**Worship Service October 22, 2023**

**Good morning, everyone! It is good to be in the house of the Lord with you all this morning!**

**Announcements:** On Monday, October 23rd Points to Ponder items are due. On Tuesday the 24th the preschool board is having a meeting at 6:15 pm and the trustees are having a meeting at 7 pm. On Saturday the 28th there will be a charge conference meeting at Kent UMC at 10 am and trunk or treat will be 3-6 pm. A bonfire will be following trunk or treat. On Sunday the 29th we will be holding a combined service with Trinity UMC. Fellowship will follow the service.

**Video: “Holy Spirit”** (By Bryan Torwalt, Katie Torwalt)

**Lighting of the Christ Candle:** Let’s be in an attitude of prayer, as we light our Christ candle.“Light of Christ, shine on our path. Chase away all darkness. Illuminate our pathways. And lead us to the heart of God.” Amen.

**Video: “Courageous”** (By Mark Hall, Matthew West)

**Children’s Chat:** What would you do if someone came up to you and said, “Only stupid people believe in Jesus”? Would you be quiet or would you tell them that you believe in Jesus? What if they laughed at you? The book of Acts tells us about a man named Stephen who said he believed in Jesus even when people said they would hurt him if he did. Stephen lived in Jerusalem and he loved God and Jesus very much. He was a deacon, a servant of the church, and helped make sure that the poor widows received their fair share of food. He taught many people about Jesus and even performed many miracles in Jesus’ name. Stephen wanted everyone to know the good news about Jesus. He knew that there were many Jews who followed God but did not yet believe in Jesus, so he went to a synagogue to preach. The leaders of the synagogue did not believe what Stephen was saying about Jesus. They became so angry that they began telling lies about Stephen. They said Stephen was saying bad things about the Jews and about God, that he wanted to destroy their temple and stop them from worshipping God. They wanted other people to hate him too. Because they were so angry at Stephen, they took him to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious leaders, who could make decisions like in a courtroom. Even when the Jewish leaders were telling these terrible lies about him, Stephen continued to trust in God. He had so much faith in God that “His face was like the face of an angel”. When the High Priest asked Stephen if these things were true, Stephen courageously told the truth. He told everyone the story of how God had sent his Son, Jesus, to save his people, but the Jews had rejected Him. Stephen spoke the truth even though he knew it would make the people very angry, so angry that they kill him. It must have been a very scary time for Stephen. But the bible says that these angry people were not the only thing that Stephen saw before he died. The bible says, “But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “And just before he died, “Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ When he had said this, he fell asleep.” Who does that sound like? Whose example was Stephen following? Jesus. When Jesus was dying on the cross, He asked His Father to forgive those who put Him on the cross. Stephen is remembered as the first Christian martyr because he is the first person mentioned in the bible who died because of his belief in Jesus. A martyr is someone who is killed because of their religious or other beliefs. He is an amazing example of someone with courage to stand up for what they believed in, even if it meant they would suffer, even die, for doing so. Let’s say an echo prayer…Dear Jesus, thank You for showing us what real forgiveness looks like. And for courageous people like Stephen, who stand up for You and follow Your example. Give us the courage to do the same thing. In Your name, AMEN.

**Offering:** Giving is an act of faith. We believe that what we have to offer makes a difference in this world. But more than that, we believe in the One who is behind our giving. We may find it difficult to even catch a glimpse of what God may be doing around us and in us. Likewise, we may not see the effect of what we give, of what we do for Christ. But still, we believe, trusting in the One who is faithful, whose "new mercies" we often can only see by faith, day by day. Let us now give our gifts, tithes and offerings to God as an act of faith. **Let’s sing the Doxology as we praise the Lord for our many blessings;** “Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heav'nly host. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! Amen” **Let’s pray as we dedicate our giving to Him…** Lord of all mercy and compassion, bless these gifts lovingly offered, those who have offered them and those who will receive them. Use us and these gifts in ministries of hope and love that reach out and touch not only those in need in our community, but also our nation and the world. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**Joys & Concerns:** – John L is at the apostolic home. Pray for Simeon with spina bifida. **Let us turn to the Lord in prayer…** Merciful and Forgiving God, You call and so often, amid the bustle of our day, we are distracted and fail to hear Your voice. You knock, but our lives are untidy, unprepared, and so we pretend we never heard the sound. Forgive us, Lord, we who look to You for guidance, but only on our terms, when we call You. So often Your need of us is in the ‘now’ of our busy-ness, which can be ‘inconvenient’ for us. Forgive us, Lord… may the door of our hearts be open, and our ears attuned for that unexpected call at ALL times, not just the convenient ones. However busy we might be, may there always be moments when we find ourselves alone, moments to think, to pray, to hear Your voice and know Your presence within and beside us, through this and every day. Within each day may there be peace within our busyness, space where we can rest awhile with You, and listen to Your gentle voice before engaging with the world. God of all moments, be in our busyness, in the “I don’t have time for anyone else” moments, in the running around, chasing our tail moments. Be in our solitude, in our “time to take stock” and quiet moments, in the stilling of our minds and prayerful moments. God of all moments, be in all our moments, always and forever. You are the whisper in the breeze, the calm voice within each storm, the lamp that lights our darkness and our guidance along the road of life. You are the hidden treasure. You are the pearl of great price. You are the one who occupies the God-shaped holes in our lives, the holes that no other can ever fill. We commit this day and all its moments into Your hands. Your Loving hands, caring hands, guiding hands, healing hands, guarding hands, forgiving hands. **With our hands folded in prayer, we commit this day to You as we pray the words Jesus taught us to pray:** **For we ask these things in Jesus’ Name as we pray the prayer He taught us to pray**: “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, for ever and ever. Amen.”

**Hymn of Preparation: “Stand up, Stand up for Jesus”** (By George Duffield Jr, George J. Webb) **Verse 1** – Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross; lift high his royal banner, it must not suffer loss. From victory unto victory his army shall he lead, till every foe is vanquished,

and Christ is Lord indeed. Standing on the promises of Christ my King, through eternal ages let his praises ring; glory in the highest, I will shout and sing, standing on the promises of God. **Verse 2** – Stand up, stand up for Jesus, the trumpet call obey; forth to the mighty conflict, in this his glorious day. Ye that are brave now serve him against unnumbered foes; let courage rise with danger, and strength to strength oppose. **Verse 3** – Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord, bound to him eternally by love's strong cord, overcoming daily with the Spirit's sword, standing on the promises of God. **Verse 4** Stand up, stand up for Jesus, stand in his strength alone; the arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own. Put on the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer; where duty calls or danger,

be never wanting there. © 1830 Words & Music: Public Domain. *For use solely with the SongSelect®*[*Terms of Use*](https://songselect.ccli.com/about/termsofuse)*. All rights reserved.*[*www.ccli.com*](http://www.ccli.com/)CCLI License #1694213

**Scripture**: **James 5:7-11** “7 Therefore, brothers and sisters, you must be patient as you wait for the coming of the Lord. Consider the farmer who waits patiently for the coming of rain in the fall and spring, looking forward to the precious fruit of the earth. 8 You also must wait patiently, strengthening your resolve, because the coming of the Lord is near. 9 Don’t complain about each other, brothers and sisters, so that you won’t be judged. Look! The judge is standing at the door!10 Brothers and sisters, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord as an example of patient resolve and steadfastness. 11 Look at how we honor those who have practiced endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job. And you have seen what the Lord has accomplished, for the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”

**Message “*Learning the Way of Faith: The Courage of Faith*”:** Would you pray with me?

Speak Lord through these lips, however unworthy, the wonderful words of life. Open our minds and hearts to Your message so that we may be transformed. Amen. We are on week 4 of our 5-week sermon series on learning the way of faith. We looked at the trial of faith, when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Did Abraham love God enough to give Him the one thing nearest and dearest to his heart – Isaac, his son of promise?

Abraham passed the test; he obeyed God, withholding nothing from Him – not even his precious son. Abraham obeyed God’s unexpected command because he had a history and a relationship with God; he knew God to be good and trustworthy, therefore he faithfully trusted God’s promises as he obediently and unquestioningly followed His commands. Abraham’s trial of faith is a story about obedience to God. We looked at the discipline of faith. Throughout Scripture, God portrays Himself as a Father, a loving parent. As a loving parent, God not only blesses us, His children, He disciplines us as well, for our own good. Proper discipline is a proof of love and God, our heavenly Father, loves us. In His love for us, will not allow us to continue in behavior He knows could destroy us. The Lord’s discipline is a response of His love for us and His desire for each of us to be holy, just as He is holy.

When God corrects us, we need to see it as proof of His love for us. The result of His discipline is a stronger faith and a renewed relationship with Him. When we gratefully accept His discipline, return to Him, accept His forgiveness and change our ways, our Heavenly Father gives us a fresh start, His mercies are new every morning and His love for us never fails. He wants us to exhibit lives of holiness, lives that reflect the new nature He has given us and the new creatures we are made, in Christ, through Christ, so that we can be holy, just as He is holy. We looked next at the patience of faith, and we looked to Job. When someone exhibits great endurance through all kinds of trials, annoyances, or provocations, we say that person has “the patience of Job.” Job’s perseverance, his patience, stands out because his story is extreme in the amount of suffering he endured. Yet Job never lost his faith in God, even under the most heartbreaking circumstances. Job’s plight never caused his faith to waver. In his letter to believers of the early church who were suffering persecution for their faith in Christ, James used Job as a prime example of the patience of faith in suffering. He reminded them that even though they, like Job, had done nothing to deserve their suffering, they must patiently endure all things for the sake of Christ. Just as Job faced many struggles, they too would face hardship in living for God. As do we. The true test of patience comes when our rights are violated, when we are treated unfairly, when, like Job, we have done nothing to deserve the suffering we face. Patience reveals our faith in God’s timing, omnipotence and love. Perhaps the greatest lesson we learn from the book of Job is that God does not have to answer to anyone for what He does or does not do. Job’s experience teaches us that we many never know the specific reason for our suffering in this lifetime, but we must continue to trust in our sovereign, holy and righteous God. Our responsibility to God is to love Him, obey Him, and trust Him, in all circumstances. When we do, we will find God in the midst of our trials. And He will get us through them. Today we will look at the courage of faith. When we think of Biblical characters who exhibited great courage, we have many from which to choose. We may think of Moses pleading with Pharaoh to let God’s people go. Or maybe we think of Daniel in the lions’ den and his friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace. Perhaps it is Esther going before the king to plead for her people at the risk of her own life. David facing Goliath. Peter stepping out onto the water. These are all great examples of the courage of faith. However, today we will focus on Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Little is known about Stephen before he is first mentioned in Acts chapter 6. We know nothing about his personal life – his parents, his siblings, whether he had a wife or children. His name suggests that he was a Hellenistic Jew who spoke and preached in Greek, one of the common languages in Israel at that time. What we do know about him, however is truly important. He is introduced in Acts 6:5 as “a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit.” There have always been those faithful believers whose love for and commitment to the Lord shine through so brightly that others around them notice, and Stephen was such a believer. Stephen was one of seven men chosen to be responsible over the distribution of food to widows in the early church after a dispute arose and the apostles recognized they needed help. In time, he began to stand out because he was “full of God’s grace and power [who, empowered by the Holy Spirit,] performed great wonders and signs among the people.” We don’t know exactly what these signs and wonders were, but they brought Stephen to the attention of members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen. As devout Jews, these men would have been appalled at Stephen’s claim that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, so they opposed him but could not argue against him as they were no match for the wisdom given Stephen by the Holy Spirit. They decided instead to falsely accuse him of blasphemy, had him arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin, the same Jewish council that had condemned Jesus to death for blasphemy, where they produced a string of witnesses to bring false charges against him. Acts 7 is the record of Stephen’s testimony before the Sanhedrin, which is perhaps the most detailed and concise history of Israel and their relationship to God of the many accounts of this history given throughout Scripture. In his speech, Stephen reminded the council of their faithful patriarch, Abraham, and how God had led him from a pagan land into the land of Israel, where He made a covenant with him.

Stephen spoke of the journey of the Jews, through Joseph’s time in Egypt to their deliverance by Moses 400 years later. He reminded them how Moses met God in the wilderness in a burning bush, and explained how God empowered Moses to lead His people from idolatry and slavery to freedom in the Promised Land. Throughout his speech, he repeatedly reminded them of their continual rebellion and idolatry, in spite of the mighty works of God which they had witnessed. Stephen courageously accused them with their own history, determined to stand firmly on the side of Jesus Christ, no matter the consequences. God inspired him to speak boldly, rightly accusing Israel of their failure to recognize Jesus, their Messiah, rejecting and murdering Him, as they murdered God’s prophets before Him.

Stephen’s speech was an indictment against Israel and their failure as the chosen people of God who had been given the law and the promise of the Messiah. He closed his sermon by accusing the assembled group of being stiff-necked, opposing the Spirit, killing the Righteous One, Jesus, and failing to keep the law. This enraged the crowd and provoked Stephen’s stoning.The law of Moses states that the sin of blasphemy deserves a death sentence, usually by stoning. Our reading from Acts records Stephen’s final moments of earthly life. Just before the enraged crowd followed the prescribed penalty and began stoning him, Stephen, “full of the Holy Spirit” saw heaven open and Jesus standing at the right hand of His Father.

Scholars ponder why Jesus was standing rather than seated, as we usually hear of Jesus “sitting” at the right hand of God. Perhaps, knowing that Stephen was about to be martyred, Jesus stood to welcome him into heaven. Can you imagine? It is also possible that Jesus stood to act as a witness for Stephen. Witnesses in Jewish courts stood to give their testimony. Jesus earlier said, “I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God.” (Luke 12:8). Regardless of His reason for standing, Stephen, on the verge of martyrdom, is given the privilege of gazing into heaven and seeing God’s glory and His risen Lord. “They stoned Stephen as he called out saying, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’” This echoes Jesus’ words from the cross, “Father, into Your hands I commend My Spirit.” Stephen “kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice.” This echoes Jesus “crying with a loud voice” as He died on the cross. Stephen asks, “Lord, don’t hold this against them.” This echoes Jesus’ words from the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” Stephen, “when he had said this, he fell asleep.” This echoes the account of Jesus’ death, where Luke tells us, “Having said this, he breathed his last.” We can be sure that Luke, writer of his gospel and the book of Acts, intended us to notice the similarities between Jesus’s death and Stephen’s death. Both were holy men. Both were unjustly executed. Stephen followed the example of his Lord, Jesus Christ. He was a bold evangelist who was not afraid to preach the gospel despite dangerous opposition. His courage came from the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit that lives inside each one of us. The Holy Spirit equips believers to do things they could not do on their own. Stephen was a gifted preacher, but God gave him wisdom and courage, and He promises the same to us. Jesus promised His followers in Luke 12, “When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.” Although we may not be brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, we can claim this promise as we courageously witness to others when Christ presents us with such opportunities. Stephen was a great blessing to those he encountered throughout his life on earth, but his influence was even greater after his death. A young man watching the murder was Saul of Tarsus, who would later be converted by Jesus and become the apostle Paul, perhaps the greatest evangelist and missionary the world has ever known. Before he converted, however, Saul, a Pharisee, would persecute other Christians in the name of the Sanhedrin, causing early church members to flee Jerusalem, taking the gospel with them and spreading it wherever they went. Thus, Stephen’s execution began the spread of Christianity, revealing that what seems like a tragedy can somehow be part of God’s great plan – proof “that in all things our God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to Him purpose.” Stephen’s death had the unexpected consequence of forcing Christians to flee persecution in Jerusalem. The gospel spread far and wide as a result. The full impact of our lives and our witness may not be felt until decades after our death. God’s work is constantly unfolding and goes forth on His timetable. Stephen’s life – and even more so his death – is an example of how every believer should strive to live: committed to the Lord even in the face of death; faithful to preach the gospel boldly and courageously; knowledgeable of God’s truth; and willing to be used by God for His plan and purpose, no matter the outcome. Stephen’s testimony still stands as a beacon, a light to a lost and dying world. May God give us the courage to follow his example so that we too may be rewarded with a glimpse of our Savior Jesus Christ in His glory. **Would you pray with me?** Dearest Lord Jesus, Give us the commitment and the courage of your servant Stephen as we witness to Your love and saving grace, so that we too may see you standing in glory at the right hand of the Father. In Your precious and powerful name we pray, Amen.

Our **closing song** is **“It Is Well With My Soul”** (By Horatio G. Spafford & Philip Bliss) **Verse 1**-When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul. **Refrain:** It is well with my soul, it is well, it is well with my soul. **Verse 2** – Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control, that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed his own blood for my soul. **Refrain, Verse 3**- My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought! My sin, not in part but the whole, is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more, praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! **Refrain**, **Verse 4-** And, Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll; the trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend, even so, it is well with my soul. **Refrain.** © 1876 Words & Music: Public Domain. *For use solely with the SongSelect®*[*Terms of Use*](https://songselect.ccli.com/about/termsofuse)*. All rights reserved.*[*www.ccli.com*](http://www.ccli.com/)CCLI License #1694213

### Benediction Jesus has called us and placed His trust in us. Therefore, go courageously into this world, bearing words of hope and healing, reaching out to others with love, knowing that Christ goes with us. For it is Jesus’ name, that we are sent out to serve. AMEN!