

**Zion Lutheran Church, Harrisburg, PA /November 1, 2023**

**WOW (Worship On Wednesday) – FALL SERIES - 12:10pm Service of Holy Communion**

**“KNEELING WITH GIANTS – Learning to Pray with History’s Best Teachers”**

*Based on the book of the same name by Gary Neal Hansen*

**Praying with The Cloud of Unknowing: Contemplation in the Dark**

**Welcome & Announcements**

**Opening Versicles**

L O Lord, open my lips.

C **and my mouth shall declare Your praise.**

**Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.**

**Confession and Forgiveness**

L Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

*Silence for self-examination*

C **I confess to God Almighty, before the whole company of heaven and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned in thought, word, and deed; wherefore I pray to God Almighty to have mercy on me, forgive me all my sins, and bring me to everlasting life. Amen.**

L The almighty and merciful Lord grant you pardon, forgiveness, and remission of all your sins. Amen.

**Prayer**

L The Lord be with you,

C **And also with you.**

L Let us pray: Heavenly Father, in whom we live and move and have our being: We humbly pray you so to guide and govern us by your Holy Spirit, that in all the cares and occupations of our life we may never forget you, but remember that we are ever walking in your sight; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C **Amen.**

**Scripture Readings:**

**Exodus 24:12-18**

<sup>12</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and wait there, that I may give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” <sup>13</sup> So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain

of God. <sup>14</sup> And he said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them."

<sup>15</sup> Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. <sup>16</sup> The glory of the LORD dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. <sup>17</sup> Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. <sup>18</sup> Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

### **Luke 10:38-42**

<sup>38</sup> Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. <sup>39</sup> And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. <sup>40</sup> But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." <sup>41</sup> But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, <sup>42</sup> but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

L The Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

### **Readings from *The Cloud of Unknowing***

Lift up your heart to God with a humble impulse of love; and have him as your aim, not any of his goods. Take care that you avoid thinking of anything but himself, so that there is nothing for your reason or your will to work on, except himself. Do all that in you lies to forget all the creatures that God ever made, and their works, so that neither your thought nor your desire be directed or extended to any of them, neither in general or in particular. Let them alone and pay no attention to them. ...

As long as a man lives in this mortal flesh, he will always see and feel this thick cloud of unknowing between himself and God. And not only that, but it is one of the painful results of original sin that he will always see and feel that some of the many creatures that God made, or some of their works, will always be inserting themselves in his awareness, between himself and God. ...

The work consists in treading down the awareness of all the creatures that God ever made, and keeping them in the cloud of forgetting, as we mentioned before. Here is all the labour, for this, with the help of grace, is man's work. And the other beyond this, the impulse of love, this is the work of God alone. So press on with your own work, and he, I promise you, will certainly not fail in his.

## Homily

### The Prayers

L Show us your mercy, O Lord,

**C and grant us your salvation.**

L Clothe your ministers with righteousness.

**C Let your people sing with joy.**

L Give peace, O Lord, in all the world,

**C for only in you can we live in safety.**

L Lord, keep this nation under your care.

**C and guide us in the way of justice and truth.**

L Let your way be known upon the earth;

**C your saving health among all nations.**

L Let not the needy, O Lord, be forgotten,

**C nor the hope of the poor be taken away.**

L Create in us clean hearts, O God,

**C and sustain us with your Holy Spirit.**

L *Additional petitions offered...*

Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **C Amen.**

### Great Thanksgiving

L: The Lord be with you.

**C: And also with you.**

L: Lift up your hearts.

**C: We lift them to the Lord.**

L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**C: It is right to give him thanks and praise.**

L In the night

in which he was betrayed

our Lord Jesus took bread,

and gave thanks; broke it,

and gave it to his disciples,

saying: Take and eat;

this is my body, given for you.

Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper,

he took the cup, gave thanks,

and gave it for all to drink,

saying: This cup is  
the new covenant in my blood,  
which is shed for you and for all people  
for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

L Lord, remember us in your kingdom and reach us to pray:

**C 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 and ever. Amen.**

L This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Blessed are they who are called to his supper.

### **The Communion**

*All baptized persons who believe in the Real Presence of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine are welcome to the Table of the Lord. Please take an empty cup to receive wine or a pre-filled cup with grape juice.*

*For those fasting from the sacrament, you are invited to pray the following prayer,  
The Spiritual Communion:*

My Jesus, I believe that You are present in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

I love You above all things,

and I desire to receive You into my soul.

Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,

come at least spiritually into my heart.

I embrace You as if you were already there,

and I unite myself wholly to You.

Never permit me to be separated from You.

*(Saint Alphonsus Liguori)*

### **Post-Communion Blessing**

L The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in His grace.

**C Amen.**

### **Post-Communion Prayer**

L Let us pray: Pour out upon us the spirit of your love, O Lord, and unite the wills of those whom you have fed with one heavenly food; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **C Amen.**

## **Benediction**

L Let us bless the Lord.

**C Thanks be to God.**

L The Lord almighty bless us and direct our days and our deeds in his peace.

**C Amen.**

### **Additional Teaching on *Praying with The Cloud of Unknowing: Contemplation in the Dark From Kneeling with Giants by Gary Neal Hansen***

The method of prayer taught in the anonymous medieval book *The Cloud of Unknowing* is simple: focus your attention on God. That's it.

Did it go by too quickly? Here it comes again: Turn directly toward God – turn your mind, your will, your soul – in an outpouring of love. The keep your focus there, every moment, day after day, always. According to the author, when you do that you see nothing, feel nothing and really know nothing. It's like climbing a mountain, way up into the fog, and losing your bearings.

Rather than sensing the presence of God, in prayer we enter a "cloud of unknowing" and stay there. As with many "simple" things, it is exceptionally difficult to do.

When people hear they are to pray without senses or emotions or words or ideas, they often have trouble figuring out what they are actually supposed to do. Imagining this as their prayer life for the rest of their days can be daunting. Then when they try it out, the typical response is, "I just don't see how doing this is actually prayer." ...

Personally, I find the *Cloud's* approach extremely comforting. I do not think I am alone in feeling inferior when people start to talk about their marvelous experiences in prayer: they sensed God's presence or heard God's voice or were overcome by feelings of love. The rest of us cringe and think, *I guess I really am no good at prayer after all.* ... To all who pray and feel absolutely nothing, *The Cloud of Unknowing* says, "That is good. That is a sign that you really are in the presence of God." We know God is there *because* we feel nothing. If we feel something we know for sure that it is *something* in creation – not the direct, unmediated presence of God. ...

Question: How am I supposed to quiet my mind so that I can give God my full attention?

Answer: Actually, the process is exactly the opposite. You can't quiet your mind first. You turn your attention toward God, and then as any kind of thought creeps in, you gently set it aside, under the "cloud of forgetting."

*From an Anonymous Source (and often cited as Martin Luther, which cannot be confirmed)*

"For feelings come and feelings go, and feelings are deceiving;

My warrant is the Word of God, Nought else is worth believing.

Though all my heart should feel condemned, For want of some sweet token,

There is One greater than my heart, Whose Word cannot be broken.

I'll trust in God's unchanging Word, 'till soul and body sever;

For though all things shall pass away, His Word shall stand forever."