

March 17, 2024

Fifth Sunday in Lent: "Seeds Planted in Gardens of Living Stones!"

FORT COLLINS MENNONITE FELLOWSHIP

300 E. Oak Street, Ft. Collins, CO 80524

Worship: 10:00 AM

Pastor: Steve Ramer

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SEASON OF LENT

Stones come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Some are given great monetary value and some are very useful to sculpt statues or build structures that can stand a thousand years. However, most just lie there, often getting in the way. Yet God calls us to become "living stones!" What does this mean? How can this transformation happen? Who are these living stones in our midst and which ones, yet unearthed, will also spring to life?

1. GATHERING

Musical Prelude: Psalm XIX by Benedetto Marcello (John)

Call to Worship (Based on Psalm 22:23-31)

Leader: You, who try to take God seriously, sing God's praises! All you offspring of Menno here at FCMF, glorify God alone!

People: God does not despise or turn away from the affliction of the afflicted; nor does God run away and hide when I cry out for help.

L: The poor shall eat and be satisfied and those who truly seek God will find their hearts full of praise for the new community that our God creates!

P: All kinds of folk, in every nation and to the ends of the earth, will stop fearing "the other," embrace the stranger, and so truly worship God.

L: Every living thing on the earth will bow down in worship before God and then rise up to become fully alive in their service of God.

ALL: Nothing that we do for God is lost! If we are faithful, future generations will know the truth about God and will know how to serve God.

"Hardship will not automatically make us better. Pain can break us or make us wiser. Suffering can destroy us or make us stronger. Fear can cripple us, or it can make us more courageous. It is resilience that makes the difference." — Eric Greitens

Opening Prayer (based on Psalm 51:1-17)

God, you always show mercy because your love is steady like a boulder! Please forget all my failures and scrub me from head to toe with soap and hot water to wash off the stains. My faults are many and you would be justified in punishing me harshly. But instead, you desire what is true in me and what I hold deep within my heart. Create a heart that is true and fill me with your spirit. Restore my joy and sustain me when I'm weak. God, open my lips so I can sing your praises.

Congregational Singing (Cathy)

Welcome and Passing of the Peace

Leader: May the peace of Christ be with you.

People: And also, with you.

All: Let us offer one another signs of peace, reconciliation, and love.

"Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today." — Thich Nhat Hanh

2. HEARING GOD'S WORD

Scriptures: Mark 5:1-6

So Jesus and his crew came ashore on a sketchy stretch of beach where Gerasenes were the majority (you know, "those kind of people!") And just as Jesus was stepping out from the boat, he was accosted by a man who was clearly out of his mind, either suffering from an untreated mental illness or maybe he was high on drugs, or likely both?

Now this guy had been camping for awhile in the local cemetery. And though he had been committed several times to psych hospitals and had been in and out of rehab numerous times, none of those treatments had been successful.

His addiction was too strong and his thoughts too disordered, so the court had deemed him "un-restorable" and released him on his own recognizance. He also managed to elude the police who had warrants out for him. So, night and day he ran loose among the tombstones and through the streets, cursing at the top of his lungs while also bruising himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus arriving in the distance on a boat, he came running and screaming, but after he bowed down before Jesus, well . . . long story short, he was healed!

SERMON: "Seeds Planted in Gardens of Living Stones!"



Stones can be used to hurt and destroy. But stones can also be gathered together to create gardens where seeds can be planted, plants can be nourished, and where both beauty and the abundant fruits of all our labors can be harvested.

3. RESPONDING TO GOD'S WORD

Congregational Singing (Cathy)

Response

Joys and Concerns

Offering & Music

Sending (based on Matthew 6:11-6, 16-21)

If you practice your piety so others will see it, God will ignore it. If you make a big deal out giving money to the poor, God thinks nothing about that. When you pray, don't be like those hypocrites who love to stand in church and pray loudly; God prefers to sit and talk with you alone. When you fast, don't look sad, like hypocrites, who disfigure their faces and try to look obviously miserable. When you do deny yourself anything to spread God's Kin-dom do it with joy. And above all, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures here on earth, but store up treasures in God's domain. After all, where you keep your treasures, that is where your heart really is."

"Because God gave you your makeup and superintended every moment of your past, including all the hardship, pain, and struggles, He wants to use your words in a unique manner. No one else can speak through your vocal cords, and, equally important, no one else has your story." — R. Swindoll