

**BROADWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH • COLUMBIA, MISSOURI**  
**THE WORSHIP OF GOD • JUNE 21, 2020**  
***“BRAVING THE WILDERNESS”***

**The Psalm Litany**  
**Based on Psalm 29**

*Bravo, God, bravo! Heaven and earth shout, “Encore!”*  
*We stand in awe before your visible power.*  
**God of Grace, we call out, “Glory!”**

*God thunders across the waters, brilliant face streaming; brightness.*  
*We stand in awe before your visible power.*  
**God of Grace, we call out, “Glory!”**

*God’s thunder spits fire. When God thunders, even the wilderness quakes;*  
*God wakes all, the desert shakes, and the oak trees whirl.*  
*We stand in awe before your wild dance.*  
**God of Grace, we call out, “Glory!”**

**Song of Focus**  
***If It’s of God***  
**Words and Music by Ed Varnum**

1. If it is true, if it is just, if it reaches out to others and is not just for us,  
and lifts folks up and sets them free,  
and brings down walls so we know we are one family;

*Refrain*

If it’s of God, then let’s be bold,  
giving hope to the downtrodden, black and white, both young and old.  
Announce Good News of God’s redeemed!  
Let Justice roll like waters, righteousness like a mighty stream!  
If it’s of God!

2. Be brave, oh Church!! Serve without pause!  
Stand tall and give God glory, moving forward in God’s cause.  
You’re not alone! Our God is here!  
So, live your life for others, serving boldly without fear.

*Refrain*

If it’s of God, then let’s be bold,  
giving hope to the downtrodden, black and white, both young and old.  
Announce Good News of God’s redeemed!  
Let Justice roll like waters, righteousness like a mighty stream!

If it's of God!

*Bridge*

Holy Spirit descend upon us, anoint us in your work,  
proclaiming Good News to the poor to set them free.  
Empower us to love and serve in the joy of Jesus Christ.  
Lord, open up the eyes of all that they may see.

*Refrain*

That it's of God! And we'll be bold!  
Giving hope to the downtrodden, black and white, both young and old.  
On earth below as heaven above,  
with everything we do or say ruled by the God of love.  
Yes, it's of God! Yes, it's of God! Yes, it's of God!

**The Scripture**  
**Acts 5:19-20; 33-39**

*But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life."*

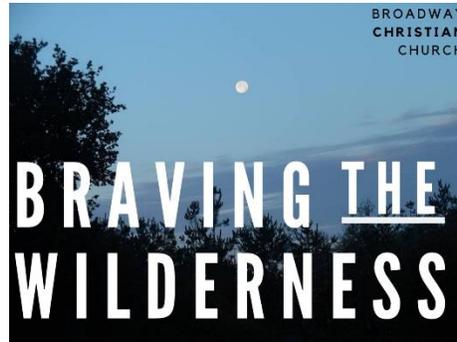
*When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. Then he said to them, "Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared. After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them—in that case you may even be found fighting against God!" They were convinced by him...*

**The Message**  
***Braving the Wilderness: Iffy***  
***(The Mockingbird)***  
**Terry Overfelt**

Synopsis: The success of the message brought about growth but also opposition. Yet, even jail bars couldn't stop the spread of the Gospel. As jail's gates flung open, the disciples kept on keeping on. While some Sadducees were ready to give them the death penalty, more level-headed voices advised, "*Wait and see.*" Many movements

launched quickly and folded just the same. Did the Jesus movement have staying power? Does it still?

*“If this program or this work is merely human, it will fall apart, but if it is of God, there is nothing you can do about it – and you better not be found fighting against God!” – (Acts 5:39 MSG)*



Our sacred ground here at Broadway is 19 beautiful acres. Twenty acres is the size of the territory defended by any single or pair of northern mockingbirds. Have you heard the pair that live here? Once “you have ears to hear and eyes to see,” they will not go unnoticed.

One who comes regularly to meditate here regrets that I introduced her to them. Because now, she notices; they never stop singing. Showing off’ that’s what they do, even so boldly as to take the occasional swooping bow, spreading their wings and tail feathers as if to flash a spotlight with their white spotting and underwing stripes.

Whether a single or a pair, they will sing their songs to attract a mate, to establish and defend their territory, and the single males sing longest into the moonlit nights. You can catch a glimpse of them on the top sprig of the Bush and Pauline Walden pine where our main entrance divides, or up on the wires of the parking lot poles or following us to the outdoor worship space. They can’t keep from singing.

They have lifted my spirits on many days; during fresh air, mask-free lunches, joining in the bluegrass song recording, personal distanced meetings on the outdoor benches, and most recently, as we worship here on Sundays. Enjoyment of them has become a

noticed gift of the quarantine.

Do you have some of those? Have you been invited to listen to the mockingbird?

Mockingbirds have a song of their own. But they have a repertoire of songs they mimic of other area birds, animals, insects, and even machinery like camera shutters or car alarms.

When they begin their concert, each song is sung between two and six times before moving to the next. In their urban eight-year lifespan, they might come back annually with new songs numbering to 200. At the end of a performance, they take a swooping bow. Like any good performer, I get the feeling it is a nod of mutual respect. It is said that Beethoven mimicked an indigenous German bird who sang four notes into a fifth. (whistle...da da da dum...)

Mimicking is not just for the birds. My father would sing back to the cardinals, squirrels, dogs, cats, frogs. this apple didn't fall far. Happy Father's Day, Dad. Thank you for teaching and loving us in our biological gifting and those of choice and beautiful promptings.

To each one who has taught us by imitation for better or worse in the world, hear our celebration of you in this day.

One dawning walk shortly after my father's death had me noticing a mockingbird on the high wire. He was singing and was interrupted by a deep croaking frog, whose song the bird then repeated.

I was in awe and deeply touched by this reach of what I perceived as the spirit of my father permitted to pass through the veil. Then I scolded him for being so obvious. "You're going to get in trouble with God." I chided, "How am I supposed to have faith in things unseen? Unheard?" My dad was often beyond the rules. Creative, confident people repeatedly think themselves so.

In today's Scripture, Peter and the Apostles were imitating Jesus, and they, too, acted beyond the rules.

Ephesians 5: *Be imitators of God, as beloved children and walk in love just as Christ also loved.*

The disciples had been forbidden by law to teach in Jesus' name. They were filling Jerusalem and beyond with his song and thousands were flocking to them to receive and witness physical and spiritual healing by the power of the Holy Spirit. Remember the reach for Peter's shadow. The disciples were *detained in custody* (Acts 4) The temple police didn't dare lay a hand on them for fear of starting a riot.

Like the mockingbird singing the beloved song of another, they could not keep silent. They sang out BOLDLY in witness to the words and deeds of Jesus, jeopardizing their lives, just as it had cost Jesus his. They were the messages of (chirping) welcoming the stranger, turning the other cheek, caring for the poor, neighboring, loving God, remember, remember! But the piece that really riled the authorities was they were now calling him Savior and Messiah. who sits at the right hand of the One True God. What is the polytheistic Greco-Romans to do with this? How about the Israelites whose God just raised Jesus up; right hand man?!

I think Peter was shrewd: Giving responsibility for his death to Jews, Gentiles, priests, Roman authorities, and citizens alike ...made everyone guilty and in need of a Savior. Peter says this to them five times. He makes it perfectly clear that they were the ones who crucified (2:36, 4:3, 4:10), killed (2:23, 3:15), and hanged (5:30), Jesus.

Maybe his emphatic accusations processed the guilt of his own thrice repeated denial. He boldly countered with the beauty that repentance and forgiveness of sins was the message offered to all by the power of the Holy Spirit, to all, by divine and human partnership just for the asking of Jesus.

Not one of these groups could see how they would survive if admittedly responsible for killing the Savior and Messiah. None of them wanted to face the truth of their culpability even in their complicity by action or inaction.

We know how this feels – weighing in on today's pointing to the *fault vault* of transgressions: viral, economic, cultural, and racial. Lots of us are attaching even our pre-corona frustrations to the campaign for the need to change.

We are at the intersection of Broader Way and Providence in overheated cars and jammed traffic. I can't breathe... I've had it up to here (!) with face mask shaming. Our tolerances are worn down by the frustrations and exhaustion of what is continually colliding. Every vehicle is carrying a person or persons with legitimate assaults. I want to deny added guilt, but I discovered my conviction of diplomatic silence. I did not even realize that is a thing, let alone my personal sin.

And there, flying over the stay-in-your-lane intersection is the mockingbird, mocking the car alarm and the goose honk and spreading the white banded wings of the Holy Spirit. We look up to see.

There was so much at stake there in Jerusalem. The answer from the Court was to demand that these disciples stop talking and mimicking the life of Jesus. Stop the gatherings, the accusations, the healing in his name. Come down off your perch. But they could not; courage and sacred conviction gathered them in the outdoor

worship and kept adding verses.

So, the authorities arrested them and put them in public jail. Charges pending.

— Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*:  
“If you're for the right thing, you do it without thinking.”

Very little comment is made about what happened next. How they got free was eclipsed by what happened afterward. Sometimes, we miss the awe for the “to do” list.

In the night, an angel opened their prison doors and brought them out saying, “Go stand in the temple and tell the people the whole story of this life.” The police had an eyewitness to tell them of their whereabouts. They went to the temple and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people.

The court's not-so-holies were enraged. They wanted to kill them. (5:23) They were mocking with the cry of the carrion eating vultures. Enter Gamaliel, a teacher respected by all. Have you been in a room where the energy shifted with an amazing mentor's input?

Gamaliel put the disciples in time out. Then he turned to have a word with the court system.

“Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men.” Remember Theudas? He declared himself a prophet and led 400 to the Jordan and called for it to part; ala the Red Sea. He proclaimed that he was the one to bring freedom from Roman oppression. He was executed and his gaggle dispersed. Before him there was Judas of Galilee who likewise led a revolt against the Romans, and they destroyed him too. His flock disappeared. The mob mentality was probably circling with a, “Hello, Yes! Take Peter out, and we'll be done with this.”

But Gamaliel was referring to the death of Jesus and these followers who were adding to their numbers by the thousands. Then he poses the thought to consider, for all of us to consider. “So,” says Gamaliel, “*In the present case, leave these (disciples of Jesus) alone.*”

*Because **if** this plan is of human origin, it will fail. **If** it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them, and in that case, you may even be found fighting against God!”*

They were convinced by him. (Acts 5:38-39)

Right person, right time, right song. If becomes iffy...In the wilderness of questionable courage and divine intention.

The Holy Spirit emboldens us to stand **as if** God is for us and none can be against us! Prison break angels show up. Isn't it interesting that the disciples, suddenly and miraculously freed, didn't run and hide? The angel said, "Go stand! "The shackle-breaking power will return in Acts 16. Paul and Silas will be perched on the bars at midnight, singing with earth-quaking timbre, trying to attract the bride of Christ. And again, the prisoners will be set free.

As followers of Christ, even seekers of him, the Jesus song will resonate down in our bones.

Brenae Brown, author of *Braving the Wilderness*; the motivating chorus for our series here, says, "I've never doubted the power of music as the most powerful form of collective joy." (p. 131)

Pastor Mark asked us in staff this week what song has held meaning for us during the pandemic. One said the songs from her girlhood, another a hymn of justice. For me, one is the Thomas Rhett song we just sang: "*Be a Light*." These virulent times set us up for having enough with assistance that began to roll down as we cared for one another under a common threat. Can we imitate the song of reform in a joyous chorus of repentance and forgiveness as the antivirus to the dissonance of hate? Please! It is the only song that will have us building nests for the next season of fledgling hope.

Listen for, learn, and sing the song of someone else. Once "you have ears to hear and eyes to see," they will not go unnoticed. Join the mockingbird, who sings the beauty of others, of Jesus and celebrates their voices by joining in their songs and repeating them.

### **The Benediction**

I saw a peaceful protest sign that offered this turn on the Serenity Prayer of St. Francis. I leave it for us, as we go in courage and conviction, by the power of the Holy Spirit within us, to know and act as imitators of Christ.

"God grant us the serenity to accept the things I cannot change and the courage to change the things I cannot accept."

Go boldly in peace. Amen.