

**Welcome to worship with the
Upper Path Valley Presbyterian Congregation!
June 14, 2020**

Good morning, church. Today is an important day. This is the 14th of June and it is the 14th Sunday since we have been together in our sanctuary for worship. On March the 8th, the 2nd Sunday of Lent, we had no idea that it would be the last time we would worship together for 3 ½ months!

Some of you posted pictures or videos on Facebook showing how we might come back into the sanctuary when we could finally do so! Dancing, singing, coming into His presence with thanksgiving and his courts with praise! That's how some of us envisioned our return to this place! But I think the longer we were apart, the harder it became to envision anything.

In these weeks apart, we have lost jobs, have scrambled to try to get unemployment in virtual lines that were longer than Rt. 81. In these weeks apart we have lost the enjoyment of going to a restaurant to share a meal with family or friends. In these weeks apart, we lost time with our kids, our grandkids, our grandparents, our parents, our friends, and our church family. In these weeks apart, we have lost loved ones. I think about Jerry Hall. Today would have been his 84th birthday. Because of COVID, his family could not see him and be with him as he passed from this life into Heaven.

In these weeks apart, we have had family emergencies, we have heard words from doctors that have shaken us to our core.

In these weeks apart, we have celebrated weddings, and we have learned of babies on the way.

In these weeks apart, teachers have taught everything online, all students became homeschooled, and graduates had only virtual graduation ceremonies. In these weeks apart, we have missed sports – march madness, The Master's golf tournament, the first pitch in baseball, little league, and so much more.

In these weeks apart NASA and SpaceX launched two astronauts, sending them to the International Space Station – this was the first since 2011 that the US sent humans to the space station from our own US soil.

In these weeks apart we have spoken harshly to others because we felt so tangled up inside. In these weeks apart we have categorized people not according to God's Word but according to our opinions and preferences and desires. In these weeks apart our country has cracked wide open – staring injustice, violence, and a variety of forms of racism in the face. People of all skin colors have been killed as anger and frustration mount.

In these weeks apart many have turned to God for answers. Many have wondered where God is in all of this. Many have questioned what part "church" really has in our lives. Some are wondering after being away for so long, how necessary is the "church gathered" to being a believer in Jesus? Can I be just as strong a believer if I don't watch any of the videos, if I don't give any offering, and if I just use these weeks apart to step away?

In these weeks apart, God has shown us mercy. Mercy beyond mercy. God has remained faithful and steadfast and good – because that is the nature of God. Faithful, steadfast, and good. God cannot act outside of his nature. God cannot become unfaithful, unstable, and evil. It's unthinkable for those who know Him, who have a relationship with Him. God IS completely faithful, completely steadfast, and completely good though we are often unfaithful, unstable, and far from good.

We are not gathering in our sanctuary today with dancing, with loud trumpets, and with singing. God has not yet called us to that. God has called us today, no matter where you are when you are hearing these words, God has called us to a solemn assembly.

Hear these words from our reading in our Daily Bible for yesterday, June 13 from Joel 2:
"This is what the LORD says, Turn to me now while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead.

Return to the LORD your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love... call the people together for a solemn meeting. Gather all the people, the elders, the children, and even the babies. Call the bridegroom and the bride. Let them pray, Spare your people, LORD."

As we think about it, the word solemn means sincere, serious, formal, dignified. The precise Hebrew word for solemn assembly (*'ăsar*) gives us a picture of something restrained or held fast (like a child holds a favorite stuffed animal close to his heart).

On this day, as some of us regather in the sanctuary for the first time in 14 weeks, but for those of you at home too as we continue to make progress towards reopening and regathering freely & safely, for all of us as we continue to process what we've lost, and what we've gained in these weeks apart, as we continue to process our part in honoring people of every colored-skin and honestly weed out the biases and prejudices that have found root in us, on this day of a solemn assembly, we hold fast to the One who knows us best, who loves us best, who carries us when we can't take another step, and who, through the Holy Spirit, comforts us, convicts us of our sin, counsels us, and reminds us of everything Jesus taught us.

Let us pray: Thank you, LORD, that when we are holding fast to you, we find that you are already holding fast to us. Thank you for never letting go. Thank you for getting us through these last 14 weeks. We are still grieving all we lost. We are still trying to process what we learned and how we can put into effect the beautiful truths revealed. Thank you for gathering some of us together today in this house of worship, sacrifice, and prayer. Thank you that the day is coming ever closer when all your children can be together again as you intended. This we pray in Jesus' name who taught us when we pray to say, "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 our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever, Amen."

Song for Reflection: *He Will Hold Me Fast* (Keith Getty)
When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast;
When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast.
I could never keep my hold through life's fearful path;
For my love is often cold; He must hold me fast.
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.
Those He saves are His delight, Christ will hold me fast;
Precious in his holy sight, He will hold me fast.
He'll not let my soul be lost; His promises shall last;
Bought by Him at such a cost, He will hold me fast.
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.
For my life He bled and died, Christ will hold me fast;
Justice has been satisfied; He will hold me fast.
Raised with Him to endless life, He will hold me fast
"Till our faith is turned to sight, When He comes at last!
He will hold me fast, He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so, He will hold me fast.
He Will Hold Me Fast

Children's Message: What has been the hardest for you? How have you kept going? An interview with Laurie Parsons & Rev. Meagan

Sermon: A Lamp and a Light, Part 22
Rev. Meagan Boozer

Our sermon for this morning is coming from 2 Kings 5 – the story of a man healed of leprosy. *“The king of Aram had great admiration for Naaman, the commander of his army, because through him the Lord had given Aram great victories. But though Naaman was a mighty warrior, he suffered from leprosy. 2 At this time Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman’s wife as a maid. 3 One day the girl said to her mistress, “I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy.” 4 So Naaman told the king what the young girl from Israel had said. 5 “Go and visit the prophet,” the king of Aram told him. “I will send a letter of introduction for you to take to the king of Israel.” So Naaman started out, carrying as gifts 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. 6 The letter to the king of Israel said: “With this letter I present my servant Naaman. I want you to heal him of his leprosy.” 7 When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, “Am I God, that I can give life and take it away? Why is this man asking me to heal someone with leprosy? I can see that he’s just trying to pick a fight with me.” 8 But when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes in dismay, he sent this message to him: “Why are you so upset? Send Naaman to me, and he will learn that there is a true prophet here in Israel.” 9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha’s house. 10 But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: “Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy.” 11 But Naaman became angry and stalked away. “I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!” he said. “I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me! 12 Aren’t the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than any of the rivers of Israel? Why shouldn’t I wash in them and be healed?” So Naaman turned and went away in a rage. 13 But his officers tried to reason with him and said, “Sir, if the prophet had told you to do something very difficult, wouldn’t you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply, ‘Go and wash and be cured!’” 14 So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child, and he was healed! 15 Then Naaman and his entire party went back to find the man of God. They stood before him, and Naaman said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant.” 16 But Elisha replied, “As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept any gifts.” And though Naaman urged him to take the gift, Elisha refused. 17 Then Naaman said, “All right, but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the Lord.”*

I’m sure we have all described someone like this: “Oh, he is a really great guy, BUT....” Or we might ask a friend, “Do you love him?” And she answers, “I do love him, BUT...”. We interview someone for a job and afterwards might say, “She has all the skills we need, BUT...”. “I love it when they come to visit, BUT...”. “I love our church family, BUT...”.

That one word ‘but’ indicates there is a problem. There is something in your perception of the person or the situation that is holding you back from fully engaging with that person or persons.

Naaman was a great guy, highly respected. One of my commentaries compared his position in Aram as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He was the military leader of one of the region’s most powerful nations. He was highly regarded, victorious, and brave. BUT... all of those descriptors vanished each day when he looked in the mirror. He had leprosy. It is thought he was in the earliest stages of the disease, but even so, people were beginning to keep their distance. He was a great and mighty warrior, BUT...

I want you to put yourself in a sentence like that. You can use all the descriptors you’d like. “Meagan is a loyal pastor of almost 18 years, a devoted wife, mother, and grandmother, BUT....” But, she is a sinner. You can put all the descriptors together you’d like about yourself, add up all your achievements and fine qualities, BUT.... Bottom line, you are a sinner – and not

only that, a wretched sinner. A habitual sinner. We don't compare ourselves to the other person and the sin we see in their lives in order to make ourselves feel better. Our model is Jesus. His life is the life we strive to live – and compared to him – we are wretched sinners. So, we can relate to Naaman, can't we? We are sinners in need of a miraculous intervention. We need to be healed and cleansed.

There's so much in this passage we could stop and look at together, but I want to jump right to the part where Naaman and his company of travelers get to the prophet Elisha's house. And Elisha doesn't even come out of the house. He sent a messenger out to give Naaman his instructions. Do you think he was worried about contracting leprosy? I don't think so. I believe that Elisha, as led by the Lord, was doing exactly what Naaman needed him to do in order to get on the road to healing, cleansing, and peace with God.

Naaman was already taken down a peg when he just assumed that he should go directly to the King of Israel with his request for healing – and was denied – was sent on to someone else.

Now, this 'man of God' won't even come out of his house to speak directly to him? He just sends out a messenger telling him to get into the Jordan River and wash 7 times as his path to healing."

But Naaman, who was already worked up, who was already a jumble of emotions (most of them negative), essentially stomped his foot and turned away in anger. "I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me! "Aren't the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than any of the rivers of Israel? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?"

Here's where he got into trouble: He thought. He expected. "I thought he would...". "I expected him to...". He thought and expected things based on his own brokenness, based on his own sinfulness. Instead of opening up his heart and mind to the possibilities – he found himself mad and disappointed. He found himself even more isolated from others – even more isolated than when he 'only' had leprosy.

Sin can do this, folks. The thoughts we allow ourselves to have and hold that are not from God, the expectations we set up as the be all and end all, can separate us and isolate us from one another and from God with or without a quarantine, with or without the prejudices we carry known and unknown.

In my calling as a pastor, I try not to lay my unrealistic expectations on people or situations in order for things to come out the way I want them to come out. I also do that personally as a gift for my family. My expectations, my needs, my hopes, my thoughts for our church and for my family are just that – mine. Mine. And therefore, tainted by my sin. And if all I do is live my life expecting everyone to do what I want them to do, (I mean, don't they know who I am and all I've done), my own healing, my own cleansing from my own very real sin is going to leave a lot of dirt behind, a lot of soap scum behind. Is anyone with me, here?

So God, working through this whole situation, was deliberately taking Naaman down to his knees. "I thought...". "I expected...". Well guess what? This healing that is coming, it is not about you. It is about God. What matters is what God thinks. What matters is what God is doing, regardless of my expectations, in spite of my expectations, far beyond my human expectations.

In this moment, Naaman needed the encouragement and counsel of the people around him to see what was happening. Otherwise, he was leaving. His "my way or the highway" thinking was going to leave him in a very lonely, self-exalted place. But God used the people he had placed around him to help him stop, turn back, and submit. Stop. Turn back. Submit. And the end result? Cleansing and healing inside and out. Is it just a coincidence that his skin was described as being healthy, like the skin of a young child when we're talking about cleansing and healing inside and out? Of course not! John 1:12, "*But to all who believed him (Jesus) and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. "They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human*

passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God." The picture of Naaman gives us a picture of our own healing and cleansing from the blood of Jesus.

I think part of how some of us got into places of darkness during our time apart, was due to the patterns of thinking we fell into, and due to the expectations we set up for getting things back to the way we wanted them to be sooner rather than later. I'm sure that's true for all of us. We allowed the ways of the flesh, meaning the ways of sin, to start to reign and rule and get us off track. Maybe we started out strong reading our Bibles, watching all of the worship and devotional videos we provided for you to keep us connected to each other and to God, but after a time, you just allowed yourself to be so discouraged or disgruntled by what you didn't have that we missed what we did have.

That, I believe, is why this is a solemn assembly today. We know that God is holding us fast, but our thoughts and our expectations are still running wild, are still in need of cleansing and healing. There are things we need to let go, lay down, things we need to submit to God's ways, God's thoughts, and God's perfect plans for us and for our church.

Maybe you thought or you expected we would be coming into this place with singing and shouting and clapping and whatever else you want to add to that list. Hugging! Not happening!

God has called us to come and tear our hearts – meaning – let's get back right with him. I believe that we are starting a season in the life of this congregation and in the life of the Church worldwide that no one saw coming but God. In fact, I believe God not only saw it, but perhaps tried to direct us to it, but we didn't hear. I think perhaps the church became too focused on ourselves and what we wanted from it, instead of focusing on who wasn't here yet. We kept going to the rivers we wanted to go to, and missed the call to the Jordan.

I do not pretend to know what this next season is going to look like moving forward. I don't even know what next Sunday is going to look like until we prayerfully consider whether we have done what God called us to do today.

This is the 14th Sunday since we've been together. This is the 14th of June. The scripture from 2 Kings 5 that describes Naaman's turning point is 2 Kings 5:14, "So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child, and he was healed!"

14, 14, and 14. 14 is double 7 – and in Biblical numerology 7 is the Biblical number of completion, of perfection. The Creation account includes not 6 days, or 8 days, but 7 days. So 14 is emphasized completion and perfection. In the genealogies in the Gospel of Matthew as the New Testament begins, there are 14 generations from Abraham to David, 14 from David to the exile in Babylon, and 14 from the exile to Jesus. Jesus died in the flesh on the 14th day of the first month, making his perfect, completed sacrifice for you and me.

Is there something here in today's 14, 14, and 14? I don't know, but I don't think apart from the Holy Spirit I would even have noticed the pattern. God wants this day to be our turning point as we now put a period at the end of our exile from one another. God wants this day to be our turning point, no matter where you are, that we stop, confess, that we repent, that we lay down our expectations, that we lay down the insistence that our thoughts are maybe not higher than God's thoughts, but are higher than the thoughts of others around us.

On Thursday morning, our census worker for this area, Nicole, called me to ask about using the building for fingerprinting of census employees. As I have been doing the last several weeks, any time I have an interaction with someone with black or brown skin, I'm speaking my heart to them. I said to her that if there was anything I've said or done that was somehow disrespectful of her, I'm sorry. And I opened myself up to her, asking that she help me be better. And her response, "Pastor, it goes both ways. God looks at the heart, and through him, we can see each other's heart."

Let us lay down our pride that insists that our thoughts and our expectations matter more than God's or are somehow more right or valid than someone else's. Let us open up our hearts to one another. Let us open up our hearts, our minds, and our spirits to God so that where we go

from here, is exactly where God is calling us to go to complete his mission of seeking and saving the lost in Jesus' name.

Let us pray: Almighty God, thank you for hearing our prayers, for perfecting them in accordance with your sovereign will. We thank you for this beautiful sanctuary – this place of refuge, this place of prayer, this place of peace that has meant so much to us. Forgive us for taking it for granted, forgive us for walking into this space week after week without really thinking about what we can bring to you in worship, only thinking about what we want to get out of it. Forgive us walking into this space just like we walk into any other space, with a sense of hurry and impatience. Forgive us for unkind words we have spoken in this space, and forgive us for entertaining unclean thoughts instead taking those thoughts captive to Christ. We remember today that those who came before us, with a humble reliance on you, set this space apart. Help us, as we move forward, to set it apart anew too – to honor it with glad and grateful hearts every time we walk through the doors.

We acknowledge you, Jesus, as the Head of this Body. We turn to you now, while there is time. We bring to you our hearts that have been torn by the events of the last months and the last weeks in our country. Our hearts are torn by the disregard we have paid to you in our homes, our communities, our counties, our state, our nation, and in all the world. We know that hiding and pretending that we are just fine is not your plan. We lay down whatever you are calling us to lay down – eagerly – we lay it down for your glory and our good. We know that you desire truth in our inner beings. You desire truth to be spoken and to be lived openly and humbly, with eyes towards shalom – wholeness and healing.

Thank you for always meeting our needs. Thank you for the eternal fruit that we believe is coming as we continue to seek you as individuals and as a church family. Thank you for freeing us up by the cutting and the pruning you have done in our lives. Thank you for sparing those things that you know can be revived for your glory!

Thank you for pouring out your Spirit upon all people – our sons and daughters. Thank you for your promise that our old men will dream dreams and our young men will see visions. Help them to interpret what they see in accordance with your will. Thank you for your restoring power!

Thank you for your protection over us in these last months. Thank you for guarding our hearts as only you can. Thank you for the many things you taught us, even when we were kicking and screaming. Thank you for gathering us in worship online in new ways in these last months. Thank you that in these last weeks we have been able to gather on the outside of this building, and now we thank you for your mercy in bringing some of us inside. Right now, we speak your words of healing, of peace, of refuge protection, and of transforming love over the mind, heart, and soul of every person who is listening online, and who will be sitting in these pews. In the coming weeks, may we all find just those things: healing, peace, a place of security and spiritual refuge, and of transforming love through Jesus Christ the Lord, Amen.

It is Well With My Soul:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.
It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!
It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

And Lord, haste the Day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back like a scroll –
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend –
Even so, it is well with my soul.
It is well with my soul,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Prayers of Intercession

Gary Rebok

Benediction

If you are able to give, there are two slotted boxes in the sanctuary.
Both are on the front pew on either side of the aisle.

You can also go to our website and choose the 'give' option at the top. www.upvpc.org/give/.
Your online offering is secure through Paypal. You can also send your offerings to UPVPC
Treasurer, P.O. Box 128, Spring Run, PA. 17262. Thank you! God loves a cheerful giver! ☺

SMALL GROUPS for ADULTS ARE BEGINNING TO MEET ON THE
CHURCH PROPERTY ONE AT A TIME EITHER OUTSIDE OR IN THE ASSEMBLY ROOM. IF
YOU ARE IN ONE OF THESE GROUPS, OR WANT TO JOIN ONE, PLEASE BRING
YOUR OWN CHAIR IF AT ALL POSSIBLE and YOUR OWN FILLED DRINK CONTAINER
IF YOU PLAN TO GET THIRSTY. ☺ ALL ARE WELCOME!

- Sunday at 9:30 a.m.: Adult David C. Cook Small Group (Cornelious/McClure)
- Sunday at 6 p.m. on ZOOM: Adult Small Group (Cornelious/McClure)
- Monday at 7 p.m.: Adult Small Group (John Boozer/Dee Flood)
- Tuesday at 6:30 p.m.: Adult Small Group (Joni Frey/Nick Parsons)
- Wednesday at 7 p.m.: Youth Group for 6-12 grades (Laurie & Nick Parsons/Rodney Walters/Marissa Flood/Chris Walters)
- Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.: Men's Fellowship (in the back yard or the sanctuary)

SUNDAY, JUNE 21: FATHER'S DAY:

Elder Scott Naugle, Preaching

Services online and in the sanctuary at 8:15 a.m. and 10:30 a.m.