

**Sunday, May 17, 2020**

**Sixth Sunday of Easter**

Pastor Sue McNicol – Aldersgate UMC

Butte, MT

**Scripture Reading:** Psalm 118: 24-29 – New Revised Standard Version

<sup>24</sup>This is the day that the LORD has made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

<sup>25</sup>Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!

O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!

<sup>26</sup>Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.

We bless you from the house of the LORD.

<sup>27</sup>The LORD is God,

and he has given us light.

Bind the festal procession with branches,

up to the horns of the altar.

<sup>28</sup>You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;

you are my God, I will extol you.

<sup>29</sup>O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,

for his steadfast love endures forever.

**Sermon: *Today I Shall Behave As If...***

Today...let's talk about TODAY! Not what's been happening or what may happen in the future...let's just focus on TODAY! We are all listening to this message because we came to this very place - today. We opened our eyes and stepped into this glorious day – and as the Psalmist tells us, “let's rejoice and be glad.”

Focusing on the here and now is not always easy. It takes effort to set aside other worries and planning. Our to-do lists may need to be shortened and our expectations placed on “pause” for the time being. It seems almost irresponsible or lazy to set aside so much and just be here NOW. Sometimes the best way to be in the present moment is to take a quick inventory. For just an instant I ask that we close our eyes. What do you notice? Take a quick inventory of your mood and your physical being. What is happening in and around you right now?

I quickly notice I am feeling tired, and somewhat fuzzy in the head. My jaw is clenched and my back aches. I'm not feeling as peppy as today's verse suggests – “This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.” How can I possibly relate to all the vim and vigor expressed in these words when my personal being does not feel terribly chipper right now? I suspect many of you may feel much the same. Thankfully, we are reminded the author of Psalm 118, who was likely King David, was not exactly going through the best of times when he penned those words. His situation was rapidly changing, surrounded by the enemy, pushed back and about to fall. (Not unlike our current situation of recent months). He was crying out to God. Yet, in the midst of it all, faith remains. The psalm begins and ends with the same pronouncement, “O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” We are reminded we are not alone. God will be with us through it all – the tough stuff, the worries, the confusion, and the joy!

Grounding ourselves in today may be precisely how we get to the place of experiencing the “rejoicing and gladness” scriptural pronouncement. And thankfully, we are not all in the same physical and emotional state of being, so when one of us may be down, another might be feeling strong and able to lift us for a while. And it's this rigorous honesty that helps us navigate who we are, where we are and what we might have to offer, or in-turn, be willing to receive TODAY.

One of my favorite theologians, Theodor Geisel, otherwise known as Dr. Seuss wrote the following: *“Today I shall behave, as if this is the day I will be remembered.”* What would it be like to imagine today is the day we will be remembered for...for all eternity? Does it change our motivation or make some things not near as worrisome. I personally do not want today to be

only about mopping floors, paying bills, and completing reports. I want to make sure I have connected with friends and family, extended kindness to others and explored ways to express my unique creativity. I want to breathe deeply and go through every moment with my eyes wide open. Suddenly, I find I don't want to waste one moment worrying about what was and what might be...my focus shifts to what is. We have been given THIS DAY. What shall we make of it?

I wonder if the resurrected Jesus was focused on making the most of each day during the forty days of Easter leading up to his Ascension. We read about Jesus' appearance to the believing women on Easter morning (Luke 24:1-12), to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-31), to ten apostles on Easter evening (John 20:19-23), to "Doubting Thomas" (John 20:24-29), and to seven by the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-14). Jesus was reminding them of their time together over the past three years of his ministry and preparing them for their mission. He was also sharing with them how discipleship will unfold after his departure...stressing community, scripture and Holy Communion. He was making the most of the time he had to assure them he loved them. He was living with them in the moment, so that he might live with them eternally. It wouldn't have been a stretch for him to say...*"Today I shall behave, as if this is the day I will be remembered."* Jesus was a pro at creating memorable moments, and lessons, and encounters. He connects us to our moments of awe and appreciation – our deep sense of gratitude and reverence for what God has given us...TODAY!

Are there any bible trivia enthusiasts listening today? If so, there's something a bit unusual about today's scripture reading. Psalm 118 falls at the very center of the bible, depending of course on which version of the bible you are reading. I did not know this bit of trivia when I selected today's reading – honestly, I picked Psalm 118 because I just felt a need for levity and simplicity during a period of intense reorganization. However, coming to the center, coming to a pivotal spot with equal parts of what came before and what is to follow may offer some direction for us whether it was planned or not. We are entering into a period of ministry with such newness we really cannot look back or seek to jump forward. We must focus on the here and now...TODAY. What is the state of our world? And how do we worship God in community while loving all individually and equally? Is it possible to let go of what was... the inclination to

hold tight to statements like “we have always done worship a certain way at Aldersgate” and enter into our current climate with fresh ideas and rituals? Psalm 118 reminds us...God is at the center. God is the focus. We’re invited to rejoice and be glad – and rejoicing may not be through singing a choir anthem or reciting prayers aloud in worship for some time to come – but rejoicing and gladness are still possible. Take a moment today to observe how “rejoicing and gladness” happens for you alone. Does it spring forth in something observed in the stillness of your own heart? Or through the tenderness of another’s glance? Protective masks cover much of our faces...but thank goodness our eyes still have an opportunity to speak volumes. Chuck stated it so eloquently in our Morning Prayer, “Remind us Lord that while doors may reopen our hearts need to reopen as well. Healing needs to continue, and trust needs to begin anew. Our small mustard seeds of faith need grow again into mighty trees.”

Take time today to allow yourself to be raw and real with whatever happens to be the state of your heart. It’s this spirit of vulnerability and honesty which will help us grow as a community of faith, searching for new ways to come together (whether in person or isolation) to love and support one another. While we are living in a time like none other, we also have an opportunity to mold the body of Christ into something like never before. May we unwrap the gift of this day and witness God’s hand in shaping the next. Day-by-day God will guide our ministry. Day-by-day...thanks be to God!