

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**  
**ALL SAINTS' DAY**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: Grace to you and peace, from God whose care we know.  
All: **We bring all that we are to this time of worship.**  
One: Let us praise God as long as we live.  
All: **Praise God for the joy inspired by the Holy Spirit.**

**OPENING HYMN** “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!” GtG 1

One: Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All: **Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.**  
One: Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!  
All: **God in three persons, blessed Trinity!**

One: Holy, holy, holy!  
All: **all the saints adore thee,**  
**casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;**  
One: cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,  
who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

One: Holy, holy, holy!  
All: **though the darkness hide thee,**  
**though the eye of sinfulness thy glory may not see,**  
One: only thou art holy;  
All: **there is none beside thee,**  
**perfect in power, in love and purity.**

One: Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All: **All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea.**  
One: Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!  
All: **God in three persons, blessed Trinity!**

*(Public Domain)*

## UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We confess, O God, our narrow vision, our limited response, our self-serving plans. We have failed to share the joy of faith. We have neglected to learn and pray and witness to your living presence among us. We have found idols to occupy the time you have given us. Forgive our sinful ways, tame our wayward wills, and restore in us your image; through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

## SILENT CONFESSION

### ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Let us rejoice in the goodness and grace of the Lord!

All: **Because Christ died, we receive forgiveness for our sins. Because he was raised from the dead, we receive new life in him.**

One: So celebrate the good news we believe!

All: **For by the grace of God we are loved and accepted, forgiven and restored through Jesus Christ our Lord. Alleluia! Amen.**

### THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

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

## THE WORD

### SCRIPTURE READING I Thessalonians 1:1-10

I THESSALONIANS 1:1-10 (various)

<sup>1</sup> Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

*To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.*

<sup>2</sup> We always give thanks to God for all of you and we mention you constantly in our prayers. <sup>3</sup> For we remember before our God and Father your work that comes from faith, your effort that comes from love, and your perseverance that comes from hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that God has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our good news did not come to you in word only, but also with power and the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know as well as we do what kind of people we were when we were with you, which was for your sake. <sup>6</sup> And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word, even in the midst of great suffering, with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup> So that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup> For the word of the Lord rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but the news about your faith in

*God has gone everywhere. There is nothing, then, that we need to say. <sup>9</sup> For they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for God's Son from heaven, whom God raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.*

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** by Pastor Bill Vincent

I hope you heard it.

The importance, the centrality of community to what Paul is saying: the church as that association, that gathering of people; that conglomeration of deep, meaningful, vulnerable relationships.

*And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, ... so that you became an example to all the believers.... (v.6&7)*

Which strongly suggests that in this community, in these relationships, we affect and we are affected by one another -- we have an impact on one another.

We have an impact on one another *for the good* in faith and love and hope.

And we work on this life, not on our own, or even primarily with our own resources, but in and through and with the power of God: i.e., we are empowered by God for this community and these relationships and this impact.

And we are guided by God in this community, in its relationships and in its life. For we, like the Thessalonians, have chosen to turn away from the idols of power and prestige and position -- the allure of self -- and have chosen to turn *to* the God of faith and grace and love, the God of giving and life and peace. We have chosen to turn to this God, that God would engage our lives and shape our lives and renew our lives; and indeed that God would invest our lives and inject our lives with God's own self.

With the end result of gratitude and joy.

-gratitude for one another, and one another's impact upon us and presence in our lives.

-joy in the movement and work and evidence of God in our midst, in and through us.

All of this -- this joy and gratitude -- in spite of hard and difficult times, whether these hard and difficult times be the result of persecution or pandemic or political turmoil.

And sometimes we know all this joy and gratitude even *because* of hard and difficult times. For we recognize that God is with us in and through the hard and difficult times. Because we know that God sustains us in and through one another in the hard and difficult times. And our living faithfully and lovingly and hopefully in hard and difficult times becomes a wondrous occasion to witness to the joy and power and life that is in us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You see, in these initial verses of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he has opened for us a window (or a door) into the community of faith, a vision of life together.

This vision Paul holds up for us.

This vision Paul works toward in his letter and in his words, in his relationships with Silvanus and Timothy and the Thessalonians, always based on his relationship with God.

How will this vision impact us?  
Will it challenge us?  
Will it encourage us?  
Will it guide us?  
Will it nurture us?

I have to admit that when I see this vision, when I hear this vision, when I yearn for this vision, I realize maybe this is why there have been times -- especially in the past months -- when I (and maybe you too) have been so downtrodden and so depressed and so despairing. Because what we see outside our homes, what we see on the airways and the twitter-ways, what we see in our own friends and family, and even (all too often) in ourselves -- what we see has been a picture that is so far removed from this vision of life and community, and life *in* community; a picture so far removed from this vision of relationships of deep and just caring, and celebration of presence one with another whether or not we have been physically present with one another.

For we fail this vision when we call each other names and set each other up as the good 'us' versus the bad 'them'.

We fail this vision when we ignore another's isolation and curl in upon ourselves and withhold our resources only for ourselves

We fail this vision when we protect ourselves to the exclusion of acknowledging the pain and degradation of fellow human beings whose lives are belittled and demeaned and diminished by oppression and injustice and constant condescension.

And we are left with a reality that is far from community and far from 'together' and far from that intended by God.

As one commentator suggested, the fruits of our failure is 'wrath' (v.10) indeed.

You see, Paul and Silvanus and Timothy care deeply for these people.

They have had an impact on the Thessalonians' lives. And they have been impacted by the Thessalonians in their life together. And they have witnessed the impact the Thessalonians have had on others, in Macedonia and Achaia and everywhere.

There is love and connection and community here, fueled by the recognition of God at work in their midst, and in them and through them, and in and through others.

There is celebration of one another's presence.

There is rejoicing in one another's growth.

There is encouragement for one another in the midst of hard-pressed times.

And there is recognition of the goodness and grace, the power and love and life of God moving among them, to nurture and strengthen, to nudge and encourage, to enliven and en-joy for the greater glory of God.

Can we know that life together? *Do* we know that life together?

Will we live that vision? Can we have that?

Or better yet, will that life have us?

Will that vision find us?

And will we allow ourselves to be found by this focus and purpose, this community and grace, this love and life?

How?

I think Paul points us to the key right at the start:

*For we remember before our God and Father your work that comes from faith, your effort that comes from love, and your perseverance that comes from hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. (v.3)*

Note, this faith and this love and this hope are not 'done deals'.

Richard Ascough (Associate Professor of New Testament and Greek, Queen's Theological College, Kingston, Ontario, Canada) points out:

***Paul prefaces each of the characteristics with references to the effort required to exercise them:*** ["your work that comes from faith"], ["your effort that comes from love"], ["your perseverance that comes from hope"]. ... ***such qualities do not arise naturally....*** (Working Preacher, 2008)

No, they do not. They take effort. We have to work on them.

Which may be why some people get so discouraged by the church or a particular congregation. For they go to a church and expect for all this faith and love and hope -- all this good life and community -- simply to fall right into their lap, with no work, no effort.

And it doesn't happen like that.

*"Your work that comes from faith"*

Faith -- what I believe and whom I trust -- stirs me to action and undergirds deeds in concert with that trust and the God in whom I trust.

*"Your effort that comes from love"*

Love is an active word. Love is a verb, lived out in concrete steps and efforts, in daily choices and decisions.

*"Your perseverance that comes from hope"*

Hope encourages life. And hope not only holds on to us, we hold on to hope.

William Barclay tells the story:

**When Alexander the Great was setting out on his campaigns, he divided all his possessions among his friends. Someone said, "But you are keeping nothing for yourself." "O yes, I am," he said. "I have kept my hopes." A [person] can endure anything so long as [they have] hope, for then [they are] walking not to the night, but to the dawn.** (Daily Study Bible, p.186-187)

And they are walking, they are moving, they are actively hoping. And that hope makes a difference in how they live.

Now, it is one thing to talk about this vision of life and community, this faith and love and hope.

It's another thing to see it, which Paul acknowledges, speaking of the life of the Thessalonians.

So where do we see this vision, this life of community, this model of faith and love and hope?

Remember: today is All Saints Day. Seems appropriate.

What about some of the saints you have known?

How have you seen the work of faith and the effort of love and the perseverance of hope lived out in the community of God's love and life?

Just this week Deanna and I were notified of the death of a former professor of ours. Glenn Bannermann was professor of Recreation and Outdoor Education at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education, now Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, VA). When you walked into a class with Glenn Bannermann, you were far less likely to be handed a book of theology, and far more likely to be handed a puppet. Glenn knew joy in life and the joy of life. His joy was deep and real, and it was contagious. He embraced life and embraced others in life; and that embrace was deeply felt, impacting those beyond his immediate community. I admit he and I butted heads once or so. But I know that was simply a part of the work and effort and perseverance of life in community.

I hope you have stories like mine: of saints who have inspired and shown the way; whose lives have provided images, pictures, a vision of life -- true life -- in community.

*"We always give thanks to God for all of you, and we mention you constantly in our prayers,"* Paul writes to the Thessalonians.

Here's my prayer: in gratitude for God's work and life among us, that God would deepen our faith, expand our love, and bolster our hope; that we might be sustained, encouraged, and enlivened by the promises of God for our life together.

**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *(The Apostles' Creed)*

**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,  
And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy  
Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead,  
and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he  
ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;  
from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of  
saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.  
Amen.**

**CELEBRATING THE SAINTS**

"For All the Saints" StF 2283

One: For all the saints who've shown your love  
in how they live and where they move,

**All: for mindful women, caring men,  
accept our gratitude again.**

*Lighting a Candle for Family*

One: For all the saints who loved your name,  
**All: whose faith increased the Savior's fame,**  
One: who sang your songs and shared your word,  
**All: accept our gratitude, good Lord.**

*Lighting a Candle for Friends*

One: For all the saints who named your will,  
and showed the kingdom coming still  
through selfless protest, prayer, and praise,  
**All: accept the gratitude we raise.**

*Lighting a Candle for Others*

One: Bless all whose will or name or love  
reflects the grace of heaven above.  
**All: Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,  
your life through theirs has hallowed ours.**

*Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434.*

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Pastor: ...God, in your mercy...  
People: ...receive our prayer.

**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*

**We trust you, Lord God,  
to multiply the gifts we offer and the blessings they represent,  
as we pour out your love and grace  
on those who long to hear your word to them,  
to see your power at work within them,  
to feel your comfort beside them,  
through the generous gifts of your Spirit. Amen.**

## SENDING

**CLOSING HYMN** “For Steadfast Hope” [*Tune: GtG#8*]

**One: For steadfast hope and works of love,**

**All: for all that lifts our hearts above,**

One: we thank you, God,

**All: and praise your name  
for grace, forevermore the same.**

One: We thank you for our friends who care,

**All: and all who in your mission share.**

One: **We pray for all whose faithfulness  
inspires a lingering joyousness,**

**All: who live the gospel day by day  
in all they think and do and say.**

One: May we receive the Spirit’s power

**All: to bring our lives to glorious flower.**

One: **Send forth the news to every land,**

**All: that all may hear and understand:**

One: the true and living God extends  
a welcome that forgives and mends.

**All: O may we serve in joy and peace,  
with praises that will never cease.**

(Reprinted, with permission, from *Fresh Winds of the Spirit, Book 2* by Lavon Bayler.  
Copyright 1992 by The Pilgrim Press.)



### **\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: Where Christ leads,

**All: we will follow.**

One: Where God sends us,

**All: we will go.**

One: Through our lives,

**All: we will express our faith.**

One: In all we say and do,

**All: may God be praised.**

One: May grace and peace abound to you

from God the Father,

through the Lord Jesus Christ,

in the Holy Spirit.

And let the gathered people of God say...

**All: ...Amen.**

### **POSTLUDE**

The Prayer of Confession, Prayer for Illumination, Prayers of the People (adapted), Prayer of Dedication, and Blessing are used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2014.

The Call to Worship, Prayer of Confession, and Charge are reprinted, with permission, from *Fresh Winds of the Spirit, Book 2* by Lavon Bayler. Copyright 1992 by The Pilgrim Press.