**Culmore United Methodist Church**

**June 23, 2019**

**Personal Reflection**: Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

--***James 4: 8a***

#  Look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him, everything else thrown in.—*C.S. Lewis*

# **Prelude** *God Is Good* (see insert)

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Happy birthday!** Are there any birthdays this week? If so, let us know so we can wish you many happy returns.

**We’re back from Annual Conference.**

Great gathering of people. I’m now a Provisionally Ordained Minister. It’s only taken me 18 years to get to this point.

Let that be a lesson for everyone:

Never, never give up on your faith journey

…regardless of the number of twists and turns along the way.

**MAP is up and running at Culmore.**

This FREE health clinic is open on Thursdays between 7:00AM – 2:00PM. Since there are a limited number of appointments available each Thursday,

 come at 6:00 AM to ensure you can be seen.

The only requirement is that you come.

**Bible Study** is Wednesday, June 26 at 10:00. We’re studying Hebrews.

*Come for coffee and discussion*.

**We’re continuing our series on *Transforming Attitudes.***

By transforming attitudes,

I mean the attitudes and mindsets

that can help us grow our faith.

Yes, we ourselves are transformed as we grow in faith,

but to get there

requires that we change and fine-tune

some of our attitudes and mindsets.

That’s what I mean by *transforming attitudes.*

This is the work we do—it’s on us…

 to change our attitudes,

to try to grow these *transforming attitudes.*

When we do, these attitudes will be life-changing,

both with our faith and with the world.

Last week I asked you to answer the question

*what draws you closer to God?*

One of your top responses was

*I find myself closest to God in times of trouble.*

Why is that?

 Isn’t God around in good times, too?

When times are good,

 do we feel like we really don’t need God

—that we’re doing fine on our own?

When times are good,

do we get so busy and occupied with other things

 that we don’t hear God’s *still small whisper?*

Do we let our daily stuff

keep us from hearing God*?*

What is it about troubles that can deepen our faith

and bring us closer to God?

That’s what we’re going to explore deeper this morning.

**Passing of the Peace**

**Nelson:**

**Personal Reflections**:

Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.--***James 4: 8a***

# Look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him, everything else thrown in.—*C.S. Lewis*

It’s not so much about finding God, but ***discovering* God…**

…for he is there all the time. Sometimes we need to step away

from our busy-ness… our distractedness… our self-centeredness….and LOOK.

We are told multiple times in the Bible that we will find the Lord… if we truly seek him:

**Deuteronomy 4: 29** But if from there you seek the Lord your God…

…you will find him if you seek him with all your heart and with all your soul.

**Jeremiah 29:12-13** Call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you…. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

**Background to scripture we’re about to hear:**

The Book of Revelations

includes what Jesus told John to write

 to 7 different churches.

**Revelations 3: 15-22** is directed to the church in Laodicea,

which was the wealthiest city in the region

 back in Roman times.

I imagine the people living rich and comfortable lives.

Church, sometimes it’s hard to hear God

 when we’ve got too much.

Sometimes it’s hard to change our ways

if that means committing ourselves to God

 instead of our stuff.

I think this was the position in which

the church people in Laodicea

 found themselves

when John wrote this letter to them.

**Scripture:** Revelations 3: 15-20

**1st Reader** I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.

**2nd Reader** You say, ‘*I am rich, with everything I want. I don’t need a thing.*’ But you do not realize that you are wretched and miserable, poor, blind and naked.

**1st Reader** I advise you to buy from me pure gold, refined by

fire, so that you may become rich, and white garments, clean and pure, so you won’t be naked and ashamed; and to get salve from me to heal your eyes, so you can see.

**2nd Reader** Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.

**1st Reader** Behold! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

**2nd Reader** To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.  Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

*Behold! I stand at the door and knock.*

 *If anyone hears my voice*

*and opens the door, I will come in.*

What a promise! What a gift!

But sometimes,

this is what happens

when Jesus is knocking at the door:

**Lesson for Young and Young at Heart (Nelson and Jesus knocking behind)**

I don’t know why Jesus isn’t in my life.

Where is he?

… Oh, wait a minute, I just got a text.

That’s the funniest thing….

So where was I?

Oh, yeah.

 People talk about God’s Presence being with them,

but I don’t feel a thing. What are they doing that I’m not? …Hold on, I’ve got a phone call….

ANYWAY, why doesn’t God speak to me?

….Oops! Look at the time!

I’ve got to run. I’m meeting my friends for lunch.

My brothers and sisters, how are we ever going to discover God

if we are too busy to look up and notice him?

if we don’t make room for him in our daily lives?

Maybe that’s one reason times of trouble

can also be times of opportunity

 for us to grow near to God.

For in times of trouble,

we get **laser-focused** on the pain and worry

 staring us in the face.

In times of trouble,

we finally realize we can’t do it all ourselves.

Depending on ourselves alone

won’t be enough.

So Jesus is there, ready to be discovered by us,

 Waiting for us to turn around and see him

… but we have to LOOK.

We have work to do:

We have to invite him in,

to seek him with all our heart and soul.

Being a Christian is no passive, lazy-boy chair kind of thing.

No! It will take everything we’ve got to find him,

to wake up to the faith,

and then stay WOKE.

**Sung Prayer:** *Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus*

 Turn your eyes upon Jesus
 Look full in His wonderful face
 And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
 In the light of His glory and grace.

**What is it about troubles that can deepen our faith**

**bringing us closer to God?**

**Cousin Ray:** retired Marine chaplain.

There’s a reason, with all our talk about separation of church and State

 that the military ALWAYS includes chaplains in their forces

…particularly when troops are in war zones.

In times when death and harm

 lie just around the corner, my cousin Ray says,

people are desperately seeking God’s Presence,

You can bet your bottom dollar

 They want to know God is there, with them.

Times of trouble can be a wake up call to us.

I like what **Stephen Lang** wrote:

We are never nearer to God than when we are troubled.

 In times of comfort and ease we forget him.

In the worst of times,

 we suddenly remember,

 "Ah, what if I asked God for help?"

Sometimes the answer is the help we pray for.

Sometimes the answer is "Lean on me,

and you will survive and thrive.

**So HOW can times of trouble get us WOKE?**

**1. We get focused on God.**

We see what matters,

and what is just a distraction.

In times of trouble

– suddenly all the little things

 that have been worrying us don’t seem to matter.

We get crystal clear vision of what is truly important.

***Susan:*** *My sickness was a blessing in disguise.*

I had been focused on so many things

 that were eating up my energy and time and well-being.

When I got the bad diagnosis,

 it suddenly became clear to me

 that the little things weighing me down

 no longer mattered.

The things—and relationships—that were killing me…literally…

I had to let go.

**2. We are not alone.**

When our burden becomes **too heavy to carry alone**,

we realize there’s someone there with us,

 helping us along the way

. ..that we don’t have to do it all alone.

God is with us through it all.

**3.Awakes in us hope.**

Gives us a glimpse that

there’s something beyond our daily grind.

 That’s there’s something far grander,

 far more joyful that we could ever imagine.

God is not just here with us now,

…he is with us through eternity.

**Responsive Reading:** Psalm 121: 1-2; 46:1-3,11

I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from?

**My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.**

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present

help in trouble.

**Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.**

Though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

**The Lord Almighty is with us; the God**

**of Jacob is our fortress.**

* **Hymn** *You Are Mine* **TFWS 2218**

**Sharing Our Witness**

I am so lifted up when I hear someone’s witness

…when they felt the Presence of God in their lives.

Think of a time you were in troubled waters and you felt God’s Presence,

 carrying you through.

Would anyone like to share?

In this time, I invite you to come up

and share that moment with us.

Sometimes God uses us to lift up someone else for Him.

**My example:**

**Pastor Jane** in California, my first clergy mentor in 1999.

After I moved away, we didn’t really stay in touch.

Three years later, while living in Japan,

one night I suddenly felt compelled to call Pastor Jane.

It didn’t make sense to me,

 I hadn’t spoken to her in nearly three years,

but I did it anyway.

I felt that PUSH to tell her how much her mentoring had meant to me

and what a great work—God’s work

—she did in the churches she serves.

Stunned silence on the phone greeted me.

*Beth, why are you calling me?*

Oops, had I insulted Pastor Jane in some way?

Again she asked, *what made you call me?*

I just felt God telling me to pick up the phone and call you.

*You have no idea what this means to me.*

 *I had been feeling like such a failure.*

*The District Superintendent had decided*

 *to move me to a smaller church,*

 *and I had been feeling*

 *like my ministry just didn’t matter.*

*Your call has given me new heart.*

God has ways of reaching out to us…and each other…in ways

that defy explanation.

Does anyone have a witness to share?

**Nelson - Patrick**

* **Hymn** *I Will Call upon the Lord* **TFWS 2002**

**Community Prayer**

*Abba Father, how grateful we are that when things are most difficult, that is when the light of Your love and grace shines the brightest in our lives. All we need to do is look around us to see all the evidence of how much You love and care for us!*

 *You want us to be joyful in all of our circumstances, but we confess that is sometimes hard to do. We have chosen to put aside our tendency, to become mired down in our circumstances, or feeling sorry for ourselves, instead of trusting in You.*

 *We ask that You open our hearts and minds to the way You use our situations, to show us things we need to know. Some difficult lessons only come about when we know we have to depend completely on You, and we give You our full attention. AMEN*

**Anthem**  *Fear Not* (see insert)

**Doxology**  **UMH 95**

Behold I stand at the door and knock.

Let’s listen, let’s open wide that door

without waiting for the hard times to bring us to our knees.

Let’s ask Jesus in.

* **Hymn** *Somebody’s Knocking at Your Door* **W&S 3095**

#### Benediction