

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 10, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**FIFTH SUNDAY of EASTER**

**GATHERING**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: We come to give our thanks and praise!  
All: **We come in joy and thanksgiving to celebrate the gift of new life!**  
One: We come to know the Lord.  
All: **We come to give of ourselves even as God has given to us.**  
One: So come, friends, come!  
All: **Let us worship the Lord our God!**

**\*OPENING HYMN “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” GtG 366**

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|--|---|
| 1. <b>Love divine, all loves excelling,<br/>Joy of heaven, to earth come down,<br/>fix in us thy humble dwelling;<br/>all thy faithful mercies crown.<br/>Jesus, thou art all compassion;<br/>pure, unbounded love thou art;<br/>visit us with thy salvation;<br/>enter every trembling heart.</b> | 2. <b>Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit<br/>into every troubled breast;<br/>let us all in thee inherit;<br/>let us find the promised rest.<br/>Take away the love of sinning;<br/>Alpha and Omega be;<br/>end of faith, as its beginning,<br/>set our hearts at liberty.</b>                     |
| 3. <b>Come, Almighty, to deliver;<br/>let us all thy life receive;<br/>suddenly return, and never,<br/>nevermore thy temples leave.<br/>Thee we would be always blessing,<br/>serve thee as thy hosts above,<br/>pray, and praise thee without ceasing,<br/>glory in thy perfect love.</b>         | 4. <b>Finish then thy new creation;<br/>pure and spotless let us be;<br/>let us see thy great salvation<br/>perfectly restored in thee:<br/>changed from glory into glory,<br/>till in heaven we take our place,<br/>till we cast our crowns before thee,<br/>lost in wonder, love, and praise.</b> |

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**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**We come with joy and singing, O Lord. Yet even as we come, we know all is not well. Our lives do not reflect your glory as you desire. We tend to give you “lip service” only. Our hearts are not totally yours. Forgive us, gracious God. By your**

**Spirit, remake us in the image of your Son that we may walk in his way, and love and serve you all our days. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from I John 4)*

One: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent the Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven."

**All: "God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent the only Son into the world so that we might live through him."**

One: So rejoice and be glad and believe in the good news!

**All: For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved, we are given new life. Amen! Alleluia!**

**\*RESPONSE OF PRAISE** "Halle, Halle, Hallelujah!" *(refrain)* GtG 591

**Halle, Halle, Halleluja!**

**Halle, Halle, Halleluja!**

**Halle, Halle, Halleluja!**

**Halleluja! Halleluja!**

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**THE WORD**

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Come, Holy Spirit,  
that through your word we may be guided  
into the love of God for all the world. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE READINGS** John 15:1-12

I John 4:7-21

JOHN 15:1-12 *(New Revised Standard Version)*

<sup>1</sup> "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup> My Father removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit my Father prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

<sup>9</sup> “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in my Father’s love. <sup>11</sup> I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

I JOHN 4:7-21 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent God’s only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent God’s Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and God’s love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in God and God in us, because God has given us of God’s Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent the Son as the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup> So we have known and believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

<sup>17</sup> Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as the Lord is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because God first loved us. <sup>20</sup> Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> The commandment we have from the Lord is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

SERMON “Cycle of Love” by Pastor Bill Vincent

“Ha!” comes the derisive reply.

Lucy and Linus are having an animated conversation on the sidewalk as Lucy jumps rope. Lucy and Linus are, of course, the somewhat testy brother/sister duo in Charles Schulz’s “Peanuts” comic strip.

Lucy says to Linus,

**You a doctor! Ha! That's a big laugh!**

**You could never be a doctor! You know why?**

**Because you don't love [hu]mankind, that's why!**

As Lucy heads off, Linus shouts after her,

**I love [hu]mankind ... it's people I can't stand!!**

(The Gospel According to Peanuts, pp.122, 123-124)

**"I love [hu]mankind ... it's people I can't stand!!"**

We can identify, can't we?

We have all, at some time at least, had the experience. We love ... maybe the idea of humankind, of what the human race can be (in its more noble aspects). We love human beings in the abstract.

And the abstract notion of humanity is (quite honestly) one we create in our own image.

Whereas God salts and peppers the world with people created in God's image, and they're not at all like us: people who see the world -- life -- from a different perspective, different perspectives.

Then, we have the unfortunate experience of actually meeting a specimen of our abstract idea of humanity. And it's difficult, to say the very least.

They can be nasty, won't give us the time of day; they might disagree with us (God forbid!), or betray us; they rub us the wrong way; they approach the world, and life, so very differently.

Yes, humanity in the abstract is a whole lot easier to love than humanity in person.

Ah, but we have God (thank goodness). We love God, and all is well. That's all we need.

Until we hear these words:

**Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars.**  
(v.20-NRSV)

Yikes!

It simply can't be done, according to these words:

**for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not see.** (v.20-NRSV)

Turns out, you can't love God and hate (or extremely dislike) people.

Then it is we realize, 'Oh no! we're in trouble'.

How do we do this?

How do we love those other people? those specific, concrete specimens of our noble, abstract idea of humanity? How do we love those faulty, fallible, far-from-perfect people that we, like Linus, can't stand?

In other words, to put it bluntly: How do we love each other?

Well, prayer might be one way. That might seem strange to suggest, but I sure could use some help with this. And prayer seems to be a good way to seek some help.

"God, help me to love." Seeking help from the ultimate source of help, and strength and guidance. Which also, of course includes my being willing to admit I need help, which only comes from a needed stance of humility.

Practice is another step to take -- the way we learn so much in life. If we don't know how to do something, we have to practice in order to learn and get better.

Of course, to speak of practice also means that failure and trying again is part of (the process) our learning to love. And so forgiveness and patience is part of it, too -- forgiveness and patience for each other, and even for ourselves.

And then there's community: learning together to love; knowing love through others; sharing (practicing) love with others -- others who also have a hard time loving people.

One thing to note about this learning to love others: it requires taking the focus off the self, taking the focus off me. I am supposed to "die to myself," as Jesus says elsewhere, give up focusing (all my attention on me) on myself, in order to love others. I am to "love my neighbor as myself," which doesn't mean I forget me but does mean I'm not focused on me but focused on the care and well-being of others.

But another crucial help in learning to love others is to remember this:

**God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.** (v.16b-NRSV)

You know, Christ talked a lot about "abiding" as he addressed the disciples that evening in the upper room:

**"Abide in me as I abide in you. [he said.] Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."** (v.4-5-NRSV)

Abide: remain. Being in relationship. Remaining in relationship with our Lord. Being intentional about our relationship with our Lord. Abiding in God, and so abiding in love, and learning (knowing) how to love.

Jesus said,

**"If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love."** (v.7,10,12-NRSV)

The First Letter of John says,

**The commandment we have from the Lord is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.** (v.21-NRSV)

It's almost a circular way of thinking.

But of course, commandments are hard, even a commandment to love.

Commandments are hard, especially without experience.

But wait: we do have experience. And that can provide a real starting point for us in our experiment (desire) to learn how to love 'people'.

And it starts with...God.

Oh, I know, on this day, you'd think I'd say "mothers." We might experience this love -- hopefully we do -- through our mothers.

But it really starts with...God. God, as the source (and, indeed, initiator) of love. For "God is love."

You see, the love we are called to live is not a love that is unknown to us. The love we are called to live, to embody, to demonstrate, is the very same love for which we are grateful.

**Rudolf Bultmann has written, "Only [the one] who is already loved can love."**  
(*Offenbarung und Heilsgeschehen* [Munich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1941], p.58). (Exegesis, The Interpreter's Bible, vol.XII, 1957, p.281)

Do we know that love?

Remember...

**In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us.**

Amos N. Wilder:

**We would not otherwise have known what love is.** (Exegesis, The Interpreter's Bible, vol.XII, 1957, p.279)

...were it not for the love we know from God.

Yes, Jesus speaks of it as a commandment:

**"This is my commandment, that you love one another..."**

A commandment that we find difficult. But hear the whole statement:

**"This is my commandment, that you love one another ... as I have loved you." (v.12-NRSV)**

There it is: Not only a guide for how to love, but a power to be able to love.

The power to obey Christ's command to love others flows from Christ's own act of loving us.

The point is that we are enabled to love beyond mere abstractions to actual, concrete, real acts of meaningful love and caring, precisely because God went beyond loving in the abstract to loving concretely -- in a painfully real manner -- in the specific, concrete person of Jesus Christ.

D. Moody Smith says,

**As God's love is no abstraction but consists in the giving up of [God's] Son, so the believer's love is not merely an emotion or attitude but consists of meaningful deeds (3:17-18).** (First, Second, and Third John, Interpretation series, 1991, p.109)

As we read earlier in John's letter, "Let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." (I Jn.3:18-NRSV)

The letter of James has this wonderful example:

**If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?** (James 2:15-16-NRSV)

And John might ask, 'Where is the love in that?'

It may not be the 10-point plan you were looking for, but we love -- we learn to love -- by remembering -- always remembering -- God's love for us: God's giving to us, God's caring for us, God's providing for us, God's protecting us.

When we are frustrated with and tired of another, then we need to recall God's patience with us.

When we are fed up with another/others, then we need to recall that God has never given up on us.

When we are overwhelmed with the needs of others, then we need to recall God's power for us and presence with us.

And through that remembering -- from that starting point, going back to that source (always) -- we continue to learn to love with more practice, more prayer, more support and encouragement of(in) the community.

"Beloved, let us love one another."

Yes, we know that love. The love of God, touching us, abiding in us, teaching us, caring for us, being patient with us.

The hope is not only that we would know the blessing of experiencing that love in and through others -- our mother, our father, our family and friends; the community, including the community of faith --

The hope is also that others would experience that love in and through us. For

**We love because God first loved us.** (v.19-NRSV)

### **\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.**

**Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,**

**and the communion of the Holy Spirit,  
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,  
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**With believers in every time and place,  
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death  
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

God of life and love,  
we are nurtured by the signs of Spring budding around us;  
we are sustained by the signs of your Spirit among us.  
Hear us as we share our prayers and hearts with you.

We give you thanks for the grace and gratitude  
we have come to know through our mothers.  
May you bless them and hold them  
even as they have blessed and held us.  
Abiding God, **hear our prayer.**

For those who stock shelves and those who deliver to stores,  
for those who check us out and those who bring our groceries out to us;  
we ask your provision and your protection  
even as they, in their work, seek to provide for and protect us.  
Abiding God, **hear our prayer.**

For those who patrol our streets and those who put out our literal fires,  
for those who doctor us and nurse us, and for those who sit by our bedside;  
we give our thanks for their nurture and care,  
and we ask your blessing upon them,  
that they too, by your grace,  
may be nurtured and cared for and protected.  
Abiding God, **hear our prayer.**

For those who seek to lead and those who seek to serve,  
we ask for the wisdom to discern your way  
and the courage to follow in your way.  
Abiding God, **hear our prayer.**

For the sick and the dying,  
we ask the assurance of your presence  
and the encouragement of your care,  
and the hope that is certain in you.  
Abiding God, **hear our prayer.**

For those who fear contracting the virus  
and those who fear not having enough food for the next meal,  
we ask your calm and your presence,  
and the care and assistance of others,  
that your bounty may be shared with those who have none,  
and your protection may be provided for those who have need.  
Abiding God, **hear our prayer.**

For those who suffer at the hands of others,  
we ask your refuge,  
and the strength to stand straight in the face of adversity;  
and we ask your courage to stand with them,  
and to say No to injustice and oppression in all its many forms.  
Abiding God, **hear our prayer.**

For all those who, for whatever reason, feel lost and without purpose,  
we ask your caring touch and your guiding hand,  
that hope may arise from despair  
and focus may emerge from confusion  
and joy may leap from the heart.  
Abiding God, **hear our prayer.**

For all your people and all your creation,  
we ask the outpouring of your love,

that mercy may increase  
and compassion may abound  
and life may be full  
through the grace of your presence  
and the bounty of your Spirit;  
in the name and for the sake of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ we pray;  
sharing together in the words he taught us, saying...

### **THE 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 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.**

### **OFFERING**

#### *Invitation*

Let us show our friendship with Christ  
and our love for our neighbors  
by giving generously so that  
we may bear the lasting fruit of Christ's love.

#### *\*Doxology GtG 606*

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
praise God, all creatures here below;  
praise God above, you heavenly host;  
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.  
(Public Domain)**

#### *\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**We thank you, O God, for your love, which gives us life, fills our hearts, and nurtures us in your way. Accept our gifts of love that your will may be done in our lives and your love shared with the world. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

## SENDING

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me” GtG 703

1. **Jesus, thy boundless love to me  
no thought can reach, no tongue declare;  
O knit my thankful heart to thee,  
and reign without a rival there!  
Thine wholly, thine alone, I'd live;  
myself to thee entirely give.**
  
2. **O grant that nothing in my soul  
may dwell, but thy pure love alone;  
O may thy love possess me whole,  
my joy, my treasure, and my crown!  
All coldness from my heart remove;  
may every act, word, thought be love.**
  
3. **O Love, how gracious is thy way!  
All fear before thy presence flies;  
care, anguish, sorrow melt away  
where'er thy healing beams arise.  
O Jesus, nothing may I see,  
nothing desire, or seek, but thee.**

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### **\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Live in the joy of Christ's love  
and in all the marvelous things that God is doing!

May the righteous fairness of God,  
the loving friendship of Christ,  
and the gift of the Holy Spirit  
go with you all.

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