

Worship Transcription

Welcome – Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert

Good morning, welcome to worship. I am Sarah Calvert, your District Superintendent and I want to welcome you to worship. Worship in ways that we never imaged. Worship in ways like – out here, in my neighborhood next to my favorite tree! I want to welcome you to worship in a way maybe you never imaged before, whether you are in your pajamas, or having a cup of coffee or you're up and ready and have already been out for a run. Wherever you are, there is God, there is your community, there is a time for worship. So I call you into a time of community & worship this morning. May you be blessed, may you be enriched, and may you be made more fruitful to go back out into the world. Amen.

Call to Worship – Rev. Dr. Michelle Holmes Chaney

L: Please join us for our call to worship this morning.

L: The Lord has been our refuge and our keeper.

P: It is God who has kept us from falling and saved our lives.

L: Let our thanks and praise resound throughout this place of worship.

P: Let our love and gratitude be shown in all that we do.

L: Open your hearts and spirits to God this day.

All: Lord, be with us and place your hand of healing in our lives.

L: Amen!

Prayer – Cynthia Lopynski

Loving Father, thank you for this day, a day we have not seen before, and will not see again. Thank you for the gift of creation. May we in this season of great pause, see with new eyes our Father's world. Let us savor the quiet and stillness that has come to be this season. Help us to hear afresh the sounds of birds chirping and streams gurgling. Help us to embrace the silence, and hear the gentle whispers in our souls. Thank you Father for the gift of Jesus Christ, who revealed to us your great love and compassion, who noticed the poor, the vulnerable, and the marginalized. We confess there are times we have been blind to your children. In this season of great pause, guide us to places where we do not just notice, but respond to the needs of those around us. Father we cannot love as Christ loves all on our own, no matter how hard we try. And so in your great wisdom, you have given us the Holy Spirit, a companion who is with us always, who dwells within us. We thank you Lord for the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are grateful that we journey through this life with an Advocate, who gives us eyes to see and ears to hear how we can spread your love, how we can make your kingdom real, and tangible, here and now. We thank you for the promptings of the Holy Spirit that guide us to respond to our family, our friends and

our neighbors in love, grace and mercy. We ask you this morning to pour out your grace on us that we hear the words written so long ago, that we may hear them anew, and the Holy Spirit might move in each of us to be salt and light in the world. That the world might know Jesus through the love and mercy we show, in our every day, ordinary lives. We ask all this in the strong name of Jesus Christ, who taught us all to pray:

Our Father, who 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 of our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Scripture – John 14:15-21 – Kim Johnson

This morning's scripture comes from the book of John, chapter 14, versus 15 through 21 (NRSV):

¹⁵ "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷ This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸ "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹ In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Sermon – "Love Connection – Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert

Good morning, my name is Sarah Calvert and I am your District Superintendent for the Arlington District and I am here this morning because I am trying to help out some pastors and give them a rest, giving them a chance to step away from sermon writing for a week or so. They have completely re-invented worship and sermons and technical ways of doing worship and bible studies and programming, they have been very hard at work for the last several months and I hope this gives them a bit of a breather.

So I told them I would come and tell you a little about what it means to be in the midst of this crisis maybe in my life a little bit. So every day in the midst of this, I am walking my dog. This is my neighborhood, and walking my dog, I come across this lovely tree. This lovely tree with the wind blowing through it – its stable! You know the leaves and branches are flexible, and they move, and it is rooted very deeply and strongly. And so it's not going anywhere. It's a very old tree. It's got a lot of character to it. And it's a touchpoint for me. It's a time to stop and take a deep breath, and to remind myself of the ways that I am rooted, the things that I am rooted in, that determine how I can move forward, how well can I move through the fears and the anxiety, the anger and the worry that is going on in our world right now. The trees are very important and interesting. Last summer I spent some time studying a book called "The Secret Life of Trees" where it talks about how trees are in community in ways in which we don't even know. Their roots reach out. Even a solo looking tree like this, their roots reach out and talk to the other trees around it. Their branches and leaves, and even the way disburse pollen have chemical

traces that talk to each other, even across different types of trees. And the trees themselves are a community, they are not standing isolated and alone. So though it may be rooted to one spot, it is actually part of a bigger whole. That helps me to think through the fact that even though I am isolated at home, even though I'm fearful or angry, I am part a larger community. I am part of a church, and for me, I'm part of many churches, in the whole District! In the midst of that I am reminded I am never alone.

So what have I rooted myself in? I know I have comfort and strength for the road ahead because I have studied what is going on, I've been careful, I've read up on things, and I know that I am prepared.

And when I think about this scripture we've been reading today, this passage from John, you may realize that it is part of the long passages where Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for what is about to come. He is preparing them for the fact that their life is about to be turned upside down. They are about to be afraid and anxious and unsettled and unstable, they are going to be hunted, they are going to run away, they are going to deny, they are going to do all sorts of things that mean they are in fact not going to be in the comfortable spot they are in right now. And when they do that, Jesus is going to say to them – look – if you love me, if you love me, then follow my commandment. If you love me, keep my commandment. You may wonder – what commandments are those? What commandments does Jesus say in this gospel of John? It's not 23 different ones, it's not 173 different things, in fact it is only one. A little bit later in this passage, after the part we've read, Jesus says I command you to do one thing, and one thing only. To love each other as I have loved you. Love each other as I have loved you.

That is all that he has asked of them. That is going to help them move through. They are going to be in community in ways they never expected, so if they love him, then in fact, they should love each other, and that will be the continuation of what is going to happen.

Then Jesus tells them the truth. He tells them how hard things are going to come – Look, I am not going to be here anymore. Look, he says, I am not going to leave you alone – you are not going to be orphans. In fact, you are going to be, there's going to be a helper, a comforter, something stable for you to rely upon. So he tells them that something called the Paraclete, that's the Greek word that he uses, a Paraclete is coming, and the Paraclete is a comforter, a helper is probably the best English translation of the word. Something that is going to be there for them – the Spirit, what we commonly call the Holy Spirit now, and you may recall if you are older like I am, the Father, Son and the "Holy Ghost". This is what is coming to be part of them. And there is going to be work for this Holy Spirit, beneficial to this community of disciples that is going to completely unleash God's love on this world. So this Holy Spirit is going to teach them, because they are going to continue to need to be taught. We all need to be taught, even the best teachers among us need to be taught. And so if we open up scripture together, as they come together to have worship services after Jesus is gone, they are going to continue through the power of the Holy Spirit to lift up the words that Jesus said and the actions that he took and study them and study the Jewish scriptures. Not only will it teach, but it will also remind them, remind them of what it means to be a people who are loved by God and continue to love others. Remind them in the midst of everything, like this tree reminds me to be rooted in things, remind them what it means to be a people who are loved by God and love others.

HE says that not only will the Holy Spirit teach and remind you, it will abide in you. It will be part of you. This Holy Spirit will be part of you, as you love each other as you, this Holy Spirit will remind you, will abide within you so that you can grow and be challenged and be the kind of people that show that love to the world.

So Jesus says that this is going to be a teacher, a reminder, this is going to be someone who abides with you, and this is also going to be a testifying Spirit. This Spirit is going to pull out of you testimony that you don't even know now, testimony that says that what it is that you desire, that God has put into you, what love it is that you had, that has come into this world, and it is also going to help you hear the testimony of others, how has God changed other people in your community. Again, this is part of a community role of the Holy Spirit.

Because you see this is not just for us, not just for our internal Spirit, but this is things that bind a community together, like the roots of this tree binding the trees together, the Holy Spirit is binding each of us together. If we love him, and have kept his commandment to love one another, it's a creation of the church. And you know, if you think about it, the church itself is created by the Holy Spirit. We are going to celebrate Pentecost in a few weeks and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at that time created the church that we know today. That church was created by a complete outpour, it was testimony, and it was people was seeing Peter testifying, it was people being taught, it was people finding out that the Messiah had come, and there was a new way of seeing the world in the light of the love and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

There is a tremendous amount of things that this Holy Spirit is going to do to create this community, that creates the church, that we have inherited today. So what does that mean for us today? What could that possibly be about us? What this says to us today is that our church was never about a building. Our church was never about an event. Our church was never about a particular person in a particular pew. This church was always about the power of the Spirit to life up our gifts to life up our mission and ministry, to send us forth in love, to love one another.

I have seen across our District the ways in which our churches have risen to the challenge to love one another as they have been loved by God. They have fed a tremendous number of people who are suddenly hungry. They have helped the people who are suddenly homeless. They have worked with people who have suddenly found themselves without jobs. They have called forth gifts they didn't even know they had, technical things that have never been done before in the name of the church. The Holy Spirit is present and challenging us in the midst of this. The Holy Spirit is that powerful love.

Because really – whose Spirit is it? It's the Spirit of Jesus, left behind. It's the love of Jesus left behind, and active constantly in the world. It is present here, it is present in this beautiful tree, it is present in those of you who are watching this morning, it is present in the life and love and the movement forward of the church today. In its mission to help others see, and help others know that the love of God is theirs, and they are as beloved as you are, and there is work to be done. The Holy Spirit is a love connector, it is a love connection, connecting everyone and everything to each other. This is how God transforms the world, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

May your world be transformed, may you be challenged and pushed, may you ask yourself every day – how am I living out this love, how am I being challenged by this love, how is fear and anxiety and the walls that I have put up in the midst of this scary time being broken down by love? How can I reach out to the next person in love? How can I support the work of my church and the mission of the church with my love, my work in the Holy Spirit?

I wish you great joy in the finding of that truth; I wish you great love connections, for they will transform the world throughout eternity. Amen and Amen!

Stewardship Moment - Rev Dr. Sarah Calvert

Worship and church and everything we understand about ourselves as a community has been changed and turned upside down. But the Holy Spirit is present here. The Holy Spirit is with us in the midst of this, teaching us new things, reminding us of the ways we may have done things in ancient history, and the way we might do things from now, and a hundred years into the future.

As we re-prioritize everything, as we take a new look at the gifts that God has given us, we find new ways of prioritizing, new ways of thinking about things. I've discovered for example that while my budget for gas has gone incredibly down, my budget for Door Dash has become exponentially high!

So all things are being re-examined in this new and strange time. Your church is doing things in new ways that you might not understand either. The pastors have been asked to do things about re-imagining worship that no one has ever done before. The teams that work at your church, the laity and the technical staffing, licensing, copyrights, there are all sorts of new things that are being thrown at us. And in the midst of all this, your church continues to have ongoing needs.

I hope that you can be a part of continuing the mission of your church. I've seen the ways that across this District, many of our churches have done that. I've seen people continuing to feed the hungry, and the number of hungry people has grown exponentially. I've seen people helping the homeless, and again they are growing. I've seen those who are suddenly lost their jobs and are completely disoriented in their lives, you have been in mission and ministry in new and different ways, all from a socially distant and with practicing good sanitation, all reimagined in a new kind of world. If you can continue to help support the mission of your church, now is the time to do that. Your church will let you know how you can do that, for everything from an old fashioned mail in envelope to a new and different e-transaction to ways in which your church knows that you can support them. Buy into the mission of this local church, because it is important. The church must step up and be fearless in a time of great fear.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can all continue to be a part of that mission.

Benediction – Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert

As we conclude this time of worship together, may the Holy Spirit irritate you, challenge you, push you, and send you into places and ways of being that you never imagined. As we end a time of worship, we don't really end it, do we? We continue it in the world, we take it out into the world, sometimes only as far as the tree down the street from us, but we take the love, that Love Connection, back out to the world, because we are there to share it. So go in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, knowing that you, beloved, carry the Love Connection. Amen.

