

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 9, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

NINETEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 95)*

- One: "Come, let us bow down and worship."
All: "Let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!"
One: "For the Lord is our God."
All: "We are the people God cares for, the flock for which the Lord provides."
One: Come, let us worship the Lord our God.

***OPENING HYMN** "Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven" GtG 619

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| <p>1. Praise, my soul, the God of heaven;
glad of heart your carols raise;
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who, like me, should sing God's praise?
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise the Maker all your days!</p> | <p>3. Like a loving parent caring,
God knows well our feeble frame,
gladly all our burdens bearing,
still to countless years the same.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
All within me, praise God's name!</p> |
| <p>2. Praise God for the grace and favor
shown our forebears in distress;
God is still the same forever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Sing our Maker's faithfulness!</p> | <p>4. Angels, teach us adoration;
you behold God face to face.
Sun and moon and all creation,
Dwellers all in time and space:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise with us the God of grace!</p> |

(Text: Henry Francis Lyte, 1834; adapt. Ecumenical Women's Center © 1974)

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Loving God, we come before you, calling upon your mercy and asking for your forgiveness. We have strayed as your people and as individuals. Though your way be clear, we have not chosen it. Though our task is certain, we forfeit our responsibility. You call to us, and we do not listen. You instruct us, and we too

quickly forget. Forgive us, gracious Lord. Transform our hearts that we might truly love you and serve you. Make us your people in thought and word and deed. For it is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: Here is good news for everyone:
God is gracious, merciful, abounding in steadfast love,
and gives us forgiveness and grace,
a free gift from a generous God!

All: **This is the good news we believe in our hearts
and confess with our mouths:
in Jesus Christ 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, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Genesis 32:22-31

Jacob fled Esau after he stole his older brother's birthright.

Jacob then spent at least 14 years with his uncle, Laban, working for him so he could marry Laban's two daughters.

When God said it was time for Jacob to go back, his relationship with Laban was not on the best of terms.

As he heads back home and prepares to meet Esau, Jacob is not sure how his brother will receive him. So, when he draws closer, he sends his cattle and servants, and even his family, on ahead of him, hoping to appease Esau, to butter him up ... and to hedge his own bets.

And Jacob spends the night alone.

GENESIS 32:22-31 (New Revised Standard Version)

²² The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. ²⁴ Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he

struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." ²⁷ So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." ²⁸ Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Rasslin' Match" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Jacob struggles with Esau, his brother.

Jacob struggles with Laban, his father-in-law.

Indeed, he would struggle again, in his penultimate encounter in the dark of night, with something that rushes at him out of the dark: human? angel? God?

Jacob doesn't run away; he holds on. And he is changed, reflected in his name change: a form of blessing.

His name is changed from Jacob, meaning 'supplanter', to Israel, meaning 'the one who strives with God'.

But he is also left limping, with a wound.

A wound and a blessing.

A struggle -- with people, with circumstances, with self, with God -- that transforms, that blesses.

A struggle that leaves a scar.

Paul knows it.

He speaks about it in his second letter to the Corinthians. We don't know the full details, only what he says about it:

Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, but the Lord said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." (II Corinthians 12:7b-10)

So Paul, too, wrestles -- wrestles with his thorn in the flesh, whatever it was: 'Why me?' 'Lord, take this from me!'

And he, too, is blessed -- yes, blessed: blessed with a sharper, surer insight into God's ways with him, and the strength and power of God's presence and grace.

He, too, is left wounded -- "limping" -- as was Jacob.

A struggle, a wrestling with self, with God.
A wound and a blessing.
Paul knows it.

So, too, does Horatio Spafford. You may not recognize the name. But you probably would recognize the song.

Hortatio G. Spafford, a forty-three-year-old Chicago businessman, suffered financial disaster in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. He and his wife were still grieving over the death of their son shortly before the fire, and he realized they needed to get away for a vacation. Knowing that their friend Dwight L. Moody was going to be preaching in evangelistic campaigns in England that fall, Spafford decided to take the entire family to England. His wife and four daughters went ahead on the SS *Ville du Havre*, and he planned to follow in a few days.

But on the Atlantic Ocean the ship was struck by an iron sailing vessel and sank within twelve minutes. Two hundred and twenty-six lives were lost -- including the Spaffords' four daughters. When the survivors were brought to shore at Cardiff, Wales, Mrs. Spafford cabled her husband, "Saved alone."

Spafford booked passage on the next ship. As they were crossing the Atlantic, the captain pointed out the place where he thought the *Ville du Havre* had gone down. That night, Spafford penned [these] the words....

**When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.**

(The One Year Book of Hymns, February 4 - compiled and edited by Robert K. Brown & Mark R. Norton; devotions by William J. Petersen & Randy Petersen)

One cannot lose a child -- let alone four -- and not be left wounded.

At the same time, who can deny the blessing of being able to affirm "It is well with my soul"?

A struggle, a wrestling with circumstance, with life ... and death.
A wound and a blessing.
Horatio Spafford knows it.

So, too, does Laura Story. The contemporary Christian singer tells of the struggle with her husband's health.

A year and a half into their marriage, she began noticing symptoms: her husband's forgetfulness. After months of testing and doctor's visits, they received the diagnosis: brain tumor.

A very long road was ahead of them.

After numerous surgeries -- with each one wondering, would he live? -- he began to make a comeback with a lot of healing to his body.

Still there were areas that did not know healing: vision deficit, memory deficit.

They continued to pray for healing, but God didn't answer their prayers the way they wanted.

She began to wonder: "*Could God possibly be blessing us through not giving us the things we're praying for?*"

There were still more questions than answers.

But, she said,

*I do know this: There is a blessing that comes through waiting on the Lord.
There is an intimacy that comes from walking with the Lord through that valley.
There is a reliance on his word that we only know when everything else fades away. ... [For] Sometimes God lets us stay broken in ways that we may not feel comfortable, ways that we may not expect. Sometimes God gives us what we need rather than what we want.*

(Interview 02/15/2011: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjB2skJi2co> ; and concert 02/24/2011: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tDiTuSLSJB8>)

So she sings...

...what if your blessings come through raindrops

What if Your healing comes through tears

What if a thousand sleepless nights

Are what it takes to know You're near

...what if trials of this life

The rain, the storms, the hardest nights

Are your mercies in disguise

(*"Blessings (Mercies in Disguise)"* by Laura Story)

Mercies that bless, that transform, that enliven ... and that also wound.

A struggle, a wrestling with health, with circumstance, with life, with prayer, with God.

A wound and a blessing.

And let us not feel resentful with these stories, and even your own, as if God is removed from it all, aloof and uncaring.

For in the divine drama, in the divine struggle with humanity; from his agonized prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, to his flogging and ridicule; from his lonely, forsaken crucifixion, to his eventual death; our Lord, too, was wounded.

Even with the victory of Easter, even in the blessedness of resurrection, he still had his own "limp." For the disciples themselves saw the prints of the nails in his hands and the spear wound in his side.

The woundedness of crucifixion and rejection. The blessing of resurrection and new life.

A wound and a blessing.

So you struggle and struggle -- with yourself, with another relationship, with circumstances, with life, with God -- and you know there is merit in the struggle. And you cry out, "Bless me! Bless me!"

And sometimes the blessing is quick in coming, and your struggle bears fruit in due season.

And sometimes it does not. Sometimes the struggle is long, and so is the night. And the dawning of a new day seems slow in coming. And even the waiting is a struggle.

In times such as these -- when we wrestle and the blessing is delayed -- let us take comfort and encouragement from the stories of Paul and Horatio Spafford, Laura Story and Jacob. For though the night is long, the dawn will come. We have that firm assurance, firmer still in the light of that first Easter morn and Christ's own resurrection.

The dawn will come, and with it, a blessing.

Through "the valley of death's dark shadow," through the 'dark night of the soul', through the long night of struggle, God stands with us.

So that even here, in the midst of the struggle, we are blessed. It may not be the blessing we seek. But it is a gift of God's grace.

God stands with us, as God has promised ... even though it be God with whom we wrestle.

So, go ahead, wrestle, struggle -- with yourself, with others; with life, with God.
Hold on, even though the night be long and the dawn long in coming.
Hold on. And know that the one who blesses holds on to you.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

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.

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Save us, O Lord...
People: ...we come to you.

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*

**Thank you, God. Thank you for your grace and your presence.
Thank you for teaching us and leading us. Thank you for providing for us
day and night. Make of our lives songs of gratitude. Make our gifts useful to
your purposes. And remake us in the image of your Son, our Lord Jesus
Christ. For it is in his name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go” GtG 833

1. **O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.**

2. **O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.**

3. **O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain
that morn shall tearless be.**

4. **O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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