



Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

July 4, 2021

“The Lord is good and does what is right; he shows the proper path to those who go astray. He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way. The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all who keep his covenant and obey his demands. For the honor of your name, O Lord, forgive my many, many sins.”

Psalm 25:8-11 (NLT)

*Call to Worship

You have made all of the peoples of the earth for your glory.

You invite us to serve you in freedom and in praise.

*Give to the people of our nation a zeal for justice
and the strength for patient endurance.*

May we use our freedom in accord with your gracious will.

We ask this on a day of celebration, a day of hope for a nation made free.

We ask this in the name of the one who welcomes all to be free indeed.

*Inspire us to live and worship and serve in your freedom
and for the sake of your kingdom.*

*Praise

“God of the Ages”

UMH 698

*Opening Prayer

To You, O God, we lift up our souls. To You we offer our praise and prayer, our worship and thanksgiving, even our very lives. Make Your ways known to us. In this confusing and often chaotic time, show us the way through the darkness and the danger. Show us the path on which we should walk. Lead us in Your truth and teach us. For You alone are the God who saves, the God in whom we trust; and the One on whom we wait. Amen.

Share How You Can Present Your Offering to God

Make your offering personal...through a donation or an act of service...bring to God an offering of praise and gratitude!

Sing the Doxology Together

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

A Prayer for Our Nation

Lord, as we gather today, we do so in the safe place that freedom provides to worship without fear...whether in our sanctuary or at home. For this we are grateful. We appropriately celebrate this day, our nation's birth. We are humbled to experience the kind of freedom that many around the globe have never tasted.

So, on this day we rejoice in the favor You have graciously given us. We thank You for the blessings of liberty, for this generation and for the generations to come. We thank You for our independence and peace and for all those who have bravely given their lives in the defense of freedom and justice. We thank You that Your gracious hand has given us so much.

As we look at the landscape of our nation, however, some of what we see is troubling. Where we used to be aligned in some ways to principles consistent with Your way, that seems to be less and less the case. Violence and injustice dominate our headlines. Lord, may justice for all people be more than a phrase we utter but a reality we all experience. Show us practical ways we can be an active force for goodness in our nation and our own community.

On this day we, the church, commit ourselves to wholeheartedly honoring and serving You. With everything that we are, we lay our lives before You. Make us a generous people, a gracious remnant, a community of love and joy that demonstrates your Kingdom life. May our church be a light in this confusing world. We commit ourselves to become a vibrant pocket of grace—a settlement of grace—shining with Your love in tangible and life-lifting ways for the broken and hurting.

*And so, as we celebrate our independence, we do not presume Your grace for our country. Our land is in need of You, our leaders are in need of You, our people are in need of You, **we** are in need of You. Have mercy on us all. May we look only to You this Independence Day, humbly dependent on You. **Amen.***

The Lord's Prayer

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

God's Word

Psalm 25 (NLT)

The Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!

Message

"The Battle Between Good and Evil"

Pastor Clark

See Message Below

*Hymn of Faith

"Freely, Freely"

UMH 389

The Lord's Supper

Blessing

Hebrews 13:20-21 (NLT)

May the God of peace—who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, and ratified an eternal covenant with his blood—may he equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him. All glory to him forever and ever! Amen.



God of the Ages

1. *God of the ages, whose almighty hand
leads forth in beauty all the starry band
of shining worlds in splendor through the skies,
our grateful songs before thy throne arise.*

2. *Thy love divine hath led us in the past;
in this free land with thee our lot is cast;
be thou our ruler, guardian, guide, and stay,
thy Word our law, thy paths our chosen way.*

3. *From war's alarms, from deadly pestilence,
be thy strong arm our ever sure defense;
thy true religion in our hearts increase;
thy bounteous goodness nourish us in peace.*

4. *Refresh thy people on their toilsome way;
lead us from night to never-ending day;
fill all our lives with love and grace divine,
and glory, laud, and praise be ever thine.*

Freely, Freely

*God forgave my sin in Jesus' name.
I've been born again in Jesus' name
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share his love as he told me to.*

*He said 'Freely, freely you have received;; freely, freely give.
Go in my name, and because you believe others will know that I live.*

*All pow'r is giv'n in Jesus' name
In earth and heav'n in jesus name
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share his pow'r as he told me to.*

*He said 'Freely, freely you have received;; freely, freely give.
Go in my name, and because you believe others will know that I live.*

A Service of Home Communion

Greeting

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

Call to Worship

God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Lord's Prayer

Let us pray together as Jesus taught us 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 our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

Lifeline of Scripture

Hear these portions of scripture: Jesus invites us: *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls."* **Matthew 11:28-29**

Jesus declares: *"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me and anyone who comes to me, I will never drive away."* **John 6:35, 37**

Invitation to the Lord's Supper

We invite you now to spiritually unite with all the members of Faith and Hope United Methodist Churches, and partake of the Lord's Supper.

According to Luke, when our risen Lord was at table with his disciples, he took bread and blessed it and broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

Sharing the Bread This is the body of Christ, the bread of life—given for you. Amen.

Sharing the Cup This is the blood of Christ, the cup of salvation—shed for you. Amen.

Prayer after Communion Let us pray: *"We thank you, O God, that through Word and Sacrament you have given us your Son, who is the true bread from heaven and food of eternal life. We lift up to you, this day, these joys and concerns of our hearts: So strengthen us in your service that our daily living may show our thanks, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*

Parting Blessing May the Lord bless and keep you. Amen.

Psalm 25 A psalm of David.

¹ O Lord, I give my life to you.

² I trust in you, my God!

Do not let me be disgraced,
or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat.

³ No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced,
but disgrace comes to those who try to deceive others.

⁴ Show me the right path, O Lord;
point out the road for me to follow.

⁵ Lead me by your truth and teach me,
for you are the God who saves me.
All day long I put my hope in you.

⁶ Remember, O Lord, your compassion and unfailing love,
which you have shown from long ages past.

⁷ Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth.
Remember me in the light of your unfailing love,
for you are merciful, O Lord.

⁸ The Lord is good and does what is right;
he shows the proper path to those who go astray.

⁹ He leads the humble in doing right,
teaching them his way.

¹⁰ The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness
all who keep his covenant and obey his demands.

¹¹ For the honor of your name, O Lord,
forgive my many, many sins.

¹² Who are those who fear the Lord?
He will show them the path they should choose.

¹³ They will live in prosperity,
and their children will inherit the land.

¹⁴ The Lord is a friend to those who fear him.
He teaches them his covenant.

¹⁵ My eyes are always on the Lord,
for he rescues me from the traps of my enemies.

- ¹⁶ Turn to me and have mercy,
for I am alone and in deep distress.
- ¹⁷ My problems go from bad to worse.
Oh, save me from them all!
- ¹⁸ Feel my pain and see my trouble.
Forgive all my sins.
- ¹⁹ See how many enemies I have
and how viciously they hate me!
- ²⁰ Protect me! Rescue my life from them!
Do not let me be disgraced, for in you I take refuge.
- ²¹ May integrity and honesty protect me,
for I put my hope in you.
- ²² O God, ransom Israel
from all its troubles.

“The Battle Between Good and Evil”

Psalm 25

Introduction

Ripped from the headlines this week: Developers of the doomed **Surfside, Florida tower** that collapsed were suspected of shady dealings and cutting corners in a quest for more profits. These developers paid off two town council members to get preferential treatment for the building permit while other similar projects were stymied in endless delays. Their self-interest put the safety of hundreds in jeopardy! Choices that perhaps didn't appear to be so dangerous at the time, are now seen to be deadly...costing over 160 lives! Evil in real life!

“There is a spiritual war in progress, an all-out moral battle. There is evil and cruelty, unhappiness and illness. There is superstition and ignorance, brutality and pain. God is in continuous and energetic battle against all of it. God is for life and against death. God is for love and against hate. God is for hope and against despair. God is for heaven and against hell. There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square of space is contested.” -Eugene Peterson

It doesn't take a sleuth to uncover the presence of evil in our day. It appears to me that we are living in an era of greater unrestrained evil than ever before. Yes, I know that evil existed in every era. For instance, I am sure that evil seemed ominous as ever when Hitler was marching across Europe with savage disregard for human life spawning concentration camps to eradicate a whole race of Jews. Even so, there is a tsunami of evidence that suggest evil is running rampant now.

- The scourge of **human trafficking**, and especially child sex-trafficking, that destroys far more lives than Hilter's holocaust ever did
- **Colossal corruption** in every nation on the globe
- The **pandemic of drug addiction** that knows no boundaries between race or social status destroying far more lives than the coronavirus
- **Gun violence** that claims countless lives
- The **decadent dark web** that reveals the unspeakable evils humans will inflict upon one another for a profit or for pure evil itself.

Now, thanks to Paramount Studios, we even have a new network blockbuster entitled **Evil**, which by the way, blatantly mocks Genesis 3 with its promotional imagery.

On the other hand, I quickly and strongly want to declare: If there is something in our world that opposes the will of God, **there is surely goodness in our world that supports the will of God and asserts itself unceasingly**. No matter how great the evil, no matter how deeply it seems to be entrenched, no matter how arrogantly evil asserts itself, the will of God will prevail. God and the powers of goodness will win the war. We will spend the rest of July and into August exploring the

astounding power of goodness. So, while we name the context of goodness's battle against evil in today's message, we will devote ample time looking at how God intends to use goodness to overcome evil and how we can be a dynamic part of that strategic advance.

But why focus on evil when starting a series on goodness? Why not just bypass that depressing stuff? Here's why: as Paul David Tripp says, *"we will never understand and celebrate the magnitude of God's transforming grace until we understand the deep damage that evil and the sin it spawns does to the human heart!"* We will never understand the goodness part of this battle until we come to terms with the evil part of the battle.

Here's what sin does to the human heart: Sin is so pervasive that it influences everything we do and everything we say. Sin causes us to think, desire, choose, say, and do things completely opposite of the way things were created to function. Sin causes us to place ourselves at the center of our universe. Sin causes us to be obsessed with what we feel, what we want, and what we think we need. We set up our own little kingdom of one and then co-opt the people around us into the service our kingdom purposes. And when they refuse, we get angry in response or even rage against them.

I selected this Psalm because the writer instinctively grasps that while others are indeed making life challenging to him, he knows instinctively that he too is part of the problem. He knows that he too is in need of God's mercy and forgiveness and pleads with God for it.

On this Independence Sunday, when we celebrate our nation and our freedom in this 240-year plus experiment in democracy, we would do well to take our cue from this Psalmist. As this Psalm indicates, we too have enemies who will our defeat. We too have enemies who make our lives challenging. On a national scale, it would be easy to make them the scapegoats for all our problems. We could blame the radical Islamists in Iran and their new leader Ebrahim Raisi, North Korea and the unhinged Kim Jong-Un, Russians and their leader Vladimir Putin, and any number of other tyrants. Or on a more personal level, we could blame those who seem to impede our own will and way. If we did so, we miss the place where we should start.

The Psalmist shows us another pathway through the wilderness of sin and evil. It is a pathway that helps us make sense of the battle between good and evil.

#1 The pathway begins when we turn in trust to God (1-3)

"O Lord, I give my life to you. I trust in you, my God! Do not let me be disgraced, or let my enemies rejoice in my defeat. No one who trusts in you will ever be disgraced, but disgrace comes to those who try to deceive others."

We humans don't instinctively turn to God in trust. We are prone to insist on doing life our way. We don't want any help—a refrain I am confident we exhibit from our earliest years! In our self-oriented

hearts, we don't want God's intrusion into our life's choices and decisions. We believe we can handle it all by ourselves. Then we discover—usually the hard way—that doesn't go very well. We find ourselves in a hot mess of sticky situations. We find ourselves in situations we cannot get ourselves out of on our own. We need help from beyond ourselves.

The Psalmist demonstrates how contending with evil in our lives gets started: turning to trust in God. The Psalmist reminds us that no one who trusts in God will ever be disgraced. So in response, this Psalmist trusts so deeply, he or she gives his life to God. Trust ultimately leads to that kind of surrender of our will to rule our lives and gives it over to the only One who can lead us on the sure path through the evil of real life.

Have you ever turned your heart toward God in trust?

#2 Pray, Lord, guide me on the right path (4-6)

"Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you. Remember, O Lord, your compassion and unfailing love, which you have shown from long ages past."

In this battle we need a Guide. We need someone to show us the way through the jungle a world perilously sliding toward chaos.

The Lord is that Guide.

E. STANLEY JONES tells of a missionary who got lost in the jungle. Looking around, he saw nothing but bush. Finally, he came across a village and asked one of the natives if he could lead him back to the mission station. The man agreed. 'Thank you,' said the missionary, 'Which way do I go?' The native replied, 'Just walk.' And so they did, hacking their way through the jungle for the next several hours. Stopping to rest, the missionary looked around again and had that same overwhelming sense of being lost. 'Are you sure this is the way?' he asked his native guide, 'I don't see a path.' **The guide replied, 'In this jungle there is no path. I am the path!'**

In the chaos and confusion of our ever-changing, ever-churning world, we need a Guide who is the path Himself...Someone who can make a way where there seems to be no way.

Where do you need the Guide for your path?

#3 Plea for mercy and forgiveness (7-11)

*Do not remember the rebellious sins of my youth. Remember me in the light of your unfailing love, for you are merciful, O Lord. The Lord is good and does what is right; he shows the proper path to those who go astray. He leads the humble in doing right, teaching them his way. The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all who keep his covenant and obey his demands. **For the honor of your name, O Lord, forgive my many, many sins.**"*

Evil is so widespread. So where do we start in this epic battle of good against evil? Well, I am more and more convinced of what Alexandr Solzhenitsyn once wrote:

“Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line dividing good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart.”

The dividing line between good and evil goes through every human heart! Including yours and mine!

Soberingly, we must face the fact that we have a part in the story of evil. Ever since Genesis 3, our hearts have been bent towards sin. We have a prone-ness to sin that leads us to be one of the places evil passes through. We desperately need God’s mercy and cleansing. That’s where this Psalm points us to Jesus who promised us the truest freedom of all—the freedom from sin. Paul shares this in Galatians 3:

“But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God’s promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.” Galatians 3:22 (NLT)

A young man named Steve led a retreat for a group called ***Christians in the Air***, a Christian organization for airline personnel. During the final session of the retreat, he conducted an informal communion service. The chairs in the room formed a large circle, and the Communion table stood in the center. As songs were sung, those present came to the table to receive the bread and the cup. A strong sense of God’s presence filled the room.

As the service continued, Steve felt impressed to pray for a woman seated opposite him on the other side of the circle. Her refined, classic appearance and impeccable makeup and clothing made her stand out from the others. As he asked the Holy Spirit to guide him in praying for her, a Scripture verse came to his mind: *“How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from the dead works to worship the living God.”* (Hebrews 9:14)

Although Steve didn’t know why, he began to intercede for the woman along the implications of that verse asking that whatever was troubling her would be lifted off her. He prayed the blood of Christ to come and free her. Suddenly, much to his surprise, the woman literally fell from her chair onto the floor and began sobbing uncontrollably. Some friends knelt by her to comfort her. Not feeling prompted to join them, he stayed seated and prayed for her. Eventually the woman got up from the floor and sat back down. She seemed relieved but dazed.

Soon afterward, the service ended. The retreat was over, and everyone quickly packed up and headed home. Since Steve’s plane wasn’t scheduled to leave until the next morning, he went to spend the night with the couple who had organized the retreat.

About ten o'clock that night, as Steve and the couple relaxed together in their home, they heard a knock at the door. It was the woman Steve had prayed for at the retreat. When he first saw her, Steve immediately knew that something was different about her appearance, but couldn't determine what it was. After she came in and sat down, she said to Steve, "I apologize for coming here so late like this, but I just had to tell you what the Lord did for me during the Communion service.

Before I committed myself to Christ a couple of years ago, I lived a very promiscuous life. As I sat there this afternoon, I began thinking about all the different men I had been with. My life was so messed up. And it was all rooted in my terrible shame. Because of what happened to me when I was little, I felt utterly worthless and no good. I was ashamed to let anyone know who I really was—they would reject me if I did. Yet I needed their approval so desperately, especially the approval of men. I would do anything to get it. As a result, my whole life centered around my appearance. How people saw me, being attractive to men—those things meant everything to me and dominated my life.

After I came to know Christ a couple of years ago, I quit being promiscuous. But the guilt for the things I'd done and the shame about myself were still there. So was the overwhelming need for approval. I wasn't free from all that, but I desperately wanted to be. During the Communion service, I pleaded with the Lord to come and do something for me.

Then she paused and looked sheepishly at Steve, "I don't know what you'll think of this, but while I was praying, I looked over at the corner of the room. There, suspended just below the ceiling, I saw this reddish cloud." She hesitated, "It looked like a **great big drop of blood!** I'm sure no one else saw it, but I did. As I stared at it, it slowly began to move toward me until it was hovering over me. And then it seemed to burst and came flooding down upon me! That's when I fell onto the floor crying. And I know it's strange, but I just had to tell you. While I was lying there Jesus came and washed me in his blood. He cleansed me. He freed me. And now my terrible sense of guilt and shame is gone!"

At that point, it finally dawned on Steve what was different about the woman. She didn't have on any makeup. Not that there's anything wrong with wearing makeup. But by not wearing it that night, she made a bold statement, witnessing to what Christ through his blood had done in her life. She no longer felt ashamed; she had nothing to hide. She could stand before God and others with confident boldness. Set free by His blood, her shame was gone. She was free! Her identity as a beloved daughter of God were sealed in her heart and mind. Because of Christ's dramatic work in her life that day, she could begin the journey toward healing and wholeness.

Is there something in your life that needs to be brought to the Cross of Christ to experience the cleansing blood of Christ?

Conclusion

When we pray the Lord's Prayer as we did already today, we pray this: *"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."* As much as we might like to think otherwise, or even ignore it altogether, we live in a world where there is a battle between good and evil. It is a battle that rages all around us and even within us.

As in this touching story, evil wounds our lives too. Evil imprisons us in the chains of sin and shame. But, we have a Guide through the wilderness jungle; we have a **Savior who willingly offered His body to be broken and shed His blood so we could be set free**...so we could be cleansed and made new.

Move to communion...