

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**  
**WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: We are waiting and listening for wisdom from God.  
**All: God is waiting to speak with all of us.**  
One: Do not fear to listen for God's word.  
**All: The law of God is not a threat, but a guide.**  
One: God is here to embrace and enlist us.  
**All: Our hearts rejoice in God's acceptance of us.**  
One: Do not be afraid to respond to God's love.  
**All: God's mercy inspires us to be merciful.**  
One: God is welcoming us to this time of worship.  
Do not hesitate to enter this time of praise.  
**All: We are here to be enlightened and empowered;  
may our thoughts and words honor the Lord our God.**

**\*OPENING HYMN "God Is Here!" GtG 409**

One: God is here!  
**All: As we your people  
meet to offer praise and prayer,  
may we find in fuller measure  
what it is in Christ we share.**  
One: Here, as in the world around us,  
**All: all our varied skills and arts  
wait the coming of the Spirit  
into open minds and hearts.**  
  
One: Here are symbols to remind us  
of our lifelong need of grace;  
**All: here are table, font, and pulpit;**  
One: here the cross has central place.

**All: Here in honesty of preaching,  
here in silence, as in speech,**  
One: here, in newness and renewal,  
**All: God the Spirit comes to each.**

One: Here our children find a welcome  
in the Shepherd's flock and fold;  
here as bread and wine are taken,  
Christ sustains us as of old.

**All: Here the servants of the Servant  
seek in worship to explore  
what it means in daily living  
to believe and to adore.**

One: Lord of all, of church and kingdom,  
in an age of change and doubt

**All: keep us faithful to the gospel;  
help us work your purpose out.**

One: Here, in this day's dedication,

**All: all we have to give, receive:**

One: we, who cannot live without you,

**All: we adore you! We believe!**

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**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**O God, whose ways are not our ways,  
we confess that we have discounted or ignored your commandments.  
We have chosen our own standards  
instead of seeking ultimate good.  
We have substituted our illusions for your truth.  
Our words and actions have hurt others and diminished us.  
We have become so comfortable with our own sin  
that we find it hard to recognize.  
We have been so unforgiving of others' sin  
that they cannot discern Christ in us.  
Have mercy on us, O Lord.  
Forgive us, renew us, restore us.  
Shower upon us the gift of your grace,  
that we may bear good fruit for your holy realm;  
through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.**

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: Our saving does not depend on anything we have done,  
but comes from the grace of God alone  
through faith in Jesus Christ.  
This is the good news:

**All: 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** Exodus 20:1-4,7-20

EXODUS 20:1-4,7-20 (New Revised Standard Version +)

<sup>1</sup> Then God spoke all these words:

<sup>2</sup> I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ...

<sup>7</sup> You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses this name.

<sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work... <sup>11</sup> For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup> You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

<sup>18</sup> When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the horn, and the mountain smoking, the people shook with fear and stood at a distance. <sup>19</sup> and

said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.” <sup>20</sup> Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, because God has come only to test you and to make sure you are always in awe of God so that you do not sin.”

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

**SERMON** by Pastor Bill Vincent

I may have gotten this wrong to start off.

Noting that this is World Communion Sunday, and reading the Ten Commandments, I wondered:

Could it be that the only way (truly) to commune as one world is under the umbrella of God’s instruction for life?

That may indeed be true.

You know, God’s way, God’s world; the only way to peace.

The only problem is, that approach tends to lead to wielding the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments as a weapon: a weapon to whip everyone else into shape, into line, into my understanding of the line.

Let us remember: the Ten Commandments are not given in isolation. They are given in the context of a relationship: relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God Moses came to know through a burning bush.

This is how you ‘do’ the relationship. This describes something of how you live the relationship. This is something of this relationship’s impact and significance for you and me in relation to this God and in relation to each other.

So the Ten Commandments are less a finger pointing accusingly at someone else, and more an open hand extended in invitation to you and me and every other ‘you’ and ‘me’ in the world.

In the context of a relationship -- a gracious relationship with the one who freed them from slavery, the one who heard their cries and acted with compassion and care, the one who desires to be in relationship with them.

So less of a *prescription*, with its dictates and absolutes, though it still is that; and more of a *description* of what life is like, what life should be like, what life can be like, in communion with this gracious, caring God.

This is not to diminish the seriousness of the Ten Commandments.

This is to divulge the deeper significance of the Ten Commandments.

For though the original Ten Commandments may have been written on stone, their real significance and impact is known only when they are written on the heart.

This is how you live if you want to know life.

This is how you walk through this journey of life.  
And remember: they were on a journey. And so are we.

Now, I realize that this approach doesn't have the same impact as pointing a finger and wielding a stone tablet. Which is what we like to do.

We like to use the Ten Commandments to point fingers at others: "Shame on you!"

We relish hitting other people over the head with stone tablets: "Bad boy! Bad girl! Get your act together!"

An invitation is not as forceful as a stone blow to the head.

But that may be the point.

For a stone blow to the head may crack a skull or two, but it will not change a heart.

An invitation may leave the skull intact and, quite honestly, allow skull and owner to choose another course. But an invitation does have the power to touch and transform the heart.

Witness another example of this very principle:

A fight with armies of angels may have cracked a lot of skulls, and scared a lot of peoples, on that day in Jerusalem.

But only an offer to die for another -- upon a cross -- had the power to transform the human heart. And still does.

This same Jesus was once asked to summarize the law and commandments of God. His response?

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind."* (P.S.: see Ten Commandments 1 - 4.)

*"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* (P.S.: see Ten Commandments 5 - 10.)

More than one person has noted the 'negative' "thou shalt not"s have a complementary 'positive' side: what "thou shalt" do.

(For example:)

*"You shall have no other gods before me."*

Friday evening, a number of us watched a DVD that illustrated how these very words have been used, since the 1490's, to dominate and subjugate others, used to justify atrocities against others, oppression and genocide.

"I know the one true God; you don't. That makes me better than you. [--wham!--] Believe, or die. Believe, or forever be a second-class citizen...or worse."

*"You shall have no other gods before me."*

Why? Because every other thing or person or noble cause or ideal or way will disappoint you and let you down -- always, guaranteed. Oh, there may be some short-term perks you experience. But eventually, everything else -- everyone else -- will fall down on the job and leave you drained and life-less.

*“You shall have no other gods before me.”*

Because the one speaking and telling you this is the one who rescued you from slavery; the one who heard your cries for relief and answered; the one who created the heavens and the earth; the one who created you. And don't you think the one who created you and this world in which you live might know a thing or two about what life -- true life, real life -- is all about?

(Another example:)

*“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”* We often remember it phrased as ‘bear false witness’; or as another translation puts it, “testify falsely.” I.e., you shall not say false things about another.

But I can hear the objection already: “Oh, but you're limiting my right to free speech.”

The way some people use that argument, their ‘free speech’ is not free: it is costly -- it is costly to us all.

When I lie and smear and tear another down by half-truths and innuendoes and false testimony I give, I am not free. I have dug a hole for myself. I have built a wall around myself that I can let no one through, else they get through and see the truth and the sham about me.

*“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”*

Why? Because when I besmirch the name of another, I besmirch my own as well; when I tear down another, I lower myself; when I lie about another, somewhere, somehow, I am lying about myself.

And that's not living. That's not life.

So the “Study Catechism” of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) says this:

**God requires me to speak the truth, to speak well of my neighbor when I can, and to view the faults of my neighbor with tolerance when I cannot.**

(“The Study Catechism: Full Version,” Question 114. Approved by the 210th General Assembly, 1998. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.))

Remember: these words (the Ten Commandments) are spoken in the context of a relationship:

*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

That's what's said at the beginning.

At the end, Moses says to the people,

*“God has come only to test you and to make sure you are always in awe of God so that you do not sin.”*

The word here for ‘sin’ means to “miss a goal or way, to go wrong” (*Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, Brown, Driver, and Briggs).

And in between this beginning and end, God has described how to walk the right path, the path of life.

And if there is any doubt about that, look to Moses at the end of his life. He has helped lead the people through the wilderness. They stand on the cusp of crossing into the promised land. And, in the book of Deuteronomy, we see Moses reminding the people and instructing the

people one last time. He reminds them of all they have seen and heard and experienced. And then he summarizes all they have learned when he says,

*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death... Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying and holding fast to God; for that means life to you.*  
(Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

Choose life.  
Choose the God of life.  
Choose the way of life.  
Embrace and embody and share life.  
Choose life.  
That's the invitation.

So, we have a choice.

The Ten Commandments:

Will we see them as wielding a stone tablet as a weapon?

-or-

Will we hear them as extending an invitation?

Which would you rather...?

**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (*Contemporary*)

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.**  
**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead.**  
**On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven,  
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.**  
**I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*(Today's translation of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission from Book of Common Worship, copyright 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.)*

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Merciful God,...  
People: ...hear our prayer.

## THE EUCHARIST

### OFFERING

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**God of our Ancestors, whose laws are timeless and whose ways empower the church, we offer you the results of our labors. We would recognize all our moments and days as precious gifts from you. We dedicate ourselves anew to fulfilling your purposes through all you entrust to us. Bless all that the church seeks to accomplish in Christ's name. Amen.**

### SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

*Invitation to the Lord's Table*

*Prayer of Thanksgiving*

Leader: The Lord be with you.  
**People: And also with you.**  
Leader: Lift up your hearts.  
**People: We lift them to the Lord.**  
Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**  
*(The prayer continues...)*

*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.**



*Breaking of the Bread*

*Communion of the People*

*(Please hold each of the elements so that we might partake of them together,  
reflecting our unity in Christ.)*

*Prayer*

**SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN “I Come with Joy” GtG 515**

One: I come with joy,

**All: a child of God,  
forgiven, loved, and free,**

One: the life of Jesus to recall,

**All: in love laid down for me.**

One: I come

**All: with Christians far and near  
to find,**

One: as all are fed,

**All: the new community of love  
in Christ's communion bread.**

One: As Christ breaks bread and bids us share,

**All: each proud division ends.**

One: The love that made us, makes us one,

**All: and strangers now are friends.**

One: The Spirit of the risen Christ,  
unseen, but ever near,

**All: is in such friendship better known,  
alive among us here.**

One: Together met,

**All: together bound  
by all that God has done,**

One: we'll go with joy,

**All: to give the world  
the love that makes us one.**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**People: ...Amen.**

**POSTLUDE**

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