

# **First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan**

**Sunday, June 27, 2021**

**“It’s a Blessing to Bless Others”**

**Pastor Ruth Azar**

**Director, Second Mile Center of Detroit**

**[Online Worship Service filmed at Second Mile Center of Detroit,  
during Mission Trip of FPCP Youth and Adult Advisors, June 21-25, 2021]**

## **Opening Music –**

**Fifth Season Ensemble sings “*I Will Sing of My Redeemer*”**

**Sharon Smith, Director and Accompanist**

## **Rev. Mark Hovermale – Welcome**

Welcome to our worship today. It’s a little different kind of a service online. I want to first say thank you to the Fifth Season Ensemble, Susan Underhill, Rob Hazlewood, the entire mission crew and everyone else who is helping today. Thank you!

It’s going to be a great service. We’re here at Second Mile Center, filming the whole thing. Our youth on the mission team have been working like crazy. We’ll get right to our announcements.

## **Announcements by FPCP Youth**

Every year, food pantries across Plymouth are fully stocked in the winter months thanks to generous holiday donations. However, when summer comes, donations drop considerably, and pantry shelves become bare. This can leave low-income, hardworking families with limited options during this time of year. The Plymouth Community United Way asks local business and community members to participate in our summer stock-up event to restock local food pantries with items to get them through the warmer months. This drive replaces the annual food drive sponsored by the U.S. Post Office which has been canceled this year. Drop off locations can be found in the Friday email newsletter or in the Sunday bulletin.

Beginning with the July 4<sup>th</sup> parking lot worship service, you will no longer need to pre-register your vehicle. We will still be greeting you and passing out bulletins, and communion elements when appropriate. Instead we will have a fellowship pad available at the coffee table and we will pass the pad to those sitting outside in chairs. If you choose to remain in your car, we will bring the pad to you to sign. Thank you for pre-registering all these months.

The National / International Mission Committee has a unique mission experience available to you at Colina de Luz Orphanage in Mexico. Anyone, 21 years old or older, and those 18 years old or older with a parent or guardian’s permission, is invited to join the team that’s

being assembled for the mission trip August 3<sup>rd</sup> through August 9<sup>th</sup>. Talk to Jim Bernard for more details.

Finally, I want to say a big thank you to everyone who donated to our Renew. Refresh and Return campaign. So far we've raised over \$75,000, which means we can now afford to paint the ceiling, upgrade lighting, and install live streaming equipment, all in the sanctuary. Thank you again so much for helping us reach our goal of renewing and refreshing our worship space before our return in late July.

### **Rev. Mark Hovermale – Opening Prayer**

Let us pray. We come before you, Lord, and we thank you for this service because it's an opportunity to worship you. It's an opportunity to come before you and say how amazing you are. We pray this service is a sweet sound in your ear. Thank you for all the hard work that's being done at Second Mile Center. We pray for your blessing on this service and on the Second Mile Center as well. Amen.

### **Fifth Season Ensemble sings “Christ, You Call Us All in Service” Sharon Smith, Director and Accompanist**

### **Rev. Hovermale – Introduction to Today's Theme**

Our worship theme today is, again, different. We are here at Second Mile Center. *Serving* is our whole theme this entire week and a theme of this service. It's a privilege to serve!

I'm standing in front of a mural that was done over a decade ago by a bunch of students when we came here, as I said, about 2010 or 2011. We're here, eleven years later, partnering again with Second Mile Center. Again, it's a privilege to serve and it's not just a privilege to serve; serving is what we're *supposed* to be doing! Part of being in relationship with Jesus Christ is serving others. We partner in Christ's mission and in His Word.

We are partners with Second Mile Center and so we work *with* them. This is an unbelievable opportunity for us to share faith together, back and forth. We were doing that eleven years ago and also today!

Our students have been tackling projects here a lot better than I do. I can tell you this much: They serve, and they don't look at it as anything different than their serving because they love Jesus Christ, and they want to serve the kids and the families here at Second Mile Center and serve their Lord.

*You* might not be here building shelves or installing new concrete, but you can serve people in *your* life. You're going to hear from Pastor Ruth today about how you can serve, because serving is not an option! As followers of Christ, it is the lifeblood of our faith. Christ has said that to love your neighbor as yourself is one of the most important commandments, and one way we do that, probably the most important way, is to serve!

### **FPCP Youth – Scripture Readings**

#### **Psalm 41:1-4 (A Psalm of David) (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> Blessed are those who have regard for the weak;  
the LORD delivers them in times of trouble.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD protects and preserves them—  
they are counted among the blessed in the land—  
he does not give them over to the desire of their foes.

<sup>3</sup> The LORD sustains them on their sickbed  
and restores them from their bed of illness.

<sup>4</sup> I said, “Have mercy on me, LORD;  
heal me, for I have sinned against you.”

### **Ephesians 2:4-10**

<sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. <sup>6</sup> And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup> in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

### **Youth Prayer**

Father, we pray that we will implement what we are learning here in our lives. We thank you, Lord, for the Second Mile Center and for all the wonderful things they do for the people here in Detroit. We pray that we will never forget that nothing is too difficult for you.

Amen.

### **Ruth Azar — Sermon: “It’s A Blessing to Bless Others”**

I thank you for letting me share God's word with you today. Let us pray.

Prepare our hearts, oh God, to accept your Word. Silence in us any voices that we hear and let us only hear your Word and be obedient, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

For the last few weeks I have been listening to your sermons online. Mark and Ashley have been asking, “Are you a new creation in Christ?” Well, God does call us to repent from our sins and to believe in Jesus Christ to receive forgiveness for our sins and to receive the gift of eternal life. Because of God's great love for us, rich in mercy, by grace we have been saved and made alive with Christ.

This is good news. It is good news indeed! It is a great message. You see, we have been saved through faith, not by ourselves, not by works; no, a gift of God. Christ died as a ransom to set us free. We have the gospel of grace, and we are under the new covenant. We live by the Spirit, so let us walk the walk as ambassadors of Christ, keeping in step

with the Spirit, serving others humbly in love. Because you see, how you choose to lead your life *does* matter.

Ephesians 1:4 states that God chose us before the creation of the world! God chose us for this season, right now, right here. You and I are on this earth for His purposes. This is no mistake, no coincidence. You and I, together, are here, chosen for this time. This is our season to be the body of Christ, the family of God, not for our own fleshly purposes, but for God's purposes.

I want you to think about *your* purposes. What are they? Are they worldly? Are they uncertain? Will they die with you? Now I want us to think about the purposes of God which are always certain and will reach beyond time. Scripture tells us that godliness has value for all things, holding promises for both this present life and the life to come. We labor and we strive because we have put our hope in the living God. As a new creation we devote ourselves to meditate in God's Word, to prayer, to seek God and, in love, to teach and bless others.

Scripture tells us, do not neglect your gift. Be diligent in these matters. Give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. People are going to walk around and say, "What do they have that I don't have?" Christ in us! Persevere to bring forth fruit, improving every opportunity of doing good, and furthering God's Kingdom. You see, we are on assignment with joy, regardless of the ups and downs that we have every day.

Today we have heard the reading of David's Psalm -- Psalm 41. David is sure of God's promises to strengthen and comfort him. David writes we are blessed for considering the poor and the afflicted, whether it's in mind or body. As a new creation in Christ, like David, we should have a determination in our hearts to be pleasing in the sight of the Lord. That we should go forth as the hands and feet of Jesus Christ, being a blessing to others is even commanded in 1 Timothy, chapter 6, verses 18 through 19. It says,

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. <sup>19</sup> In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

I hope you heard, "in the coming age." Wow! Now that's a blessing, to bless others. Now I'm not talking about blessing someone to impress others, I call that "show time"; or to impress God, because you can't; nor doing a good deed to earn an award. The Bible counts this all as "dead works."

No, the invitation to the Kingdom of God is not reward-based. It's not like that advertisement, "What's in your wallet?" No, you see, you cannot *earn* it, so it's not what's in your wallet. It is what dwells in your heart!

I thought all week of a story to put into the sermon and came up blank, because I have so many. Then this morning, finally, God gave it to me and said, "Share this one." A couple months ago I got a phone call saying, "Ruth, we have a group that is making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and praying over them and we'd like to know if you would like them, because the other place we were giving them to for months no longer wants them. They've decided to stop that ministry." I was thinking, "not really." I asked, "Well what day is it?" "On Tuesday" was the answer. I went, oh, I'm out. You see, Tuesday I already get 170 prepared meals delivered to our site. You know, lasagna, cheeseburgers, pizzas and turkey subs, which are a little bit, maybe, better than peanut butter and jelly, at least to

me. So I thought, this is a great way for me to say, "I'm out!" Well, I stopped and said to myself, "Okay, God, what do you say?" And it was, "Oh, yeah! You're saying, 'yes', Ruth!" So I said, "Okay, yes, I'd be happy to take them." So the caller says, "Great, Ruth!"

The next week comes up and he says, "What time are you picking them up, Ruth?" Now I've got another job! Oh, my goodness! I thought they were being delivered to me! So there I am, grumbling, not happy, week after week showing up, and then all of a sudden I realized I was no longer grumbling. Instead, I was excited to go and pick up those sandwiches, and hopefully to see that couple and their two sons, if they were in. It was just delightful to receive, what is it, Fuji apples or Gala apples today. Are you giving me new socks and new underwear? I couldn't wait to pick them up! It was no longer a chore. I was no longer doing it for all the wrong reasons!

You see, I had service, the attitude of service, inside of me now for this. When I bring it back to the Second Mile Center, those men, especially those men on the streets, we just give them those sandwiches to put in their pockets. They want the socks, too! "Oh my God, you want to talk about brand new underwear, a precious commodity in the community. They say to me, "Oh my gosh! They're still in the package, Pastor! You know you gave me more than one?" And I say, "God bless you!"

So who has truly been blessed by this? I can tell you I am so blessed to be able to serve in this matter, at this time in my life. When it becomes so natural for us to serve and do things rich in good deeds, when we become generous and willing to share, then our heart truly has been transformed!

I even think of the countless people that have come to Second Mile Center to share in this with us, to be the missionaries for the last 15 years. They have come from as far away as California, from Florida, from Delaware, Colorado, and from Massachusetts. They have come from Battle Creek, from Plymouth and Farmington.

But I want to tell you the greatest partnership God has brought forward to us as missionaries has been the First Plymouth Church! You see, you are the church that is willing to go out there and be the hands and the feet of Christ. You have had an impact on people. The body of Christ among you has embraced people who do not look like you, who do not act like you. Both economically and socially, they are nothing like you, and yet you come and bless them with your gifts, your talents, and your treasures. You serve them, not to get that reward here on earth, not to be praised or thanked by us, but I know in my heart that all the glory and honor is given to God Almighty! But, together, I say with you, "Thank you, God! Thank you, God, for letting them hear your call to help those who are underserved."

If I were to ask every one of you today to stand up if you have ever helped Second Mile Center of Detroit throughout our 15 years, I believe you would all be standing up today. You have been praying for us to keep safe, you have encouraged us to stay on these front lines, you have given us countless volunteer hours to help sustain us and feed our community, and the dollars to support us. You have shared in the annual golf outing, and your latest endeavor, with the Fitness in Christ project, to build the parking lot, this beautiful new parking lot that we can play on, and the missionaries who came this week, day after day, blessing us.

But the good news is the transformation of people! People stop by and say, "Why is Second Mile Center still here? How are you staying? How are you such a light in the

darkness? My goodness, it's like finding a needle in a haystack! How do you do it?" The answer is simple, God! God! Even for us to share with them our story about the parking lot, ten years of praying for that lot. Ten years! I am so sure that God said, "Ruth, please stop talking to me about it! It's my timing and not yours, Ruth." He put the call out to First Plymouth Church and you, as the body of Christ, heard God's call and you responded!

I say Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Through the years some of you have asked me, "So what transformation do you see, Ruth?" I just want to share a few with you. Let's talk about the child who's the first one to ever graduate high school in their family, or the first one to graduate from college,, or children and adults being baptized, joining churches, spreading the love of Jesus, or children deciding to be a part of "our gang." We say we're the gang of Jesus Christ, of faith, hope and love. They're not joining the local or national gangs that are in our community, that are teaching them how to sell drugs, drug and alcohol use, and hatred. These gangs call our zip code 4820-Die!

One by one, children and adults are transformed by the love of God, being the change. But one of the most hopeful things for me lately is I'm seeing boys turning into men who have had a child, unfortunately, not being married, but they have stepped up. They are not going to have that child be a fatherless child in our community. They're not abandoning them. They're not going to be absent from them because they're in prison or being murdered on these streets. They are the change! We have seen them become active fathers in their child's life, willing to support them, feed them, bring them to us so we can pray over them. They are willing to raise them and nourish them to be successful. Yes, we have seen transformation here!

We only can do it because all of your hearts are with us, and by your love and support that we share with others.

When we start to think about all the blessings we have and we go out and we help others, our lives begin to change. When we take the focus off of ourselves and off of our problems, and begin looking for ways to serve and to bless others, God fills you up with joy, peace, and satisfaction like no other. We are blessed to be loved and to be needed by so many. It's so exciting to think you can do something, that you can help another person.

It doesn't mean you need to come to Second Mile Center. So listen to God and observe those around you. Hear people in conversation to learn what their needs are. They're going to tell you. It could be as simple as, "You know what? I just need someone to listen to me today. I need a prayer. I need someone to encourage me, send me a card." "My friend, how about a drive or maybe some food or clothing or a cup of coffee with you?"

The Bible gives us so many examples of those who put the needs of others above themselves. We have Abraham, with his nephew Lot. He told him, "You pick the land you want. I'll just take the leftovers." That's pretty good! How about the widow of Zarephath, who had only enough food for one meal for her son and herself, but yet she gave it to the prophet Elijah, putting his needs above hers. So many stories that we could give you! Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. Or how about Paul. He could have escaped out of jail but he stayed there to witness to others.

The Bible shows us how to live our lives, but we need to yield to God's purpose, to give blessings to others. Giving of ourselves is life-changing. The Lord himself said it is more

blessed to give than to receive. So, I say, "Thank you for investing and being a Christ follower, today and every day of your lives."

God's purpose is live on forever. Our godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. We, as believers, are to live our lives assured that our existence is not done when our body fails us.

You see we know our forwarding address after our body fails us. If I were to give each one of you a forwarding address form from the US Postal Service on your death bed and said, "Please write your forwarding address," I would like to think that this is what I would get back. The first line would be "My Father's House." The second line would be "Room Unknown." The third line would be "Heaven." There it is! Bang! We know where we're going, "My Father's house, with many rooms."

Our existence is not done when our body fails us. We have a life to come--eternity in our Father's house. Can you imagine it, or is it beyond your imagination? So go, invest, bless others. Put the needs of others over yourself and make disciples in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Rev. Hovermale — Prayers of the People and The Lord's Prayer**

Our prayers of the people is a little different today. I'm sitting in a room that was filled with students just a few hours ago, putting backpacks together with a bunch of school supplies. We talked about prayers of the people and praying for all the people in need. There's a lot of great need down here in Detroit. Our students didn't just pray about it but got involved and they put together school supplies for the kids here to use in the fall.

Again, it is an incredible gift to partner with Second Mile Center. So as we pray the prayers of the people, ask yourself what you can do to answer these prayers of the people.

Let us pray. We come before you, Lord, and are thankful. We're thankful for the great weather we have had this week at Second Mile Center. We thank you for just being you and being so faithful to us.

We have so many concerns for so many things, and as the spirit allows, we take time and specifically pray for a few of those. We pray for those who are struggling this season, whether they've lost loved ones or they're just struggling with life, those who are struggling with fear, those who have had unexpected changes to their family lives, for those who have needs, physical needs, emotional needs, spiritual needs.

We take a moment and pray for the many ministries that cover those needs--Hope Clinic, Colina de Luz, Youth Haven and the Second Mile Center. We pray for our brothers and sisters all the way over in Malawi and our sister church. We thank you for the new pastor that has been called there.

We pray for the Holy Spirit, for your Holy Spirit, to sweep through our lives, through our church, our state and our country and bring about revival in our hearts, as we have seen this week the revival that has happened here at Second Mile Center in our students.

We pray all these things and more in the name of your son Jesus Christ who taught us to pray with the words,

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 debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power and the glory forever.  
Amen.

**Fifth Season Ensemble sings "*His Strength Is Perfect*"  
Sharon Smith, Director and Accompanist**

**Ruth Azar – Benediction and Blessing**

Go forth in peace, for you have followed the good road. Go forth without fear, for God created you and made you holy. Now, go into the world blessing others with confidence, for you are God's handiwork, a new creation in Christ. Go and make disciples. Amen.