

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 5, 2020
Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union,
Missouri

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 95)*

One: "Come, let us sing to the Lord;"
All: "let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation."
One: "For the Lord is a great God,"
All: "and a great Ruler above all gods."
One: "The Lord holds the depths of the earth,"
All: "and sustains the heights of the hills."
One: "Come, let us worship and bow down,"
All: "let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!"

***OPENING HYMN** "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise" GtG 12

1. **Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.**
2. **Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might:
thy justice, like mountains high soaring above;
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.**
3. **To all, life thou givest, to both great and small.
In all life thou livest, the true life of all.
We blossom and flourish like leaves on the tree,
then wither and perish; but naught changeth thee.**
4. **Thou reignest in glory; thou dwellest in light.
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight.
All praise we would render; O help us to see
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee!**

(Public Domain)

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Wondrous God, we praise your name and confess ourselves. We hear your word, but then we do our own thing. You show us the way, but we go off in our own direction, then wonder why things go so badly for us. Forgive us, merciful God. Help us to rely on your wisdom, not on ours. Show us the error of our ways, then mold us into the image of your obedient children -- the image of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from I John 1 & 2)*

One: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

All: **"If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and God's word is not in us."**

One: "If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

All: **"Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins," and in him we are forgiven.**

Unison: **Thanks be to God!**

***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, a honk of the horn, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 11:16-19,25-30

MATTHEW 11:16-19,25-30 (New Revised Standard Version +)

¹⁶ *"But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another,*

¹⁷ *'We played the flute for you,
and you did not dance;*

*we sang a dirge,
and you did not mourn.'*

¹⁸ *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon'; ¹⁹ the Son of Humankind came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is proved to be right by her works."*

...

²⁵ *At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; ²⁶ yes, Father, this was how you were pleased to have it happen. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal the Father.*

²⁸ *"Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Against the Grain?" by Pastor Bill Vincent

You could see a human face, or a catfish, or even a dragon in the wood...even before it was carved.

"Sounds crazy to think," Rokky [England, local artist] says, "but (the wood) kind of tells you what you want to carve. You'll see a face or you'll see an animal or something in it a lot of the times, depending on the way the grain lays." (Connection Magazine, p.34)

You see, it is easier to work *with* the grain.

Though it is possible to go *against* the grain. It may be more difficult, but sometimes it may be necessary.

Jesus goes against the grain of the world; his way is counter-cultural, as they say.

-So the children in the marketplace ask first for a dance and then for mourning, and they're not happy with either response, either from Jesus or John.

-The world believes "if we study it long enough, we can figure it out." But Jesus emphasizes the need for revelation, for

no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal the Father.

Jesus goes against the grain of society's norms and values and expectations.

Not 'might makes right', but love makes right.

Not me at the center of life, but God at the center.

He lives a life that cares more about being with the "tax collectors and sinners" -- the 'down and out' -- than with the 'up and coming', the 'in' crowd -- the "wise and intelligent."

Still, as difficult as it is to go against the grain of society/culture, that's nothing compared to the grain we most typically go against...and shouldn't.

And that's the grain of life as intended by God: how we are supposed to live, who we are supposed to be -- this is true wisdom: the wisdom of which Jesus speaks.

"Wisdom is proved to be right by her works," he says.

Earlier in our chapter, John the Baptist had sent his disciples to ask Jesus a question:

"Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?" Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. (v.3-5)

Jesus' response to John's question is simply to list what he's been doing.

"Wisdom is proved to be right by her works."

Jesus embodies that very wisdom.

Jesus proclaims that word.

Jesus shows us that way.

It is the grain of life as God intends.

But too often we fight it. We go *against* the grain of God's will and purpose for us and for life.

-We seek to secure our own future: assembling our resources, making our plans. And either we run into obstacle after obstacle, and slip and fall time and time again; or we think we're good, we've finally made it, so now all we have to do is try to maintain our balance at the top, lest we fall. And no wonder we're exhausted.

-We strive to make a name for ourselves, doing all the right things, saying all the right things, wearing all the right things. Then the standards change, and what makes a name for someone now is different from what made our name before; and so we have to start all over again. And no wonder we are weary.

-We want everyone to like us. So we seek to earn everyone's approval, meet everyone's expectations of us: being the perfect mother or mother-in-law; son or son-in-law; the perfect etc. dad and husband; friend, employee, boss, citizen, member. And it's different from one moment to the next. And no wonder we feel like we are carrying heavy burdens.

-We accept responsibility for everyone else: for their actions (or inaction), for their well-being and happiness. Somehow it's all up to us! No wonder we feel the weight of the world on our shoulders.

No wonder we are weary and carrying heavy burdens.

And this experience I'm talking about is not simply the fact that I'm tired after a long day's work. There's something deeper going on.

We see it in the context of our passage:

-In the earlier part of the chapter, Jesus speaks about recognizing God's work and God's way, and knowing God's wisdom.

-The first part of next chapter, following our passage, deals with controversies over the sabbath. Jesus does not say the sabbath is bad, but he does indicate that the typical interpretation

and practice of the sabbath goes against the proper understanding and use of the sabbath, i.e., the use of the sabbath as God intends...and as Jesus himself exemplifies.

So, we seek to secure our own future...

...When God says, “do not worry about tomorrow, what you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear; but seek first God’s kingdom and God’s righteousness” (Matthew 6:25-33), and God will take care of the future.

We strive to make a name for ourselves...

...When God says to Abraham, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great” (Genesis 12:2).

And God also says, “the greatest among you will be your servant” (Mark 10:43).

We want everyone to like us...

...When Christ warns us that “family members will turn against family members” (Matthew 10:21) when we seek to be faithful to following him.

We accept responsibility for everyone else...

...When Jesus says to Peter (John 21:20-22), “What is that to you? whatever I ask of someone else? *You*, follow me.”

God would like for us to accept responsibility for ourselves, not everybody else!

As the song says, “God’s got the whole world in God’s hands.” We don’t need to try to hold the world in our hands *as if we were God*. In fact, it’s arrogant for us to think we can.

You see, in all these ways, and more, we end up going against the grain of God’s will. And it doesn’t work. It wears us out and wears us down. And we wonder why we’re exhausted and frustrated and stressed and at our wits end.

Then Jesus says, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*”

And boy do we like hearing that! That sounds wonderful! We’d love to chuck it all and prop our feet up and maybe retire from life itself. Let someone else do the work and run the rat race.

Except that’s not what he’s saying.

He says he will give us rest...but then he talks about taking his yoke upon us. And remember, a yoke is made of wood: it has weight; a yoke is heavy. And a yoke is made for working.

But this is the yoke of God’s work: of God’s wisdom and God’s word and God’s way. This is the yoke of life as God meant for it to be, for us and for all people. God created us; you would think God would know what God is doing.

You see, for us to bear this yoke is to go *with* the grain -- it is to live life as God intends and as God created us to be and to live. We’re no longer fighting God. We’re no longer fighting against ourselves and our inborn, created nature. We’re working *with* God. We’re living out our true intention, our true calling.

This is the reason Jesus can say his yoke is easy, his burden is light. Because we're going down the road we're supposed to be going down. We're living life the way we were created to live life.

Have you ever met someone who says, "Even if they didn't pay me, I'd still do this job." Their job (in this case) energizes them, it excites them; it fulfills them and gives them purpose and direction and joy. Do they work any less than others? No. They still work hard and strive to do better, and yes they can get frustrated at times and confused at times. But what they are doing is what they were created to do: it is their calling. And it is not so much a burden and work that drags them down, as it is a joy in life that builds them up.

They know the yoke of Christ. They know something of what it is to live their life as God intends -- of going *with* the grain of God's purpose for their lives. And it's infinitely easier than trying to fight the Lord of all creation, including your creation.

The yoke of Christ is work, yes. But it is good work.
And it is work for which we have help.

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me."

-Douglas R.A. Hare:

It is possible that "learn from me" means more than simply "listen to my teaching." ... *his disciples*... were to learn not only by listening but by watching. ... The yoke is not one that Jesus imposes but one he wears! ... In this word Jesus may be saying: "Become my yoke mate, and learn how to pull the load by working beside me and watching how I do it. The heavy labor will seem lighter when you allow me to help you with it."
(Interpretation, p.129)

-Shelley D. Best:

a yoke ... is not only something that is meant for two, but something that was used by farmers to train inexperienced animals for their work. Less experienced beasts of burden would be teamed with more experienced ones so that the neophyte could learn how to pull the weight of the plow.
Jesus knows our yoke. Through him, we learn how to do our own work -- and [we learn] of the rest that comes when we work with him. (Feasting on the Gospels, p.299)

Christ teaches us and shows us the way, and even works alongside of us, yoked together with us.

So when he speaks of the wisdom of love, he not only tells us that, he shows us that wisdom and works together with us in that love.

And when he shares the word of forgiveness, he not only speaks of that, he shows us that word and works together with us in that forgiveness.

And when he says he looks for the way of mercy, he not only tells us that, he shows us that way and works together with us in that mercy.

And when he calls us to embrace others, he not only speaks of that, he shows us that embrace and works together with us to embrace not only us, but all others.

James Montgomery penned a hymn ("Go to Dark Gethsemane," 1820) telling of Jesus' dark night in Gethsemane. And the last line of each stanza speaks to us of what we can, and need to learn, from our Lord.

...Learn from Jesus Christ to pray.

...Learn from Christ to bear the cross.

...Learn from Jesus Christ to die.

...Savior, teach us so to rise.

To be taught by Christ -- to take his yoke upon us and learn from him -- to learn of his ways and walk in his way, to take his word to heart and speak his word from the heart, to grow in his wisdom and live out his wisdom -- this is to go *with* the grain of God's way.

And going *with* the grain of *God's* way will definitely mean we end up going *against* the grain of the *world's* way.

But which grain would you rather go against? That of the world? Or of the creator of the world?

***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.**

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:

**preaching good news to the poor
and release to the captives,**

**teaching by word and deed
and blessing the children,**

**healing the sick
and binding up the brokenhearted,**

**eating with outcasts,
forgiving sinners,
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.**

**In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage**

to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Great God...

People: ...Compassionate God, you are good to all.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (*Contemporary*)

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

We give you thanks and praise, O Lord our God, for claiming us as your people and providing for us as your children. Accept the thanks we bring and accept the offering of our lives, that your love might shine in us and your purpose be fulfilled through us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "Christ of the Upward Way" [PH 344]

1. **Christ of the upward way,
My guide divine,
Where You have set Your feet
May I place mine;
And move and march wherever You have trod,
Keeping face forward up the hill of God.**

2. **Give me the heart to hear
Your voice and will,
That without fault or fear
I may fulfill
Your purpose with a glad and holy zest,
Like one who would not bring less than the best.**

3. **Christ of the upward way,
My guide divine,
Where You have set Your feet
May I place mine;
And when Your last call comes serene and clear,
Calm may my answer be, "Lord, I am here."**

(Public Domain)

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE