

WILLITS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
WORSHIP GUIDE
May 12, 2024

The morning glories and the sunflowers turn naturally toward the light, but we have to be taught, it seems. – Richard Rohr

WELCOME TO WORSHIP

Bringing in the Light

Halle, Halle, Hallelujah

Frankie J

CENTERING WORDS: Leader

Why stare at the heavens to find God? Look within, for God's Spirit is there.
Look around, for Christ's disciples are all around.

CALL TO WORSHIP: L is the leader **P is the people**

(L) Clap your hands and sing for joy!

(P) Christ is in our midst and in our lives.

(L) Clap your hands and sing for joy!

(P) Christ calls us to worship and praise.

(L) Let's worship together.

MONEY FOR MISSIONS:

Prayer of thanksgiving

HYMN:

To God Be the Glory

#98 (vs 1, 3)

OPENING PRAYER – Let us pray together.

Risen Christ, be present in our lives and in our worship. Help us recognize and celebrate your presence. Grant us the power of your Holy Spirit, that we may answer the call to be your disciples and bring your message of love to the world. Amen.

HYMN:

His Eye Is on the Sparrow

#2146 (vs 1, 2, 3)

SCHRIPTURE: Romans 5:3-5

Barbara O'Reardon

Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character

produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

James 1:2-4

Count it all joy, my brothers, (and sisters), when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

MESSAGE: The Lessons to be Learned from Hardship Eric Glassey

Happy Mother's Day, a celebration of those who are Mothers here, but also those that begot us as well as begot the children in our world. Otherwise, we would not be here. To paraphrase Mark Twain, "What sir, would the people of the earth be without mothers? They would be scarce sir, almighty scarce."

Although I use some humor in what I'm saying I would ask you to take a minute to reflect on the miracle of what mothers have been doing year in and year out from the beginning of humankind. Last year 134 million babies were birthed in this world by women, zero babies were birthed by men. Obviously, women have pitched a shutout in this area. I ask you to look at the miracle of creating new life and how we take it for granted. It is a miracle hiding in plain sight. When egg and cell unite, they represent two cells, sperm and egg. A newborn baby has 26 trillion cells, we should look at it as a nothing less than a miracle that this process works. Beyond this is how our personality is created. I originally thought that personality was a factor in how genes were expressed as a baby grows in the womb. Talking with my son who is a biologist, I was told that the creation of personality and personality traits is an area that science has little knowledge of. Sometimes we clearly see traits in identical twins and but sometimes we see personality differences that leave us wondering how certain things happened. Other issues of intelligence, artistic ability, ability in sports or music are not understood as to how they develop. Celebrate the wonder of all that happens for God is at work here. Also celebrate the sacrifices that Mothers make for their children. They're amateurs in this life, just like the rest of us.

On this Mother's Day I share with you something that I read recently. I did not write it, but it deals with how difficult life can be and how it makes us grow. The two bible verses that we read today talk about how to look at suffering, not turning away from it but dealing with it as part of our life on earth. I would add to this another quote:

"Hardship itself is not only a great teacher, it is fundamental to establishing a sense of unity and courage-from the movie *Artic Daughter: A lifetime of wilderness*"

And so I begin:

On 19th March 2018, almost five years after being diagnosed with Stage IV colon cancer, forty-two-year-old Julie Yip-Williams died, leaving behind a husband and two daughters. Her early years had been anything but easy. Born blind in Vietnam, at two months of age she was almost killed on the orders of a grandmother who deemed her to be defective; years later, as an older child, she sailed to Hong Kong with her family and hundreds of other refugees referred to as boat people, in search of a better life, eventually settling down in the US where her life improved. She was soon given partial sight by a surgeon, studied at Harvard, and became a successful lawyer, but in her thirties was struck down by the illness that would kill her. It was then that she began to write what would become a posthumously published memoir, [*The Unwinding of the Miracle*](#). In July 2017, a year before she passed away, Yip-Williams wrote the following letter to her young daughters.

Dear Mia and Isabelle,

I realized that I would have failed you greatly as your mother if I did not try to ease your pain from my loss, if I didn't at least attempt to address what will likely be the greatest question of your young lives. You will forever be the kids whose mother died of cancer, have people looking at you with some combination of sympathy and pity (which you will no doubt resent, even if everyone means well). That fact of your mother dying will weave into the fabric of your lives like a glaring stain on an otherwise pristine tableau. You will ask as you look around at all the other people who still have their parents, why did my mother have to get sick and die? It isn't fair, you will cry. And you will want so painfully for me to be there to hug you when your friend is mean to you, to look on as your ears are being pierced, to sit in the front row clapping loudly at your music recitals, to be that annoying parent insisting on another photo with the college graduate, to help you get dressed on your wedding day, to take your newborn babe from your arms so you can sleep. And every time you yearn for me, it will hurt all over again and you will wonder why.

I don't know if my words could ever ease your pain. But I would be remiss if I did not try.

My seventh-grade history teacher, Mrs. Olson, a batty eccentric but a phenomenal teacher, used to rebut our teenage protestations of "That's not fair!" with "Life is not fair. Get used to it!" Somehow, we grow up thinking that there should be fairness, that people should be treated fairly, that there should be equality of treatment as well as opportunity. That expectation must be derived from growing up in a rich country where the rule of law is so firmly entrenched. Even at the tender age of five, both of you were screaming about fairness as if it were some fundamental right. So perhaps those expectations of fairness and equity are also hardwired into the human psyche and our moral compass. I'm not sure.

What I do know for sure is that Mrs. Olson was right. Life is not fair. You would be foolish to expect fairness, at least when it comes to matters of life and death, matters outside the scope of the law, matters that cannot be engineered or manipulated by human effort, matters that are distinctly the domain of God or luck or fate or some other unknowable, incomprehensible force.

Although I did not grow up motherless, I suffered in a different way and understood at an age younger than yours that life is not fair. I looked at all the other kids who could drive and play tennis and who didn't have to use a magnifying glass to read, and it pained me in a way that maybe you can understand now. People looked at me with pity, too, which I loathed. I was denied opportunities, too; I was always the scorekeeper and never played in the games during PE. My mother didn't think it worthwhile to have me study Chinese after English school, as my siblings did, because she assumed I wouldn't be able to see the characters. (Of course, later on, I would study Chinese throughout college and study abroad and my Chinese would surpass my siblings'.) For a child, there is nothing worse than being different, in that negative, pitiful way. I was sad a lot. I cried in my lonely anger. Like you, I had my own loss, the loss of vision, which involved the loss of so much more. I grieved. I asked why. I hated the unfairness of it all.

My sweet babies, I do not have the answer to the question of why, at least not now and not in this life. But I do know that there is incredible value in pain and suffering, if you allow yourself to experience it, to cry, to feel sorrow and grief, to hurt. Walk through the fire and you will emerge on the other end, whole and stronger. I promise. You will ultimately find truth and beauty and wisdom and peace. You will understand that nothing lasts forever, not pain, or joy. You will understand that joy cannot exist without sadness. Relief cannot exist without pain. Compassion cannot exist without cruelty. Courage cannot exist without fear. Hope cannot exist without despair. Wisdom cannot exist without suffering. Gratitude cannot exist without deprivation. Paradoxes abound in this life. Living is an exercise in navigating within them.

I was deprived of sight. And yet, that single unfortunate physical condition changed me for the better. Instead of leaving me wallowing in self-pity, it made me more ambitious. It made me more resourceful. It made me smarter. It taught me to ask for help, to not be ashamed of my physical shortcoming. It forced me to be honest with myself and my limitations, and eventually to be honest with others. It taught me strength and resilience.

You will be deprived of a mother. As your mother, I wish I could protect you from the pain. But also as your mother, I want you to feel the pain, to live it, embrace it, and then learn from it. Be stronger people because of it, for you will know that you carry my strength within you. Be more compassionate

people because of it; empathize with those who suffer in their own ways. Rejoice in life and all its beauty because of it; live with special zest and zeal for me. Be grateful in a way that only someone who lost her mother so early can, in your understanding of the precariousness and preciousness of life. This is my challenge to you, my sweet girls, to take an ugly tragedy and transform it into a source of beauty, love, strength, courage, and wisdom.

Many may disagree, but I have always believed, always, even when I was a precocious little girl crying alone in my bed, that our purpose in this life is to experience everything we possibly can, to understand as much of the human condition as we can squeeze into one lifetime, however long or short that may be. We are here to feel the complex range of emotions that come with being human. And from those experiences, our souls expand and grow and learn and change, and we understand a little more about what it really means to be human. I call it the evolution of the soul. Know that your mother lived an incredible life that was filled with more than her “fair” share of pain and suffering, first with her blindness and then with cancer. And I allowed that pain and suffering to define me, to change me, but for the better.

In the years since my diagnosis, I have known love and compassion that I never knew possible; I have witnessed and experienced for myself the deepest levels of human caring, which humbled me to my core and compelled me to be a better person. I have known a mortal fear that was crushing, and yet I overcame that fear and found courage. The lessons that blindness and then cancer have taught me are too many for me to recount here, but I hope, when you read what follows, you will understand how it is possible to be changed in a positive way by tragedy and you will learn the true value of suffering. The worth of a person’s life lies not in the number of years lived; rather it rests on how well that person has absorbed the lessons of that life, how well that person has come to understand and distill the multiple, messy aspects of the human experience. While I would have chosen to stay with you for much longer had the choice been mine, if you can learn from my death, if you accepted my challenge to be better people because of my death, then that would bring my spirit inordinate joy and peace.

You will feel alone and lonely, and yet, understand that you are not alone. It is true that we walk this life alone, because we feel what we feel singularly and each of us makes our own choices. But it is possible to reach out and find those like you, and in so doing you will feel not so lonely. This is another one of life’s paradoxes that you will learn to navigate. First and foremost, you have each other to lean on. You are sisters, and that gives you a bond of blood and common experiences that is like no other. Find solace in one another. Always forgive and love one another. Then there’s Daddy. Then there are Titi and Uncle Mau and Aunt Nancy and Aunt Caroline and Aunt Sue and so many dear

friends, all of whom knew and loved me so well — who think of you and pray for you and worry about you. All of these people's loving energy surrounds you so that you will not feel so alone.

And last, wherever I may go, a part of me will always be with you. My blood flows within you. You have inherited the best parts of me. Even though I won't physically be here, I will be watching over you.

Sometimes, when you practice your instruments, I close my eyes so I can hear better. And when I do, I am often overcome with this absolute knowing that whenever you play the violin or the piano, when you play it with passion and commitment, the music with its special power will beckon me and I will be there. I will be sitting right there, pushing you to do it again and again and again, to count, to adjust your elbow, to sit properly. And then I will hug you and tell you how you did a great job and how very proud I am of you. I promise. Even long after you have chosen to stop playing, I will still come to you in those extraordinary and ordinary moments in life when you live with a complete passion and commitment. It might be while you're standing atop a mountain, marveling at exceptional beauty and filled with pride in your ability to reach the summit, or when you hold your baby in your arms for the first time or when you are crying because someone or something has broken your tender heart or maybe when you're miserably pulling an all-nighter for school or work. Know that your mother once felt as you feel and that I am there hugging you and urging you on. I promise.

I have often dreamed that when I die, I will finally know what it would be like to see the world without visual impairment, to see far into the distance, to see the minute details of a bird, to drive a car. Oh, how I long to have perfect vision, even after all these years without. I long for death to make me whole, to give me what was denied me in this life. I believe this dream will come true. Similarly, when your time comes, I will be there waiting for you, so that you, too, will be given what was lost to you. I promise. But in the meantime, live, my darling babies. Live a life worth living. Live thoroughly and completely, thoughtfully, gratefully, courageously, and wisely. Live! I love you both forever and ever, to infinity, through space and time. Never ever forget that.

What does learning from hardship teach us? A friend of mine told me that when she was giving birth she had to go deep within herself to find the strength to finish when she was in pain and exhausted. It changed her perspective on what she could endure. For all of us who have been parents its being taken for granted or having children angry with you when you are doing your best and still loving your children. Its learning patience when you are going through difficult times and want your life to get better and easier. Its grieving after the death of someone you love and learning to find gratitude in what you had instead of dwelling on what you lost. Its dealing with the aging process with

the restrictions and losses that come with it as we lose muscle strength, dimming of our senses, memory loss, and learning to be more compassionate and loving to those who are in a similar process. These are gifts that broaden our understandings of this life and give us wisdom and perspective.

In closing let me say: to all of my female friends, both mothers and not, I salute you. You endure all the vicissitudes of being female, the joys and challenges, the discomforts and exhaustion of being able to bring life into this world. So often you are taken for granted and yet are so essential for our survival. Thank you.

HYMN: Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness #2120 (vs 1, 4)

Please remain seated as we prepare our hearts for prayer

PASTORAL PRAYERS:

Prayers of the People

Lord's Prayer:

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. Lead us, not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen

OFFERTORY: DOXOLOGY

Offering Prayer:

Through these gifts and offerings, bless your world, O God. Through our actions and lives, bring love to your creation, that all may know your presence and live in your grace. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Monday	Prayer Team	10 am	Zoom
Tuesday	Concert at Willits High School		
Wednesday	Book Study	Noon	In person

HYMN: Blest Be the Tie That Binds #557 (vs 1, 3)

BENEDICTION:

Go forth, as God gives you strength, trusting without wavering, and confident in God's love. Go in peace to love and serve our community.

SHALOM: Shalom to you now, Shalom my friends. May God's full mercies, bless you my friends. In all your living and through your loving, Christ be your Shalom, Christ be your Shalom.