

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: The God of our ancestors calls us to worship.  
All: **Praise the Lord!**  
One: Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.  
All: **Let us worship God!**

**\*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!**

*(Public Domain)*

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**God of mercy,  
we have resisted the way you would have us go.  
We have doubted you in the face of affliction  
and ignored you when things go well for us.  
Doubting your loving care, we grab for  
more than we need.  
Doubting your loving purposes, we shrink  
from living as your followers.  
Doubting your loving plan, we become  
stumbling blocks in your creation.  
We ask your forgiveness,  
and seek the renewal of our covenant  
with you and with one another.  
In Jesus' forgiving name we pray. Amen.**

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

**One:** We remind ourselves of the good news we have heard and in which we believe: that the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in constant love.  
**All:** **If we confess our sins, God is quick to forgive and to restore us to new life.**  
**One:** So let us rejoice and be glad, proclaiming once again the good news.  
**All:** **That in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. 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 READING      Exodus 2:23-3:15

EXODUS 2:23-3:15 (various)

<sup>23</sup> After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. And their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. <sup>24</sup> God heard their groaning and remembered God's covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. <sup>25</sup> God looked at the Israelites, and God understood.

<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup> There the messenger of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire but that it was not burning up. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this amazing sight—why the bush does not burn up." <sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." <sup>5</sup> Then God said, "Do not come any closer. Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." <sup>6</sup> Then God said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers. I know all about their sufferings. <sup>8</sup> And I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup> So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

<sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup> And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is God's name?' what shall I say to them?" <sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" <sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever; this is how all generations will remember me."

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

**SERMON** “Burning, But Not Burned Up” by Pastor Bill Vincent

If Moses was leading his flock on a hillside in California, I’d like to think that he would flee the burning brush and trees and hillsides -- run the other way, not go toward it.

But Moses went toward the burning bush, the flaming flora.

Because something very different was going on -- very different.

Moses saw a bush that burned, but was not burned up -- very different from the scenes we picture of California’s wildfires.

And so Moses began a journey.

Though it actually doesn’t start there.

It starts with God’s seeing and hearing -- and knowing -- the plight of the Israelites. Just like Moses sees the bush, and hears God’s voice, and knows, or comes to know, God’s ‘Name’.

God’s knowing serves as the foundation for God’s passion for the people, and God’s compassion in delivering them by calling and sending Moses.

Turns out, Moses had previously demonstrated a passion for what God was calling him to do...a passion for justice.

*One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk. He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (Exodus 2:11-12)*

Turns out, the story was not as hidden as Moses had hoped, so he had to flee Egypt.

Now, I’m not ‘real thrilled’ with murder as the result of Moses’ action. But it seems that, from the bush, God is calling forth that same passion, shaping that passion, directing that passion.

For Moses already knew the impact of someone’s passion, and compassion, for another.

Remember: he himself had been saved through the working of his sister’s and mother’s -- and even his foreign, adopted mother’s -- passion and compassion...for him.

He had sought to exercise that same passion to help a fellow Israelite (Hebrew), and that had gone awry.

He (almost instinctively) used it, in another instance, to help strangers:

*Moses...settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well. The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock. But some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock. (Exodus 2:15-17)*

As Amy Merrill Willis writes,

**Moses is driven by a deep sense of justice -- a desire to intervene for the victimized and the mistreated** (Working Preacher, 2011).

And now God calls forth that same passion and compassion, using Moses’ shepherding skills, his passion for justice, his compassion for those oppressed.

God sought to light a fire in Moses, and shape and direct that fire toward the working and implementing of God's will for the people.

It is Moses' calling, Moses' vocation.

Frederick Buechner, in his now famous definition of vocation, says,

**The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.** (*Wishful Thinking*, p.95)

Note the passion, responding with one's "*deep gladness.*" And note the compassion, responding to "*the world's deep hunger.*"

A teacher leads (and shows us) the way, who has such a deep love for the children that she does what she can to inspire the children to learn, to affirm who they are as a person.

A retiree leads the way, who has spent years honing and refining his talent, and now goes to the projects, to help others learn his skill, to pass on that talent and that wisdom.

Moses leads the way, albeit with a number of objections. But that tends to be part of it, as he recognizes the awesome (and frightening) task before him.

But notice, too, another who leads the way.

Witness one Jesus Christ: he who is the incarnation, the enfleshment, the embodiment of this 'Name' from the burning bush.

And witness Christ's passion for others, and his compassion for their needs.

"*I am,*" he said.

"*I am ... the bread of life*" (John 6:35), sustaining us, feeding us.

"*I am ... the light of the world*" (John 8:12), guiding us, showing us the way.

"*I am ... the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6).

"*I am ... with you always*" (Matthew 28:20).

And, as the contemporary Christian group NewSong sings, "We Wear His Name."

**when we see those in desperate need  
how can we pass them by  
let's not forget we represent  
the name of Jesus Christ**

...

**we wear his name  
in a world that's lost in hopelessness  
we've been called to be the light  
we wear his name**

(Arise My Love [The Very Best of Newsong] 1999)

That's what we're doing when we hear this call and respond.

But recognize that the first step of hearing the call and answering the call is not the miracle of the bush, though that may capture our attention and motivate us to respond to this journey.

The first step is knowing our neighbor's need, and knowing our neighbor.

This is the first step to risking this call.

And how often (too often?) do we skip over this step?

How many efforts to help, to be of service have been derailed because the one who wants to help did not understand the true need, did not really know the one they sought to help?

To fulfill our calling, to be who we are truly meant to be, we have to risk getting to know our neighbor (near and far), and getting to know their need.

And the second step in risking this call is to give oneself away:

-to be willing to offer what we have to give;

-to be willing to share our passion and do so with compassion;

-to give ourselves away;

-to lose our lives, and in losing, to find them.

(Sound familiar?)

Now, I want to be clear and offer a word of caution: this 'giving ourselves away' is not an invitation to work tirelessly and take no time off or no time for ourselves, burning the candle at both ends, all in order to earn another's praise or get someone to pat us on the back seeing how good we are.

There are flames in life that eat us up, that fully consume us and devour us. Like chasing after the biggest house to claim the world's success. Like doing all you can, striving to keep yourself 'on top'. Like living 'this way' in order to please others.

This is not the flame we pursue.

But there is a legitimate concern, a hesitancy -- in Moses' case, an objection.

And when we fear that we might actually lose our lives, and wear ourselves out, and end up with nothing left to give...

when you think about your passion, and worry about using it up...

remember the bush: it burned, but it was not burned up.

How could that be?

Roger Nam reminds us,

**Fires take a lot of fuel. The mystery was an ordinary bush with extraordinary properties -- limitless fuel to sustain this fire. Similarly, God's provision is endless. ... God will miraculously sustain the people just as [God] can sustain the bush.** (Working Preacher, 2020)

Just as God sustained the bush, so God can -- and will -- sustain you and me as we

-risk hearing God's call, and

-risk pursuing our passion, and

-risk investing our compassion, and

-risk responding to God's sending you and me (us).

And then too remember the One who calls and sends: the great I AM

-who *is* present and *was* present and *will be* present

-the creator and sustainer of all that is, including you and me.

As Jill Duffield notes,

**We are never abandoned or orphaned by the One who names and sends us.**  
("Looking into the Lectionary," 2020)

Will we trust in that?

Will we trust that we will not be burned up?

And will we allow ourselves

-to burn with passion,

in compassion;

-to burn with devotion to the God who calls,

in service to the neighbor in need?

### **\*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.**

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

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Pastor: Merciful God...

People: ...hear our prayer.

**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*

**Holy God of holy ground,  
like Moses, we question our fitness to serve  
heaven's purposes on earth.**

**Overcome our qualms with the assurance  
of your presence.**

**Bless our offerings of self and substance  
that, through them,**

**we may do your will  
to the glory of your holy name.**

**Amen.**



## SENDING

\*CLOSING HYMN “May the God of Hope Go with Us” GtG 765

**May the God of hope go with us every day,  
filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.  
May the God of justice speed us on our way,  
bringing light and hope to every land and race.  
Praying, let us work for peace;  
singing, share our joy with all;  
working for a world that's new,  
faithful when we hear Christ's call.**

*(Words by Alvin Schutmaat, 1984)*

### \*CHARGE AND BLESSING

One: God's steadfast love is with us wherever we go.  
**All: We will bless God's holy name every day.**  
One: The God our ancestors trusted has a mission for us.  
**All: God sees the misery of many in the midst of abundance.**  
One: God sends us to our sisters and brothers in need.  
**All: We are here to respond to one another's cries.**  
One: Live daily in God's realm, with confidence and hope.  
**All: We mean to live as children of the heavenly realm.**

One: The blessing of God be with you,  
the love of Jesus fill you,  
and the power of the Holy Spirit sustain you,  
now and forevermore.  
And let the gathered people of God say...

**People: ...Amen.**

### POSTLUDE

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