

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, January 10, 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**BAPTISM of the LORD**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: We come to worship the Lord our God, the creator of all the universe.

**All: We come to celebrate God's claim upon us and God's gift of love and life.**

One: We come, because we are invited to come.

**All: So come, let us worship the Lord.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" GtG 353

One: My hope is built on nothing less  
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

**All: I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.**

One: On Christ,

**All: the solid Rock,**

One: I stand;

all other ground is sinking sand;

**All: all other ground is sinking sand.**

One: When darkness seems to hide his face,

**All: I rest on his unchanging grace;**

One: in every high and stormy gale,

**All: my anchor holds within the veil.**

One: His oath, his covenant, his blood  
support me in the whelming flood;

**All: when all around my soul gives way,  
he then is all my hope and stay.**

One: When he shall come with trumpet sound,  
**All: O may I then in him be found,  
dressed in his righteousness alone,  
faultless to stand before the throne.**

One: On Christ,  
**All: the solid Rock,**  
One: I stand;  
all other ground is sinking sand;  
**All: all other ground is sinking sand.**

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**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Most wondrous and merciful God, we praise your name even as we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. In your mercy forgive what we have been, help us amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.**

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: In this is love, that God gives us the gift of Jesus Christ to remind us of the truth of Immanuel: that God is with us.  
**All: So rejoice and be glad, for in Jesus Christ we are forgiven; in Jesus Christ we are loved -- always.**

**\*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 READINGS** Mark 1:9-11  
Matthew 28:18-20  
I Corinthians 11:23-26

MARK 1:9-11 (New International Version)

<sup>9</sup> At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

MATTHEW 28:18-20 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>18</sup> And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

I CORINTHIANS 11:23-26 (New International Version)

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

**SERMON** "Oath of Identity and Life" by Pastor Bill Vincent

This past Wednesday, January 6<sup>th</sup>, was a day filled with powerful symbols.  
Flags waving. People rushing. Protests shouted. Resolve stated in word and deed.  
Symbols of rage, and resolve.  
Symbols of concern, and care.  
Symbols that frightened, and fortified.

Today, we lift up symbols of a different kind: symbols seemingly insignificant in the face of those we discerned on Wednesday.

And yet, I put to you the symbols we celebrate today are more powerful, more lasting, more profound.

Symbols of water, bread and cup.

Simple? Indeed. Small? Yes. Everyday, ordinary? Precisely.

Yet symbols that point us to a reality larger than this country's political process...and unrest.

Symbols that engage us with a power more certain.

Symbols that direct us to a life more lasting.

I'm speaking, of course, of the symbols of the sacraments: baptism and communion.

Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary tells us the word "sacrament" comes from the Latin meaning "**oath of allegiance.**" Like "the oath of office" we might associate with the month of January with the swearing in of public officials.

But ours is not an oath of office, but more fundamentally, an oath of identity and life: an oath to mark who we are and whose we are and how we will live.

In biblical terms we're talking about a covenant.

An oath. A pledge. A promise.

Yes (of course) there are times when we have to be careful with the promises we make, the oaths we take. Who here hasn't warned a child about certain promises they might be asked to make: "Promise you won't tell!" We're not so sure about that.

The so-called "promise" that is coerced or threatened or tricked out of someone is no promise. For a real promise is always a gift: a gift offered openly, honestly, and freely.

Christina Rossetti, in her poem written in the context of Christmas and the gift of Jesus Christ, writes,

**What can I give Him,  
Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd,  
I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise man,  
I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give Him:  
Give my heart.**

("In the Bleak Midwinter" ords by Christina Rossetti, c.1872)

Heart is a part of our promise. You know: "cross my heart."

Heart is a part of our oath. Placing your hand over your heart.

The heart suggests there is a deep, personal investment in an oath. We put ourselves on the line when we make a promise, when we take an oath.

We commit ourselves to whatever we pledge ourselves to in the oath. It affects our lives; it influences our choices.

We connect ourselves -- bind ourselves -- to the one invoked in the oath. We are now identified with the one mentioned in the oath, and that one is identified with us.

Which is risky...for all involved. You know, 'Be careful the company you keep'.

Christ risks "being seen" (identified) with us -- not always the most flattering for Christ.

And we risk "being seen" (identified) with Christ -- not always the safest for us.

And on a broader front, we risk "being seen" (identified) with each other -- others who also take/make this oath -- not always real comfortable for us.

Today is Baptism of the Lord Sunday. The starting point for my thinking for today.

We read the story in Mark where Jesus comes and is baptized by John the Baptist. Jesus identifies with all those others coming to John to be baptized. As Roger Gench notes,

[Jesus] **submits to John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, which places him alongside sinners and broken people. He is baptized in solidarity with them;...** ("Looking into the Lectionary," *The Presbyterian Outlook*)

And Jesus continues the action and tradition of baptism with the commission to his followers to

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...."*

In baptism, God claims us and says, "You are mine." God promises to love us and accept us and include us in the community of God's people.

And our part is to say, "Yes, we claim God's claim of us."

Baptism signals a change in our allegiance and the direction of our lives, and a change in our identity. We are no longer our own, but God's. Just as in Jesus's baptism God says, "*You are my Son, whom I love,*" so in our baptism God says, "You are my daughter; you are my son; you are mine." And we pledge ourselves, we dedicate ourselves to "**living as becomes the followers of Christ**" (Service for the Reception of Members).

This is who we are.

And our oath, our pledge, our commitment, our promise is all in response to God's promise (pledge) to love and accept and embrace and claim us.

The Lord's Supper is that act Jesus initiated (or at least transformed in a significant way - i.e., Passover)

*on the night he was betrayed, [when he] took bread, and ... broke it and said, "...do this in remembrance of me."*

When we come to the table, we remember God's decisive act on our behalf in Jesus Christ -- the forgiveness, reconciliation, healing of broken relationship that we (can) experience - and we acknowledge our need for guidance and sustenance in our lives. We cannot do this on our own. We cannot live out this commitment we claim at baptism on our own. And so we gratefully receive the provision we need to lead our lives of discipleship. Christ sustains us and nurtures us for the journey of our lives, the pilgrimage of faith.

All in the context of his promise,

*"I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

"I am with you." Even as the bread and the juice become a part of us -- within us -- so Christ becomes a part of our lives -- within us, within our hearts -- that he might sustain and nurture, provide and guide.

As we noted in our first hymn,

**His oath, his covenant, his blood,  
support me in the whelming flood;**

("My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" words by Edward Mote, c.1834)

And with that support, we know we can carry on.

And so we renew our pledge to follow him and rededicate ourselves to live as his disciples. Again, all in response to Jesus' act on our behalf and to his promise:

*"I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

In one sense it could be said that every time we celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we also renew the vows made at baptism.

For baptism acknowledges the beginning of our journey as God's people.

The Lord's Supper claims the provision -- the providing -- we need to continue our journey as God's people.

A promise. An oath.

-from God to us: God, who always initiates and whose promise and presence is foundational to the sacrament.

A promise. An oath.

-from us to God: our response to God's prior act of grace as expressed and proclaimed in the sacraments; our response of gratitude and dedication.

A promise. An oath.

-from each of us to one another. It is the inescapable corollary to all that proceeds. We are bound to one another by our common bond to our common Lord.

The sacraments make a difference in how we live and how we treat each other.

As we affirm God's stance toward us, we are bound together with all people as fellow children of God. Justice, mercy, peace, and love define our relationship toward all precisely because of God's justice, mercy, peace, and love toward us and the world.

We are a sacramental community, an oath-bound community: bound to one another by a promise -- an oath -- centered in our pledge of allegiance to Christ our Lord.

For in baptism, we pledge ourselves to welcome and to nurture the individual baptized -- to help and support one another in the way of Christ: the way of justice, the way of peace, the way of wholeness, the way of love.

And in communion, we put aside our differences and recognize that the differences -- whose flames were fanned this week -- those differences do not define who we are and whose we are and how we relate to one another. We come to the table, breaking through the barriers that separate and divide us, and gather together at the table at the Lord's invitation, by the Lord's grace, with the Lord's love, in celebration and gratitude.

The hymn we will share later this morning puts it this way:

**I bind my heart this tide,  
to the Galilean's side,  
to the wounds of Calvary,  
to the Christ who died for me.  
I bind my soul this day  
to the neighbor far away,  
and the stranger near at hand,  
in this town, and in this land.**

("I Bind My Heart This Tide" words by Lauchlan MacLean Watt, 1907)

Our oath to Christ guides and shapes our oath to one another.

Sacrament:

-an oath that calls us together as God's people.

-an oath that sends us out as God's people.

-an oath that assures us of God's presence and providing, in days of turmoil and in days of peace.

-an oath -- a promise -- that identifies who we are and whose we are, and directs how we will live as followers of the One who claims us and provides for us.

So, as we commemorate the sacraments this day, let us pledge to live by

-the grace that claims us,

-the provision that sustains us, and

-the presence that holds us.

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

Pastor: Give strength, O Lord,...

People: ...and bless us with peace.

## **SERVICE FOR THE RENEWAL OF BAPTISM**

*\*The Apostles' Creed (Traditional)*

**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.**

## **THE EUCHARIST**

### **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Dearest God, we pledge ourselves to you as you have pledged yourself to us. Receive the gifts we offer as signs of our commitment to following in your way. Use them, and us, to spread the word of your love and faithfulness. In Christ's name we pray. 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 the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)*

*Prayer*

## SENDING

### \*CLOSING HYMN “I Bind My Heart This Tide”

One: I bind my heart this tide  
to the Galilean’s side,

**All: to the wounds of Calvary,  
to the Christ who died for me.**

One: I bind my soul this day  
to the neighbor far away,

**All: And the stranger near at hand  
in this town, and in this land.**

One: I bind my heart and soul  
to the God, the Lord of all,

**All: to the God, the poor one's Friend,  
and the Christ whom God did send.**

One: I bind myself to peace,  
to make strife and envy cease,

**All: My God, fasten sure the cord  
of my service to the Lord!**

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### \*CHARGE AND BLESSING

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

**People: ...Amen.**

### POSTLUDE

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