

God planned for these things to be the way that we live our lives. God has in mind for us, things that are good, things that are filled with life and part of our stories and stained glass today. Help us see different aspects of that. We continue on our journey, this, uh, over the past several weeks of taking a look at the stained glass in the sanctuary scene where it connects with the stories of scripture and how we might connect with our lives today. Today we will be taking a look at the windows under the balcony on the west side. I will start in the back. Um, so those you can't see from here, but we'll start in the back. We'll make our way forward. You'll see those images on the screen today. So it began a very, in the very back on the far northwest on in the ushers room as a lamp stand, or you may know it as a Menorah.

Um, this image that depicts a lamp stander monogamy to pure gold. Um, it was used in the portable sanctuary which was set up by Moses in the wilderness. And later in the temple in Jerusalem, fresh olive oil, the purest quality, um, was burned daily to light lamps. A couple of passages of scripture to describe both. It's a, it's a blueprint and its design and its description isn't the same passage of scripture that we see a couple of weeks ago when we saw the breastplate, the chest pendant of these, these items that were used in the worship of God in the Old Testament in exodus 25 that can lampstand the pure hammered, golden lampstands base branches, cups, flowers, and pedals should all be attached to it. It should have six branches growing out from its sides. Three branches on one side of the lampstand and three branches on the other side of the lamp stand.

And then a few chapters later, we hear about how this lamp stand is to be used. You must require the Israelites to bring you pure oil of crushed olives for the light so that the lamp maybe set up contests to burn continually in the meeting. 10 outside the veil that hangs in front of the Covenant Document. Aaron and his sons will tend the lamp from evening to morning in the Lord's presence. It will be a permanent regulation for the Israelites in every generation. So this lamp, Stan wants to be kept burning all night long from evening to morning. Um, it was part of the responsibility of a Aaron and his sons, the priests to do this. Uh, just a word of, of note, you may be familiar perhaps with the Menorah that's connected with Hanukkah. Um, the, uh, manure at Hanukkah has nine at branches. Um, this has seven branches.

So a bit of a distinction there, um, in, uh, uh, in these pieces of the Jewish faith, one of the ways that I make sense of this for us today is by how it was used. This lamp stand was kept burning all night long. And especially there, you might imagine before, well before there was electricity to keep things light at night. This lamp stand provided light in the darkness and perhaps in the very same way, not exactly the same way, but we might also about it perhaps that when we find ourselves in darkness, because we certainly find it in our lives at times, for a variety of reasons, that God will light the way that even though it may seem them, as we considered a number, the stars in the sky last week, there is some light in the midst of the darkness and the lampstand reminds us of this.

God is light and the darkness of our lives, not just for Moses and the Israelites when they lit this particular piece of sacred furniture, but for you and for me today. This is the lamp stand. The next image, a further closer to the front. I was still inside the room though is an image of a broken chain. Unbroken chain is really a powerful image. I'll author Alana Francis writes in Christianity today about broken chains. Chains are an obvious symbol of imprisonment in physical terms. They restrict us, hold us down and back and signify our captive state. In spiritual terms, they do more or less the same. Well, many of us will experience physical change. We're by no means immune to the impact of spiritual chains which harm our spiritual growth. These kinds of shopping shackles are just as unmissable and detrimental to our freedom because they affect our behavior, our outlook, and our faith. There's a number of scriptures that describe a change, uh, or chains being broken. I'm one of the share a couple

of them with you today. The first from Psalm [inaudible]. So they cried out to the Lord in their distress and God saved them from their desperate circumstances.

Yeah,

God brought them out from the darkness and deep gloom. He shattered their chains. Have you ever in your life felt like you have been in desperate circumstances?

The Psalm has promises that God will bring you out of the darkness and God will in time perhaps shatter your chains and the district from Jesus in which he shares a words not particularly related, um, to uh, to change, but I believe can help us make sense of this image as well. In John Chapter Eight, Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, you are truly my disciples. If you remain faithful to my teaching, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Respondent were Abraham's children. We've never been anyone slaves. How can you say that we will be set free? Jesus answered, I assure you that everyone who sins is a slave to sin flavor isn't a permanent member of the household, but the sun is therefore, if the son makes you free, you really will be free.

Jesus, promise of freedom, not just for those that heard his words when he first shared them. This promise of freedom, of being able to experience the truth of God and to let it set us free from those things that bind us. It's still true today. Got Offers, the opportunity to break the chains of those things that bind us. And this broken chain reminds us of this power of God in our lives today. The next image just inside, uh, the very back there. You May, if you turn your neck, you can see it there, the dove and the rainbow. I'm the dove, of course that becomes a symbol of peace in this story. We looked at doves last week and the creation story, but this is most certainly, um, a story of Noah's Ark. You see there an olive branch in its mouth, um, the water receding and the rainbow, the rainbow as well.

A powerful image that you know from that story, very same story, the symbol of union, it appeared in the sky after the flood to reassure Noah of God's forgiveness in general, outside of this story, the rainbow is a symbol of God's pardon and forgiveness of humans for their sins. You remember that at that time the flood was sent because of the great, uh, the great evil of the people that were living on the world. And God, one of the fresh start wanted to begin again, a desired to begin again with all of creation except for this few group of people and animals that were there on the Ark. So we hear this story again in Genesis Chapter Eight, verses six through six, beginning of verse six. After 40 days. No, I open the window of the art that he had made. He sent out a raven and it flew back and forth until the water's over.

The entire earth had dried up. Then he sent out the dove to see if the water's on all the fertile land had subsided, but the devil found no place to set its foot and returned to him and the arcs since water still cover the entire earth. No stretched out his hand took it and brought it back into the Ark. He waited seven more days and sent the dove out from the arc again. The dove came back to him and the evening grasping a torn olive leaf in its beak. And then in chapter nine, beginning in verse 12, God said, this is the symbol of the covenant that I'm drawing up between me and you and every living thing with you on behalf of every future generation. For instance, you and me, every future generation, I've placed my bone in the clouds. It will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the Earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I will remember the covenant between me and you and every living being among all the creators. Floodwaters will never again destroy all creatures.

God offers the opportunity to begin again. The dove, a sign of peace, the olive branch, assign of new life, the opportunity to begin again for Noah and his family, and the rainbow as a sign of God's promises in this case, that particular promise that God wouldn't destroy all the creatures in the earth with flood waters. Again, I need also a sign of God's continual promise that the chance to the beginning again is offered for you and me. When we find ourselves in a place where you feel like there's no way out of it, God can offer us the chance to begin again and to discover new life and to seek to plant new things and to find ourselves growing in life with God. And so the dove and the remain and the rainbow remind us of these things, reminded us that God's promises that continue for all time.

The next image is a, is a pulpit, uh, pretty clearly, um, a pulpit, as you may know, is a raised stand for preachers in a Christian church as a symbol in stained glass that represents the preaching of the word of God. I'm a united methodist. Preachers have a united methodism, has a long history of a preaching being a significant part of the service still today. Um, it's the, the single longest, uh, part of the service and helping people understand the word of God, making connections with their life of faith and the way that they live in their everyday lives. Being both relevant to our lives today and faithful was something that, um, I hope to do certainly around the world. I'm around town throughout all of our communities. Hopes to do this as well. And the pulpit reminds us of that. Now there's only one reference to a pulpit and scriptures and it's, uh, it's in the Old Testament.

Um, and we don't actually see that this word in the common English Bible. Um, but I'll, I'll read it to you from Nehemiah Chapter Eight, verse four. So the scribe show it on a wooden platform that had been made for this purpose and they're standing beside him were a bunch of other people that were standing beside him and the King James version, the wooden platform, uh, that we see here in this verse as translated as a pulpit of wood. I'm so [inaudible] getting ready to, to speak to the people who's getting to share with him the word of God. And this is a, this is the reference that we see for a pulpit in the scriptures, but certainly within our practice of faith, I'm a very common symbol. I'm a very [inaudible] image is in churches. I'm certainly around town and uh, and around the world.

And part of what I believe that this symbol reminds us is that, is that proclaiming the word of God is not only for clergy, that pulpit isn't up here in the front. Oh, well we have one here. We have a chance to, to speak here in this sanctuary. But um, but that pulpit is out where you all sit and it's a reminder that the clergy person is not the only one who has the opportunity to share God's word that's available for all of us. Now, when you and I do it throughout the week, it may not be at a piece of furniture like this. In fact, it almost certainly isn't, but by the way you speak, by the way that you live your life, by the way that you interact with other people, you have the chance to proclaim God's. And I believe that this pulpit in our stained glass helps remind us of that, that we're all called to share the good news of Jesus Christ, to share God's love with others, to talk about the way that God has been at work in our life, to proclaim God's word. And this is the pulpit in our stained glass.

The next image is the Ark of the covenant. A, again, another piece of sacred furniture. The gold covered wooden chest with a lid on cover there, uh, with Angel's. I'm describing the book of Exodus. I'm in this portion of scripture. Extra is 25, we see several of our stained glass images that are described in this section of, of uh, how to worship and how to connect with God. Um, and we hear these words from Twenty Five Verse Twenty Chapter Twenty Five have then make an acacia wood chest. It should be 45 inches long, 27 inches wide and 27 inches high. Cover it with pure gold. Now I don't know why this, our image doesn't have gold in it, uh, but it doesn't, uh, inside and out and make a gold molding all around it. But the gold cover on top of the chest and put the covenant document that I will give you inside the chest there, I will meet you from there above the cover from between the two wings. Heavenly

creatures that are on top of the chest containing the covenant. I will deliver to you all that I command you concerning the Israelites. This is the arc of the covenant picture there again. Now again, we just have, we have gold in the sunglass. Why? That's not gold. I'm uncertain. Um, but the scriptures tell us that this is the place where Moses went to meet God, a place where Moses went to meet God. Not only that, but to listen and to hear God speak.

And so again, we, we don't have one of these up here on the chancel and I doubt that you have one in your home. Maybe you do, but it's a symbol for us today.

Yeah,

it reminds us to answer the question, where is it? You go to meet God. Of course we know that we can meet God everywhere, but there are things, a particular places perhaps that are more meaningful or significant place where you can perhaps hear God more clearly. For some of you, it's, it's this place. Maybe it's a favorite chair in your home, a special corner of a particular room. Maybe it's when you're outside, I don't know what it is for you, but where is it that you go to meet God? Where's the place or the time or the circumstances when you're able to experience God most profoundly or hear God speak most clearly?

OK?

This arc of the Covenant was that place for Moses and the people of Israel, and we need those places today when he particular places where we can pay attention to our relationship with God and intend to it, and find time to listen for word for us today. This is the arc of the covenant.

The next image is the bronze snake. We've heard about that in the passage from numbers. Uh, you remember that the story of bronze snake mountain around the cross was because the people were impatient with God. God had sent poisonous snakes. They turned away from their sins and the bronze snake was able to heal them. And this is one of those stories where I think this is, it's kind of a funny story. So the people aren't patient godsend snakes and then they turn back and they say, God sends this, will make this broad snake put it up on the pole. And then I think it'll be OK. It's a little bit of unusual perhaps, but, but part of what it teaches us is that is that when we turn away from our sins, God offers healing for us.

When we turn away from where we know that when we seek to live a new life, God is able to wash it clean, to make right what has been made, what has been wronged, and to heal up broken places and the bronze snake there on a pole as a reminder of that. It's a reminder, the forgiveness that got off for the people of Israel, relenting repenting from that poisonous snakes that he had sent on them. And also for us today, uh, for some people see in this image a symbol as well of Christ on the cross in a different way than this bronze snake of course, offering a chance of healing from our sins. And so this image reminds us that God is there to offer us healing and new life and opportunity again to begin again to receive God's great mercy.

OK?

It's available all the time. Not just in the story long ago and far away out in the wilderness on the Sinai peninsula, but for you and me and the symbol reminds us that God is able to offer us healing. When we turned back to God and recognize what we've done is wrong, this is the bronze snake.

The next image is the cup. Me just locate it. I'm coming up here to the front and you can see that I'm at least two different ways that we might interpret this particular image. Um, certainly as a sign of holy communion, I'm just above it. Um, to the south is the wheat we talked about as a sign of holy communion as well. And so we look at the Cup as a reminder of the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples and invited us to continue to share today. But also it's the reminder of Jesus request in the garden and guest somebody, um, that when he was in agony and suffering that he asked God to take away his cup. We find both of these, uh, in Luke chapter 22 starts there in the upper room and the continuous later in the garden of the guest seminar or read from verse starting with Verse Nineteen. After taking the bread and thanks. He broke it and gave it to them saying, this is my body which is given for you to do this in remembrance of me, the same way he took the cup after the meal and said, this Cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

And then just a few verses later in the very same chapter in the garden of Gethsemane and Jesus left and made his way to the Mount of olives. The disciples followed him. When he arrived, he said to them, pray that you won't give in to temptation. He withdrew from them about a stone's throw. Now down and prayed. He said, father, if it's your will, take this cup of suffering away from me. However, not my will, but your will must be done

in the same image. We see these, uh, perhaps seemingly very different, um, experiences. Uh, the cup of new life, the cup of salvation. Um, the chance of this new, a promise that God makes through Jesus Christ. The celebration that we have of holy communion is, is one that can be joyous and it reminds us of God's grace and mercy and ended at the same time. This Cup reminds us that, that even Jesus himself, when he was going through this dark night, this most difficult time in his life when he knew and he was to be put to death. He said, God, take this cup of suffering from me, but not my will, but yours be done. And for me, uh, I find that a difficult thing at times to say, God, not my will, but your will be done until this cup, but both reminds us that we might be called invited just like Jesus did, to offer our lives, to ask God to take away the cup of suffering, but most importantly, that God's will to be done. And it's a sign of God's mercy poured out for the whole world through the blood of Jesus Christ, to the promise of the new covenant made for each one of us. This is the cup.

Finally, the last image on this, on the west side here, uh, before the transept an alter from the old testament, an altar is a place where, uh, sacrifices were offered, a were sacrifices were placed. I'm certainly, this particular alter was most likely I'm out, certainly not in the temple. Um, you can see that it was made of, made up stones here and an offering being burnt on top of it, we hear a description of an alternate from Exodus Chapter Twenty Verses Twenty four and 25

God says, make for me an alter from fertile soil in which to sacrifice your entirely burned offerings, well-being, sacrifices your sheep and your oxygen. I will come to you and bless you in every place where I make sure my name is remembered, but if you do make me for me in alter from stones, don't build it with chiseled stone. That's using a chisel on the stone, will make it on pure. So, uh, clearly in this image they took the second a. This is not of soil, um, it is of stones or the ones that haven't been chiseled symbol on that reminds us of that. We might offer what we have to God, the people of Israel, and it's recorded in the Old Testament, brought um, uh, animal sacrifices of livestock, of dub stuff have a variety of other means and they offered it to God, us their first fruits, and we as well, um, seek to offer the first

fruits of what God has given us back to God, what God has given us to offer it back to God. The Altar help reminds us of that we're not going to ask you to do, to emulate animal sacrifices are necessarily anything involving fire, but God has given us a lot. And so we offer what we have back to God.

These stories in the stained glass connect with the stories of scripture. They continue to connect with our story today. And the good news is that the God who told these stories, who interacted with people and these ways over times whose stories are told in our stained glass is still at work in our lives today. So offer the best of what you have to proclaim God's word through your life. God is light in the darkness. God is with us. In suffering, God can help you break free from what binds you got offers forgiveness from our sins, a fresh start, a new beginning. God's promises are forever and God's mercies are new every morning. These are the stories in our stained glass. Will you pray with me? Oh God, we ask that you would help us live as part of your story. We take these images, these scriptures, this meaning,

yeah,

not just hold it in her head, but let it sink down to our heart and out into the way that we live our lives. Well, God, we offer ourselves to you. In Jesus name. Amen.