

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 28, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

13th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 96)*

- One: "O sing to the Lord a new song!"
All: "Sing to the Lord, all the earth!"
One: "Sing to the Lord, bless the name of the Lord."
All: "Tell of God's salvation from day to day."
One: "Declare the glory of the Lord among the nations!"
All: "Declare God's marvelous works among all the peoples!"

***OPENING HYMN** "The God of Abraham Praise" GtG 49 *(Verses 1, 2, & 4)*

1. **The God of Abraham praise,
who reigns enthroned above,
the Ancient of Eternal Days,
the God of love!
The Lord, the great I Am,
by earth and heaven confessed,
we bow before your holy name,
forever blest.**

2. **Your spirit still flows free,
high surging where it will.
In prophet's word you spoke of old
and you speak still.
Established is your law,
and changeless it shall stand,
deep writ upon the human heart
by your strong hand.**

4. **You have eternal life
implanted in the soul;
your love shall be our strength and stay,
while ages roll.**

**We praise you, living God!
We praise your holy name:
the first, the last, beyond all thought,
and still the same!**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**We praise you with our lips, O God, yet hesitate in our hearts.
You call us to trust you, but we're not sure.
You invite us to follow you, but we're not sure.
You promise to provide for us, but we're not sure.
We hesitate to commit.
We hesitate to give you our all.
We hesitate to give you ourselves.
Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us.
Assure our hearts and affirm your presence.
Call to us once again,
and give us the heart and the will
to embrace you and your way,
even as you embrace us.
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: **So rejoice and believe the good news of God's grace: that in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, in Jesus Christ we are loved. Amen. Alleluia!**

***THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READINGS Genesis 22:1-14
John 21:15-19

GENESIS 22:1-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

*After these things God tested Abraham. God said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." God said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you." Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father Abraham, "Father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." He said, "The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "**God** will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.*

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." The angel said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you revere God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

JOHN 21:15-19 (New Revised Standard Version)

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “To the Mountain Top, or the Lakeside” by Pastor Bill Vincent

I do not know about you, but I don't think I could make it to the top of that mountain with Abraham. What about you?

“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.”

There's something about that picture of Abraham hiking, traveling to that mountain in the land of Moriah to sacrifice his son.

Could we do that? Would we do that?

But of course, our 21st century sensibilities will not allow us to consider the question seriously, let alone in any way literally. We tend to dismiss the question offhand, without a second thought. This request of God baffles and upsets us, it is somehow beyond us, beyond our understanding and comprehension. Surely not, we say. The God of which we know, revealed to us in Jesus Christ, would not ask us to sacrifice our children, or our parents, or anyone else for that matter. How barbaric!

Jesus does not ask us to sacrifice our children or parents, family or friends, or even ourselves, for that matter. Or does he?

“Unless you take up your cross and follow me...,” he said.

‘Well, sure,’ you say, ‘the way of the cross. Ah now, that's different.’

But I contend it really is not different. We may know something of the way of the cross. We may understand something of what Jesus says about it. And we may remember him and picture him in our minds: his model and example as he treads his own way of the cross.

But a crucial aspect of this faith story in Genesis is coming face to face with something of the inscrutable nature of God: the unknowable, unfathomable, mysterious ways of God.

And quite honestly, there is still much about the way of the cross that is still unknown to us, that baffles and confuses us, that is beyond our comprehension, and that is as mysterious to us as is the way to that mountain in the land of Moriah.

And so Jesus says to Peter as they walk together by the lake,

“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

There may be various ways to interpret that question. ‘Do you love me more than these other people (disciples) love me?’ ‘Do you love me more than you love these trappings of your former life as a fisherman?’

Maybe more to the point for us this morning, we hear it say to us: “Do you love me more than you love these others -- these other disciples, these other people, be they friends or even family, or even self?”

As Jesus said earlier in his ministry,

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

(Matthew 10:37-39-NRSV)

“Do you love me more than these?” It is, in essence, the same question God was asking Abraham.

“Will you sacrifice, give up for me that which is most precious to you?” It is, in essence, the same question Jesus was asking Peter.

For, underneath them both, is the question, “Who will be your God?”

Whom will you love most? Whom will you put first? Whom will you serve above all else? Whom will you trust and put your hope in?

Isaac, as the visible fulfillment/embodiment of the promise? Or God?

Your family (or friends), as the visible source of love and acceptance? Or God, who, in the worst case scenario is able still to provide you with mothers and brothers and sisters 100-fold?

God was testing Abraham’s belief that God would provide -- provide for life, provide for the promise.

Jesus was testing Peter’s love for him.

In the end, they are asking the same thing: who will be your God, the end all and be all of your life? Who will be the one in whom you trust and hope? Who will be the one whom you will serve and love above all else?

“Abraham, son of Terah, do you believe God will provide?” Do you trust in God to provide more than you trust in your own devices? “Do you,” in other words, “love me more than you love Isaac?”

“Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Do you,” in other words, “believe God will provide, even when you are led where you do not wish to go?”

“Bill, son of Bill” -- fill in your own name -- “do you believe God will provide? Do you love me more than anyone else, even yourself?”

The point is not, for us, human sacrifice: killing, or even abusing, another person to satisfy some twisted religious sensibility. Actually, many would say that part of the point of the story is to say clearly that God does NOT want child sacrifice, which some other peoples did practice.

God tested Abraham. God didn’t want Isaac’s death. At the moment, God didn’t want Isaac. God wanted Abraham. God wanted all of Abraham, heart, mind, and soul. God wanted Abraham, lock, stock, and barrel. God wanted Abraham’s undivided attention and uncompromised loyalty.

That’s what God wanted from Abraham ... and wants from us, too. Not a loyalty divided between hearth and heaven. Not a loyalty compromised by other commitments. But total, complete, undivided loyalty and love. Where all other loyalties and commitments are always secondary, and prioritized in light of the unquestionably primary loyalty and commitment to God. It can be no other way.

Abraham had all his eggs in the one basket labelled “Isaac.” And God said, “I want you to give me that basket.” And if the truth be told, Abraham did just that ... not by slitting Isaac’s

throat, but by demonstrating that he was willing to give up, to let go of that which was most precious to him -- all for God.

The call to give ourselves up to God; the call to place ourselves in the hands of God. Or, better yet, to take hold of God's hands. For when we do, we must let go of EVERYTHING else.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these? Then come, take my hands, and follow me."

Could you do it? Go your way, like Abraham, to that mountain in the land of Moriah to sacrifice to God, to give up, to let go of your child, or your spouse, or your parent, or anything or anyone else that is the most precious thing in the world to you, including your own self?

Could you do it? Go to the lakeside and converse with Jesus. And when he turned to you and said, "Tom, Dick, Harry; Jane, Amanda, Priscilla, do you love me more than you love these others?" what would you say? "Feed my sheep," he says to us, even though it mean walking in a way that we do not wish to go.

And in the end, I'm sorry to say, No, we probably wouldn't do it. Either make it to Moriah's mountain, or to answer Yes to questions put to us by Jesus by the lakeside. We wouldn't do it. We're not up to it.

But do not despair. That does not leave us doomed. Remember Isaac?

"The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" he asked. And Abraham answered -- in a way avoiding the question, in a way more truthful and profound than he could know -- Abraham answered,

"God will provide...."

We assume he believed that, even though he didn't know how God would provide. In spite of everything, and all evidence to the contrary, he believes.

What exactly does he believe? That somehow he will not have to sacrifice Isaac? That somehow, even if he does have to sacrifice Isaac, Isaac will be returned to him? That somehow, even if he does have to sacrifice Isaac, the promise of descendants and a name will be fulfilled aside from Isaac?

What exactly does he believe? We are not told.

What we are told is, "The Lord will provide."

And provide the Lord did.

So, too, I think, did the Lord provide on the shore by the lake, in that conversation with Peter.

Peter had failed his Lord so terribly, by denying even knowing him, by deserting him at his final and most desperate and needful hour, yet still the Lord provided. Provided through a cross and a sacrifice of love. And provided new life, and resurrection, and a new beginning. A new opportunity, a fresh start.

"Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" And now that Peter stood on this side of the crucifixion and resurrection, now that he stood in the presence of the resurrected

Lord, now he could know and experience the power, from God, to say, for himself, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you” -- and really mean it.

So, too, can we.

Like the man who brings his son, in a different way:

“Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. ... Jesus asked the father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.” Jesus said to him, “If you are able! -- All things can be done for the one who believes.” Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:17-18,21-24-NRSV)

‘I want to,’ the father seems to say. And it is almost as if Jesus says, ‘It is enough.’

For God in Christ empowers us to answer, “Yes, Lord,” and really mean it. God in Christ empowers us, if we are willing, to take those ominous and heavy steps toward Moriah’s mountain, prepared to sacrifice, to give up, to let go of that which is most precious to us in life. Because in the final analysis, we put our hope and trust not in our children or our parents and not even in any inner sense of self-fulfillment or self-reliance. But in God. There is nowhere else to put our hope and trust, but in the God we know in Christ.

It is the only way to make it to that mountain in the land of Moriah and back, and to know that the Lord does indeed provide in all things, even though not necessarily in the way we might hope. It is the only way to answer “Yes” along the lakeside to Jesus’s penetrating and revealing question, and to be willing to walk even the path which we did not choose and do not wish to take.

It is the only way.

To let God be our God: the end all and be all of life. Our only hope and trust and fulfillment. Our only true love in life.

***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.**

We trust in God,

whom Jesus called Abba, Father.

**In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image,
male and female, of every race and people,
to live as one community.**

**But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
Ignoring God's commandments,
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
accept lies as truth,
exploit neighbor and nature,
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
We deserve God's condemnation.
Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
In everlasting love,
the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
to bless all families of the earth.
Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.
Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.**

**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

Pastor: Hear us, O God...
People: ...your mercy is great.

THE LORD'S PRAYER *(Traditional)*

**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

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

With power and tenderness you have created us, O God. In grace and mercy you have redeemed us. In joy and hope you claim us. Thank you for blessing us with your attention and love. We make these offerings to say "Thank you!" More importantly still, we offer you ourselves -- heart, mind, and soul -- to use us as you will, to share your love and grace with others. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "More Love to Thee, O Christ" GtG 828

1. **More love to thee, O Christ,
more love to thee!
Hear thou the prayer I make
on bended knee.
This is my earnest plea:
more love, O Christ, to thee;
more love to thee,
more love to thee!**

2. **Once earthly joy I craved,
sought peace and rest.
Now thee alone I seek;
give what is best.
This all my prayer shall be:
more love, O Christ, to thee;
more love to thee,
more love to thee!**

3. **Then shall my latest breath
whisper thy praise;
this be the parting cry
my heart shall raise.
This still its prayer shall be:
more love, O Christ, to thee;
more love to thee,
more love to thee!**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: Lift up your eyes to see where God sends you.
All: May God enlighten our eyes and hearts.
One: God will provide on mountaintops and by the lakeside.
All: God's mercy and grace fill us with hope.
God's promises summon us to fuller life.
One: Follow Christ, who calls us as disciples.
Follow Christ to minister to all who need healing.
All: With joy, we claim our role as disciples.
With trust, we dare to go where Christ sends us.

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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