

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 2020

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SECOND SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on I Samuel 3)*

One: The one who calls you together this day
yearns for each of you and for all people to hear
and be blessed.

All: Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening.

One: Blessed is the One who comes bringing
trustworthy words
for the healing of the world.

All: Speak, Lord, for your servants are listening.

OPENING HYMN “Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun” GtG 663

One: Awake, my soul, and with the sun
your daily stage of duty run;

**All: shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
to pay your morning sacrifice.**

One: Lord, I my vows to you renew.

All: Disperse my sins as morning dew;

One: guard my first springs of thought and will,

All: and with yourself my spirit fill.

One: Direct, control, suggest, this day,
all I design or do or say,

**All: that all my powers, with all their might,
in your sole glory may unite.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, our lives are an open book to you. Whenever we have broken a solemn trust, whenever we have acted on selfish impulse, whenever we have trampled the feelings of others or ignored their need, you have noticed. Help us to recognize in ourselves what you have seen there. Remove the distortions that keep us from acknowledging our sin. Awaken in us a sorrow over the wrong we have done and the good we have neglected. With your love and care, create in us an earnest desire to change. And by your grace, re-create us in the image of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from I John 1)*

One: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and God's word is not in us."

All: **"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing."**

One: By confessing our sins we speak the truth, trusting in God's grace and mercy. So let us hear and proclaim the good news...

All: **...For in Jesus Christ we are restored and forgiven. Alleluia! Amen!**

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 I Samuel 3:1–10

John 1:43–51

I Samuel 3:1–10 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; lie down again." So Samuel went and lay down. ⁶ The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again."

⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if this one calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

John 1:43–51 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴ Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Behold! Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" ⁴⁸ Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." ⁴⁹ Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" ⁵⁰ Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." ⁵¹ And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Humankind."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Ear Wax and Sleepy Dust" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Though it does have its use, the tendency is when we are talking about ear wax, that we're talking about too much ear wax.

Not a good thing. Too much ear wax clogs up our ears, making it difficult to hear: as effective as ear plugs we might buy at the store.

What is the ear wax in our life?

What are the things that plug up our ears and prevent us from hearing, especially that prevent us from hearing what needs to be heard?

-Could it be an ear-full? Too much noise. There are certainly plenty of voices that vye for our attention. Too many distractions.

-Are we paying (giving) attention to the wrong things? Are we deaf to the voice of truth because we have paid attention to voices of lies and deceit?

-Do we plug our ears with our own fingers because we don't want to hear, or we're afraid of what we might hear?

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

What needs to be heard:

-Surely cries of human need. And I’m not talking about self-centered, selfish human desires, but legitimate human need: the need for food and shelter, the need for dignity and community.

-Definitely God’s calling, voice, word needs to be heard. Yet even knowing (saying) this, it still can be difficult.

That’s the difficulty of ear wax.

What about sleepy dust? You know, that crusty stuff around your eyes, what you have to wipe out of your eyes to brush off the sleepiness and be able to open your eyes to see.

What are the things that block our sight and prevent us from seeing?

-Does drowsiness itself block our sight? A disinterest in seeing. Apathy: we don’t care.

-Perhaps we don’t want to see. Or we’re afraid of what might see.

-Are we facing in the wrong direction so that we can’t see?

“Come and see,” Philip invites.

There are things that need to be seen, for our health and wholeness and integrity.

-We need to see ourselves for who we are. We are not God’s gift to the world. But neither are we cosmic garbage.

-We need to see ‘the other’ for who they are -- truly see them.

-We need to see the blight of sin and evil for what it is in our lives and in this world.

-And we definitely need to see the movement of grace in this world. This is vital. For if we cannot and will not see the working of God’s grace in this world, then we have every reason to be afraid of what we might see, for then all we will see is the wretchedness of life in this world. But if we will open our eyes to see, if we will be open to the possibility of the movement of God’s grace, then we will see -- and we will have -- hope; and that will give us the strength to carry on.

“Come and see,” Philip invites. Come and see the working of God’s incredible grace in this world.

Note that this invitation to Nathaniel obviously beckons him to leave where he is in order to go somewhere else in order to see.

I wonder if that picture, that orientation, may have something to say to us as well.

Could it be that it is precisely because of my present stance, posture, environment that I am unable to see aright?

Do we need to recognize that where we are now in life may not be the best vantage point for us to see and understand?

Do we need to leave our very self-centered world and self-only-oriented life in order to discover a new world-view that enables us truly to know the world and see one another and hear God’s voice?

Samuel heard God's voice.

Only problem was, the first three (3) times, he mis-identified the source, thinking it was Eli calling him.

But Eli himself helps Samuel to understand and hear.

Now Eli may have had his own issues (which he did). But, as Walter Brueggemann notes,

Eli is not so old or so distracted that he cannot recognize the holy voice that intrudes where least expected. (Texts-106)

There is something to be said for the help we can receive from each other.

The Quakers have a tradition called the Clearness Committee. A gathering of trusted friends and colleagues to share one's thoughts and questions and yearnings. And the Clearness Committee, through listening deeply and questioning gently and their simple presence, help the individual to discern God's voice in the midst of it all. (see Friends General Conference - <https://www.fgcquaker.org/resources/clearness-committees>)

There is something to be said for the help we can give to each other and the assistance we can receive from one another in discerning and hearing God's voice, God's word.

I remember visiting the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historical Park in Atlanta, GA, and going across the street to walk through the grounds of the King Center.

The grounds of the King Center feature a long pool whose water cascades down in stages, with words that read, as water flows over them,

**WE WILL NOT BE SATISFIED
UNTIL JUSTICE ROLLS DOWN LIKE WATER
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS
LIKE A MIGHTY STREAM**

Words of Dr. King, reflecting the words of the prophet Amos,

*But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

(Amos 5:24)

Much of what Martin Luther King, Jr. said is steeped in the biblical message: allusions to passages, use of biblical images. King himself was steeped in the biblical word, which helped him to hear and see, and to speak truth, so that others, too, could hear and see aright.

Yes, reading words of scripture is a good place from which to hear and a good lens through which to see aright.

But I also say that with a necessary caution. For I am fully aware that the Bible can be tainted with smoke and mirrors in order to deceive and lead us astray.

So that even as we read and immerse ourselves in the pages of the Bible, we need to heed what many would affirm: that Christ himself -- the embodied Word -- must be the focal point through which we see and hear and understand even the written word.

As "A Declaration of Faith" of the Presbyterian Church says it,

**When we encounter apparent tensions and conflicts
in what Scripture teaches us to believe and do,
the final appeal must be to the authority of Christ.**

(Chapter Six: The Word of God, lines 66-68)

Christ himself is the lens through which we see and understand the scriptures, and life itself.

All in order to hear and see aright.
Even to hear and see at all.
For that too is a danger.

Perhaps you've had the experience watching a movie where there's a scene of great suspense and tension, for the audience sees the hidden danger -- where the trap lies, where the enemy lies in wait -- but the protagonist does not. And the tension builds, even to the point where members of the audience shout, "Watch out!"

That suspense relies on the fact that we cannot act, we cannot do something about that which we do not know or see or hear.

-If I do not hear a warning, I cannot heed the warning.
-If I do not see a problem, I cannot work to correct it.
-If I am not aware of a need, I cannot try to alleviate it.

And that realization pushes us toward a deeper understanding, a fuller hearing, a more profound insight.

I cannot respond to something about which I am not aware.
Neither can others.

And so the issue before us is

-not only 'What do we need to hear?'
-but also "What needs to be heard from us?" so that others, too, might be aware.

We need to hear God's word of grace and embrace.

Does the world need to hear that word, too? ...from us?

We need to hear the truth about our self-serving tendencies and our inclination to perceive the world only from our own narrow perspective.

Does the world need to hear that truth, too? ...from us?

We need to hear the call to love our neighbor as ourself, and that sacrificially.

Does the world need to hear that call, too? ...from us?

We need to hear the challenge to live life with humility and to treat one another with respect.

Does the world need to hear that challenge, too? ...from us?

And perhaps the world would hear those things better from us if the world saw those things in us.

For (again) the issue before us is

-not only 'What do we need to see?'
-but also "What needs to be seen in us?"

-Perhaps random acts of kindness.

-Or reaching 'across the aisle' with genuine respect

-Crossing barriers and building bridges.

-Opening the doors for all and welcoming all to the table.
-Reaching out with arms to help and lift up.
-Reaching out with a heart that does not ignore the faults and failings and frailties of the other, yet still reaches out and embraces the other with genuine care and compassion and a deep, sincere concern for the welfare and well-being of the other that I call and claim as brother and sister and fellow child of God.

Will we hear?
Will we see?
Will we seek out an Eli who can help us to hear?
Do we see a Samuel that needs our help (guidance) in order to hear?
Where is there a Philip inviting us to 'come and see'?
Do we know a Nathaniel -- or maybe many -- who need to hear from us the invitation, 'Come and see'?

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

We trust in God the Holy Spirit,

everywhere the giver and renewer of life.

**The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and binds us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.**

The same Spirit

**who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.**

In a broken and fearful world

**the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.**

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,

**we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

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

ORDINATION and INSTALLATION of ELDERS

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: God of grace...
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*

O God, you nourish us by the outpouring of your love. You strengthen us with your enlivening Spirit. Our bodies are sustained by your goodness and power. You are the source of every good act we perform and of every talent we possess. These gifts we offer are but a portion of what you give us in abundance. Accept them as signs of our thanksgiving. Use them, and us, to be Christ's healing and transforming presence for your church and for your world. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "Open My Eyes, That I May See" GtG 451

One: Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me.
All: **Place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.**

One: Silently now
All: I wait for thee,
One: ready, my God,
All: thy will to see.
One: Open my eyes;
All: illumine me, Spirit divine!

One: Open my ears, that I may hear
voices of truth thou sendest clear.
All: And while the wave notes fall on my ear,
everything false will disappear.

One: Silently now
All: I wait for thee,
One: ready, my God,
All: thy will to see.
One: Open my ears;
All: illumine me, Spirit divine!

One: Open my mouth,
All: and let me bear
gladly the warm truth everywhere.

One: Open my heart,
All: and let me prepare
love with thy children thus to share.

One: Silently now
All: I wait for thee,
One: ready, my God,
All: thy will to see.
One: Open my heart;
All: illumine me, Spirit divine!

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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