conference to bring you a worship service in a moment of gratitude for all that you have done the clergy and the lay leaders and the lay members of our church has to help sustain the church through this really difficult year of 2020. You've all been generous. You have been pulling together and you have shown what faithfulness means, and so this moment we take to thank you for for your steadfastness. We recall that Christians have oftentimes been tried and that the virtues of patience and perseverance and faithfulness in the face of tremendous odds have carried the Christian Church through. So, we bring you this worship service this morning to help you remember that you play a vital part, each one of you, in the ministry of Christ here in this world; that your hands have been in power for the work of Christ. I offer this at the start to our worship: It has been said that the world does not so much need saving as it needs loving; and through our loving is how we save it. So friends, join us in worship.

Call to worship - Daryl Schrieber

I'd like to call you to worship today with an invitation to join us in a deep breathing exercise. As you're watching this at home, I invite you to find a place to be comfortably seated, with your hands at your side and both feet on the ground, if you are able. Close your eyes, or turn your gaze gently downward, whatever is most comfortable for you. Let's start with three big breaths. Breath in, breath out. Again, breath in, and out. On the third breath, turn your attention to your body. Breathe into your muscles, into your body. Continue breathing steadily in and out, at a rate that is comfortable for you, relaxing your body, and sinking into your body. Notice these sensations, and accept them as a part of this moment. On your next deep breath in, I invite you to breathe deeply into your stomach, letting it relax and expand. So often we hold our stomach in tight, but now, give yourself permission to let go, to soften, and expand with holy breath. Your body is a vessel for spirit. We can meet God in a wide variety of ways, not just in church or in study, but with our very bodies. Be present in this moment with your whole self.

Children's Moment - Melissa McCarl

Good morning to the young churchgoers out there! My name is Melissa and this is my best friend Murphy. Murphy is kind of the boss of this house so he gets to come and go as he pleases, but I wanted you to at least meet him before we start our talk today. We symbolize hope with light, so that could be lighting a candle on the altar of your church. That could be Christmas lights that you put up at your house during Christmas, or if you'd like me you put them up in November because you just can't wait. It might also be a nightlight that someone put up in your bedroom to keep you from feeling afraid and keep you feeling safe and comfortable, and I'll tell you what friends, we all need light at some time or another to help us feel safe so there's absolutely no shame in that. Now I'm going to tell you a little secret: light doesn't just come from without, like the candle or the Christmas lights, light comes from within as well. For instance, when you're holding a puppy, or the feeling when you get when you're holding a little kitten or a little baby, or it might be that surge of joy you feel when a teacher or coach tells you you've done a great job! Some people might call that Spirit coming through, or love, or God. In times of trouble it's really important to keep in touch with that inner light. So, today we're going to sing a song that encourages us to do just that it's called "This Little Light of Mine."

**Sing "This Little Light of Mine." Keep your light shining!*

Scripture Reading - Richard Ward

Mark 13: 27-34

24 "But in those days, following that distress, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; **25** the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' **26** "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. **27** And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. **28** "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. **29** Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. **30** Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. **31** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. **32** "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **33** Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. **34** It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

Sermon - Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott

Fire! This is one of the few words on the list of words not to exclaim publicly. This word gets people to move... and to move fast. In fact, we often have constructed plans and drills,

ways of protection and escape just in the case that fire should come, and we should find ourselves in peril.

Fire is a thing of spiritual significance. In Genesis, fire was part of the sign and ritual between God and Abraham concerning the descendants, more numerous than the stars in the sky and the grains of sand on the shore, which would be born to him. Fire, in the account of the exodus was the force by which God led God's people through the wilderness, a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Also in the Exodus narrative it was fire that God used to signal Moses to turn aside, that he might be the one... the vessel used to speak to Pharaoh, in word and deed, proclaiming that it was time that those who had been held captive in Egypt, in Mitzrayim, in the narrow place to be liberated. In Leviticus we see that fire is the means by which, Elohim commands that certain offerings be presented that they might present a sweet savor. In Numbers, fire was the means by which God's anger was made manifest among God's people.

Fire is a force for beauty, in the right hands fire can melt the metal so that the iron workers can create beautiful, intricate, ornate, and almost wispy pieces of metal work. Fire, in the right hands can be the controlled burn which allows farmland, prairies and sections of desolate forest to burn that the soil might be nourished, enriched, and renewed so that new life might spring forth. Fire, in the right hands can be used as a tool in metallurgy to cleanse, to purify, to refine to extract foreign, dulling and devaluing material.

In the wrong hands, under the wrong circumstances, in the wrong place, at the wrong time fire can lead to death, destruction and utter chaos, as we have seen burning throughout the western states of the United States of America. Homes lost, heirlooms lost, left behind because this kind of fire, means danger, and danger necessitates swift action. Danger comes to us, calls, to us, demands of us swift action. That we would heed the urgency of now.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In a sermon at the Riverside church titled Beyond Vietnam: A time to break silence spoke to the fire, to the flames, to the inferno of his time, the war in Vietnam saying;

"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The "tide in the affairs of men" does not remain at the flood; it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage,

but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: "Too late." There is an invisible book of life that faithfully records our vigilance or our neglect. "The moving finger writes, and having writ moves on..." We still have a choice today; nonviolent coexistence or violent co-annihilation."

Fire calls to us, it warns us, it pleads with us to act swiftly. In our life and time, we have seen the flames raging fires which call to us like the burning bush called to Moses. But these flames burn, and we are being consumed. I hear you my friend. I hear you asking the question Where are the fires of our life and time, where are the tongues of flame which burn, illuminate, and consume? I'm so glad you asked. There is the COVID 19 pandemic, there is a continuing refugee and migrant crisis in our midst, there is poverty, homelessness and food insecurity which calls to us from the intersections of our lives. And, the inferno of racism yet rages. Racism is simply the belief the color of a person's skin, their outward appearance, their phenotype, determines the traits of a person and that ones skin tone conveys some sort of moral, spiritual or social superiority. That fire has been burning in our land since the year 1619, when persons claiming Christian faith, brought persons from the shores of Africa to endure perpetual servitude because our skin had been twice kissed by God's sun. Fire, uncontrolled, in the wrong place at the wrong time, calls to us, it warns us, it pleads with us to act swiftly. The migrants who come to our shores seeking Shalom, safety, sanctuary but are met with dehumanization and detention show us that the fires of xenophobia and fear burn brightly in our land. Fire, in the wrong place at the wrong time, calls to us, it warns us, it pleads with us to act swiftly. The treatment of those persons within our borders who endure persecution, ridicule, and all manner of violence because of how they identify and who they love shows us that fires of bigotry burn brightly in our land. Fire calls to us, warns us, pleads with us to act swiftly.

In our text, we find Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph the carpenter, Mary's baby, the son of God after he entered Jerusalem to the cries of hosanna, after he has cast the money changes, the payday lenders, out of the temple with whips and chains, and after he gave a Preacher some tax advise giving his disciples warning of the flames to come. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his departure and for coming persecution. Jesus issues a warning about we hear the desolating sacrilege. This is, scholars believe a reference to events recorded in the apocalyptic writing of Daniel. King Antiochus IV in set up an alter and and idol in the the temple, where God and God alone, the one who called the worlds into being, heard the rise of the people Israel and brought them out of Egypt, the one who commanded Israel to worship them and them alone. Just a little refresher God = good, idols = bad. Idols are anything any person, any place, any thing which is set in the place where God should be. Be that in a temple or on the seat of our hearts. Jesus warned

beware the idols sitting in the place reserved for God. Beware the ordinary, the profane sitting in the seat of the kadosh the set apart, the hagios, the holy.

Jesus says when you see this happening, when the desolating sacrilege takes place, when any idol is set in God's seat, run. When the focus is misplaced, Don't go back to get anything. There's no time to be sentimental about the time gone by.

To add bit of compassion to this harsh instruction, we have the hope presented pray this will not take place in winter pray that it doesn't take place in a stormy season at a time when it not convenient at a time where we find ourselves underdogs down, to preserve our selves, Jesus calls us to the urgency of now, of the present moment despite the difficulty dispute our discomfort.

We find ourselves living in a world where there are more idols than... Their presence is nothing but a desolating sacrilege. We find ourselves on the run, girding our loins, picking up and running, because of the fires that burn brightly which call us to act now... and those which smolder...which call us to act now, we find ourselves running in this moment to safety.

I find no fault with obeying Jesus' command here. I find no fault with girding my loins to pick up and run at the sight of the desolating sacrilege , when idols of supremacy, or inferiority, or doubt, or cowardice sit on the seat reserved for the one in whom all flesh will find freedom and abundance. I find no fault with Jesus, but I do have just one question. Where do we go? To which place must we turn, to which place must we flee?

Jesus answer is clear flee to the mountains. Flee to the high places. Flee to the ground above the snake line. When fear and uncertainty consume us, we are called to run to the mountains to the high ground, when a gospel which is anything but good news to the widow, the orphan, the sojourner, those who are in prison, and those who are impoverished we are called to run to the mountains to the high ground. When sentiments are proclaimed in thought word and deed that anyone is not worthy, not reachable, by the power of God we are called to run to the mountains to the high ground. When the god of American civic religion sits on the throne reserved for the God of Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Miriam, Hannah, and Naomi we are called to run to the mountains to take refuge on the high ground.

How shall we run? We run by proclaiming God welcomes all stranger and friend, God's love is strong and never ends, we run toward safety by educating ourselves about the racism that burns so brightly in our midst. We run to safety by putting feet to our faith and running onward in hope, into God's presence in hope We run to safety by making sure that conversations about race and racism are part of our agenda as conference and as church,

although the journey may have caught us at an uncomfortable time, what we see and experience as an inopportune moment, let us run on in hope that our god who carved out the sea and shaped the dry land is with you on the journey. Some things, we must leave behind, some places, we must leave behind some ways of being we must leave behind. As flee toward safety, toward refuge, toward sanctuary, toward justice, toward righteousness, remember god is with you.

The hymn writer penned these words which speak to us in times like these in moments like these, the hymn writer says; I'm pressing on the upward way, new heights I'm gaining every day; Still praying as I onward bound, Lord plant my feet on higher ground. Lord lift me up and let me stand by faith on heavens table land. A higher place than I have found, Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.

Aria by John Dixon

Pastoral Prayer - Adrian Miller

Join me at the throne of grace. O everlasting and loving God, we come to you with heavy hearts, but we are thankful for one more opportunity to talk to you. Lord, we're living at a time when we are left with more questions than answers. We grieve for the loved ones of Brianna Taylor, Ahmaud Aubrey, George Floyd, and Elijah McClain. We grieve for the countless others who have died due to police brutality. We grieve for the countless number of people who have lived under a system of mass incarceration. We pray for those who have had their mental health decline, and those who feel impoverished in spirit because of recent events. We mourn that systemic racism persists, we mourn that the body of Christ remains broken by race. We grieve the hundreds of thousands of people in the United States, and that millions around the world will die due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We pray for those struggling economically, those who have lost businesses, those who have lost their jobs, those who have lost their dreams because of the pandemic. We pray for those who are struggling to make ends meet and those who don't have enough to eat. We pray for a nation at odds, bitterly so, over a presidential election. We ask for healing of mind, body, and spirit. Give us comfort in this time of uncertainty. Help us discern and utilize the gifts that you have bestowed upon us so that we may be leaders and servants in this moment that we may be the repairers of the breach. Empower us to be your eyes, your ears and arms, your heart, and to speak your love and show God's love to others. Embrace us in this time of struggle. Give us strength and help us to strengthen others. Help us to recognize the Divine in others, especially those with whom we disagree. You know our hearts, Lord. Help us to be a blessing to others as your divine plan for justice unfolds. We ask these things, seeking God's grace, love, and mercy, in Jesus Christ name. Amen.

O Mighty God

Offertory - Janice Travis

As the Financial Associate of the RMC, I can tell you that your faith community needs your generous donations now more than ever. I invite you to take a moment right now to give to your church, either by online donation, or by writing and mailing in a check. If you would like to give a gift to the RMC, you may do so at www.rmucc.org/donate. This is a critical time of growth in our Conference ministries. Your gifts are critical to being able to fulfill our vision for the future. Please consider giving as a "Friend of the Conference" in support of our shared ministry!

Communion - Rev. Erin Gilmore

As we come to this time now to share and communion together, I invite you if you haven't already to find some bread some juice or some wine and find a table in your house. Remember Christ's invitation to come however you are and receive the gift of God's son. Over the last seven months, I've been coming back to this table this picnic table in my backyard. It sits right next to this grapevine. I have come to this grapevine in every season. I have come and sat with it as the sun has warmed its branches and awakened its fruit, and I have sat in the shade of this grapevine and heat of the Summer, with the smell of ripening grapes hanging in the air. I see it now with the leaves on the ground, knowing that those leaves are returning back to soil, and I think ahead to the months soon when it will grow cold and dark. Even then I know that this vine will continue to remind me of Jesus's words, "I am the vine and you are the branches." For even as I can taste the beauty and richness of this vine and harvest the grapes to create this cup of juice, so too can I lean into the mystery and the gift of the dormant grapevine. The vine that rests in the dark, that waits for the sun's return.

Christ is the vine in every season, and we are Christ's branches. Sometimes that means we bloom, sometimes we bear fruit, and sometimes we retreat and we rest. It is all part of what it means to embody the way of Christ. Whether we find ourselves on this day worried, or worn down or wistful, whether we are righteously angry or deeply depressed, whether we are hopeful or forlorn, or energized, or exhausted, Christ knows what it is to be us in every season. And Christ continually calls us to come to this table. To abide in Christ and let Christ abide in us.

So as I gathered here at my table with the juice of this grape and the bread, I invite you take a seat at your table. All of us gathered together across all of our ordinary, yet sacred tables, I invited us to remember. I invite us to remember again the stories that Jesus' friends tell. Stories of bread broken, feeding a multitude. Stories of being gathered

together and meeting with friends around tables. Stories of unlikely guests, revealing the face of the sacred.

They say that on that night it was a night at both celebration and betrayal. That he took a loaf of bread and he blessed it and he broke it. Reminding them that it is it is in the breaking that we become whole. It is in losing our lives that we find them, and in serving that we are served. When we eat this bread, we become one with one another.

They say too that he took the cup also at the table and he poured it out. Sharing and remembering with them this life-giving breath, even now pounding rhythm through our bones. This breath of life from which we come. As the grapes find life, when we drink this cup we become one with the source of life itself.

And so we pray, come Holy Spirit come, bless this bread bless this fruit of the vine. Bless all of us in our eating and drinking that our eyes might be open that we might recognize the risen Christ, and that our lives might be the message that awakens the best of what it means to be human. Come Holy Spirit Come. I invite you to join me, take and eat the bread. And take and Drink the fruit of the vine.

Let us pray together. We come with thanksgiving to this table. This table that welcomes us wherever we are, whoever we are. This table that calls to us to be reminded, to be filled, to be sent out again to be your hands, feet, eyes, and mouth. That through us lives might be awakened, hearts might be softened, and the world might be changed. In your name we pray, amen.

Blessing and Sending Forth - Rev. Sue Artt

Friends, as we now come to close our time together today, I'd like to turn to the words of poet L.R. Knost, who offers, "Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world, for all things break and all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go, love intentionally, extravagantly, and unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you." Amen.