Cooper Memorial Devotion 3/15/20

 With worship services across Kentucky and the country canceled, I’ve been wondering what it means for us as Cooper Memorial to gather together to worship on Sunday mornings. With worship services from other churches moving online, I’ve also wondered about the importance of gathering together to worship.

 For me, worshiping God is supposed to be a daily constant activity. If my faith in God is the foundation upon which I am building the rest of my life, than the activities of my life should reflect the foundation in which they’re rooted. So the actions of my daily life can be acts of worship. I can perform the act of worship that is **Giving Thanks** to God: for the ability to breath, to act, to … we have everything to give thanks to God for.

 I can perform the act of worship that is **Confession**: understanding that I have hurt others or God by my actions, saying I am sorry and asking for forgiveness, understanding that I have not used my time or my day as an act of worship, knowing that I missed an opportunity to be a witness of Christ’s love. We have all fallen short and can confess this in order to receive God’s gracious forgiveness.

 I can perform the act of worship that is **Proclamation**: in reading and studying Holy Scripture and allowing God to speak through it. There is no better conduit to the divine than the Bible, our primary source as Methodists. I can daily read, study, and open my heart to God’s Word so that I can be a better example of Christ and a better witness of God’s love and light in the world.

 I can perform the act of worship that is **Prayer**: communicating with God my requests and thanksgivings, lifting up the concerns of others I know, and lifting up the needs of the community I am in. In prayer we are called to communicate with God and then to pause and allow God to communicate back which could be a simply response of just being still and knowing that God is.

 I can perform the act of worship that is **Service**: joining with God is God’s work within the world. Service could mean helping another person with a task, working at a soup kitchen, or saying kind words to uplift another. In service we are reminded of our connection with God and other.

 I can perform these acts of worship without be a part of a church congregation, so why do we come together for worship services?

Matthew 18:19-20: 19 Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Acts 2:41-47 Life among the Believers

41 So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

43 Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. 44 All who believed were together and had all things in common; 45 they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Hebrews 10:19-25 A Call to Persevere

19 Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus,20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

 Coming together is a large part of our religious experience. Where 2 or more are gathered we find Jesus. Together the disciples and believers in Acts broke bread and shared meals as well as gathered together resources to distribute to those in need. In Hebrews it was together that they gathered to provoke one another to love and good deeds. And together they were worshiping with the presence of God, the same God who is present when 2 or more are gathered. In being together they were able to create connections that made them a community.

 We come together to worship God, to help others, and to provoke or push each other to show a greater love. We come together in community. A community that worships in words and actions. The U.M.C. Book of Worship states on pg.13, “Our worship in both its diversity and its unity is an encounter with the living God through the risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. When the people of God gather, the Spirit is free to move them to worship in diverse ways, according to their needs.” God works with individuals and moves through people and being in community we build stronger connections for God to work through us. For if we are different parts of the body of Christ then we need to come together for the body to be complete. Being together when we worship brings me life. I gain energy and enthusiasm sharing a worship space with you. When I preach, it is not to give a message at someone but to be in dialogue with you. For me preaching is my way of providing an interpretation on scripture that can start a dialogue of discussion for us as a congregation.

 This means I need a community to hear the message I preach and respond back. This is easier when we are together but since we are apart because of the Covid-19 virus, let us remember that we are still members for the church community. We are still pieces of the body of Christ that need to be connected to the Body of Christ. Community is about connection and we can use this time that we are physically apart to strengthen our connections with members of our Cooper Community.

 **So let us ask ourselves how we can stay in connection with one another while we are physically separated? What are ways we can build connections during this time?**

 For me as the Pastor of Cooper, my hope is to build connection through a series of devotions that will be posted online, with questions like the 2 above and one below for us to consider together. I also hope to connect with members through phone calls. If you would like a call or need to update your contact information with the church, please call the church office and leave your name and contact information.

 **Our Challenge during this time: How can you let members of the Cooper community feel that sense of connection with their Cooper community?**