

BEING CHURCH



3. Discovering Traditions



10 MAY, 2020

Please click on text in **RED** to listen to music or sing along.

When finished, close and return to this page.

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Shall our lives be run by numbers and statistics, or by the real people we know and meet? Will we let "the shadow of death" cloak us with dread, or shall we look at the growing light at the end of the tunnel as our hope and salvation? The world around us speaks a different language, but our God, the Lord and Master of our lives, calls us into His presence to speak His language, the language of praise!

While we celebrate VE Day, the rest of the world is celebrating Mother's Day, but we are ahead of the world having celebrated it 2 months ago! In some countries elaborate preparations are made to take "Mother" out for lunch; in other countries, equally elaborate preparations are made by children to treat "Mother" to a home cooked meal. Different traditions, but each rich in expressions of love.

Now hear God's voice welcoming us into His presence. **LISTEN** to **THIS** music. Focus your thoughts on our incredible God, who planned for His Son to defeat death, by first entering it and being consumed by it. Such is the vastness of God's love! All He wants is for us to be with Him, in eternity, for eternity!

"Welcome to Worship"! You are not alone! Join family, friends and people you have not yet met. Welcome them in Spirit, into God's presence.

PRAYER

Loving Father and Merciful Master. You purposed Your Church in Your heart, the inclusive, expansive and life-giving fellowship where *Koinonia* is so many different expressions of living together. In this difficult time when a minuscule virus turns our minds to face death, may we turn to You and face life, eternal life! We gather to worship the One whose love knows no limits, and soak in the cleansing waters of Your Divine forgiveness! Resurrect in us Loving Father, the joy of worshipping You in beauty and in Truth. **AMEN.**

HYMN Dear Lord And Father Of Mankind

The Story Behind Dear Lord And Father Of Mankind

The Brewing of Soma is a poem by John Whittier (1807-92) from which the hymn is taken. Soma was a sacred ritual drink in Vedic (Hindu) religion, going back to Proto-Indo-Iranian times, potentially with hallucinogenic properties. The narration is of Vedic priests brewing and consuming Soma in an attempt to experience divinity. It describes the whole population getting drunk on Soma. It compares this to some Christians' use of "music, incense, vigils and trance, to bring the skies nearer, or lift men up to heaven!" But all in vain - as it is mere intoxication.

Whittier describes the true method for contact with the Divine, as practised by Quakers: Sober lives devoted to doing God's will, pursuing peace and selflessness in order to hear the "still, small voice", (see I Kings 19:11-13) as the authentic voice of God, rather than earthquake, wind or fire.

SCRIPTURE READING 1 Peter 2:4-12

You are coming to Christ, who is the living cornerstone of God's temple. He was rejected by people, but He was chosen by God for great honour. And you are living stones that God is building into His spiritual temple. What's more, you are His holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God. As the Scriptures say, "I am placing a cornerstone in Jerusalem, chosen for great honour; anyone who trusts in Him will never be disgraced." [Isaiah 26:16]

Yes, you who trust Him, recognise the honour God has given Him. But for those who reject Him, "The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone." [Psalm 118:22]. And, "He is the stone that makes people stumble, the rock that makes them fall." [Isaiah 8:14]. They stumble because they do not obey God's word, and so they meet the fate that was planned for them. But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a Holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for He called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. "Once you had no identity as a people; now you are God's people. Once you received no mercy; now you have received God's mercy." [Hosea 1:6, 9; 2:23]

*Dear friends, I warn you as "temporary residents and foreigners", keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbours. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honourable behaviour, and they will give honour to God when he judges the world. **May God bless the reading and hearing of His Word. AMEN***

LISTEN

His Eye is on the Sparrow

The Story Behind His Eye is on the Sparrow

In the mid-1800s Civilla Martin and her evangelist husband traveled the United States and worked together on most of the musical arrangements that were sung.

In 1904 Civilla was visiting an ill, bedridden friend. Although discouraged and sick, her friend remembered that God, her Heavenly Father, was watching over each little sparrow and would certainly watch after her. Matthew 10:29-31: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

By the end of that day, Mrs. Martin, a poet, completed "His Eye is On The Sparrow" and sent the complete poem to a well-known composer of the day, Charles Gabriel. His lovely music has carried it all around the world in small churches and great crusades. Ethel Waters is remembered for her great rendition of this song, when she sang and gave her testimony at many Billy Graham Crusades. (Used with permission from "His Eye is On The Sparrow" @Christianity.com)

MESSAGE

PRAYER: *Father, Your Word is more precious than all the treasures of this world, and your love and care for us is so much more than your care for the sparrows! Nourish us with Your word, that our lives may be a song of joy to your greatness! AMEN*

One of my favourite stage performances is, "Fidler on the Roof". Set in Imperial Russia around 1905 this multi-award winning stage musical based on a book by Joseph Stein, revolves around the main character **Tevye**, the father of five daughters, who tries to maintain his Jewish religious and cultural traditions as outside influences encroach upon the family's lives. His three strong-willed older daughters wish to marry for love (spurning the services of the matchmaker!). Their choice of a husband distances them further from their Jewish faith, beliefs, heritage and customs. The Tsar's edict evicting Jews from their village where they have lived for generations, adds to Tevye's angst.

The opening song, *Tradition* sets the theme around Tevye's unease and anxiety.

"A fiddler on the roof? Sounds crazy, no? But here, in our little village of Anatevka, you might say every one of us is a fiddler on the roof trying to scratch out a pleasant, simple tune without breaking his neck. It isn't easy. You may ask 'Why do we stay up there if it's so dangerous?' Well, we stay because Anatevka is our home. And how do we keep our balance? That I can tell you in one word: TRADITION! Because of our traditions, we've kept our balance for many, many years. Here in Anatevka, we have traditions for everything... How to sleep, how to eat... how to work... how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered, and always wear a little prayer shawl that shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, "How did this tradition get started?" I'll tell you! [pause] I don't know. But it's a tradition... and because of our traditions... every one of us knows who he is and what God expects him to do.

The subject of tradition is rich in content and we will not be able to cover it all this morning. Our focus this morning is discovering tradition in the life of Church, and God's Word will be the source of our guidance.

Let's start with Jesus' discussion with the Sadducees about resurrection.¹ They denied resurrection because their sole theological authority was the Torah, in which **they** did not find reference to the dead being raised. Jesus quotes *Exodus 3:6* in the context of the larger passage, *"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.... I have come down to deliver [my people]... and to bring them up out of that land [of Egypt].... The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob... is my name forever, and this is my memorial for all generations."*² The Sadducees knew the words **delivered** and **brought up** from Egypt as a lasting **memorial**, was "resurrection" language, but their minds were closed and they preferred to stick with their own, age-old understanding, missing Jesus' teaching on His life and mission.

Jesus was often cornered by religious leaders over the matter of keeping traditions. They questioned his healing of a man with a withered hand, *Is it*

¹ Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40

² Exodus 3:6, 8, 15

*lawful to heal on the Sabbath days?*³ They questioned His discipline over His Disciples when on a Sabbath, they plucked grains of wheat to eat, breaking Sabbath laws of work and, “*Why do your disciples break **our** ancient tradition, eating their food without washing their hands properly?*”⁴

Jesus’ response provides clarity. “*Tell me, why do you break God’s commandment through your tradition? God said, ‘Honour your father and your mother’, and ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death’. But you say that if a man tells his parents, ‘Whatever use I might have been to you, is now given to God’, then he owes no further duty to his parents?! So your tradition empties the commandment of God of all its meaning. You hypocrites! Isaiah describes you beautifully when he said: ‘These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honour me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’.*

In His response, Jesus distinguishes two things, then clarifies a significant point, and closes with a caution against repercussions:

1. **Ritual** is a God-ordered (therefore God-honouring) way of worship. It is first recorded in English in 1570. In the 1600s it came to mean "*the (God) prescribed order of performing religious services*", the emphasis of which was a God-ordered, God-honouring way of worship.
2. **Tradition** is (hu)man-made customs and rules, which **were** rooted in rituals, but enforce man-made rules over ritual (as above).

God gave the nation of Israel seven feasts to celebrate His continuing care through each year. Jesus clarifies, our worship of God is our act of gratitude: that we celebrate God’s faithfulness in caring for us, doing for us all that which we cannot do for ourselves. These “celebrations”:

- recalled our common origin and experience as a people (**a community, now a Church**);

³ Matthew 12:1-14

⁴ Matthew 15:1-9

- kept alive and celebrated the story of what God had done in the exodus and during the desert sojourn, and continues to do (**to commemorate, now our journey of growing in faith**);
- helped people learn lessons on the reality of sin, judgment and forgiveness, on the need for thanksgiving to God, and the importance of trusting God to provide instead of hoarding possessions for themselves (**theological - understanding the person of God**),
- and finally to celebrate the symbolism of each feast which pointed to, and anticipated it being fulfilled in the Kingdom of God, here and in the future (**typological** - each of the feasts is referred to in the New Testament).

Jesus also cautions the Pharisees and the teachers of the law not to let *tradition empty (hollow out) the commandment of God, (robbing it) of all its meaning!* Paul expands on this message when writing to the Church at Colossi, *don't let anyone worry you by criticising what you eat or drink, or what holy days you ought to observe, or bothering you over new moons or sabbaths. All these things have at most only a symbolical value: the solid fact is Christ. Let no one cheat you of your joy in Christ by persuading you to make yourselves "humble" and fall down and worship angels. Such a person, inflated by an unspiritual imagination, is pushing their way into matters they know nothing about, and in their cleverness forgetting their head. It is from the head alone that the body, by natural channels, is nourished and built up and grows according to God's laws of growth.*⁵

To avoid the trap of human traditions which draw us away from true worship of God, we are reminded, *"You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve"*⁶. Jesus too is worthy of worship; even *"the angels of God worship Him"*⁷

Two rituals form the basis of our worship of God and His Son Jesus our Christ:

1. **The ritual of personal worship** - Our relationship with God requires a personal commitment, and personal worship, including a personal study of His Word, is an essential part of this commitment: to love Him with all of

⁵ Colossians 2:18-19 J.B. Phillips New Testament

⁶ Luke 4:8

⁷ Hebrews 1:6

our heart, soul and mind⁸, to be a living sacrifice,⁹ and to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth¹⁰.

2. **The ritual of corporate/Church worship** - Our personal relationship with God also requires a commitment to the community of “believers”, to gather and worship God on His anointed days (on the Sabbath and on festival days/seasons)¹¹. The Bible doesn’t give much information about **how** New Testament church services were conducted, except perhaps in 1 Corinthians 14, where the apostle Paul told the Corinthians they were doing it wrong. But there are many passages that can guide our worship at church services. The Church leadership is given the responsibility of setting the format to avoid confusion and provide peace and unity (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).

Let’s discover traditions with Jesus’ caution, *beware the danger of man-made traditions, enforced by people who want to be the centre of attention, even control people*. Such traditions are deadly, leading us to either disregard God’s laws in favour of tradition, or accept tradition as doctrine, on par with God's word.

The life of Church is to journey with the Holy Spirit into places of discovery, where we un-learn all that which is not of God, by rooting out “man-made” tradition. In our growing relationship with Almighty God, we learn to enjoy His presence with God-honouring worship, and discover His true character. Our response to this discovery transforms us, changes us into His likeness, to be the person, and the people He made us to be: *in HIS image!* **AMEN.**

LISTEN **How Great is Our God**

PRAYER

Father! Give us wisdom to know when we are charmed into following “man-made traditions”, and please give us the courage and strength to honour You, and only You in all our worship. **AMEN.**

⁸ Matthew 22:37

⁹ Romans 12:1

¹⁰ John 4:23

¹¹ Isaiah 66:23; John 12:20

HYMN

On Christ the Solid Rock I stand

BENEDICTION

Celebrate the life God has given you!

Live the freedom of eternal life here and now,
the life Christ gave His life for!

Walk obediently in the life of the Holy Spirit in you.

For the glory of God's coming kingdom, in which Christ is King!

AMEN

LISTEN

**Make yourselves coffee or tea,
or pour yourself a glass of juice
and a slice a healthy piece of cake
and enjoy a**

Medley of Joyous Hymns

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