

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**FIFTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: How good it is to sing praises to our God!  
All: **The whole universe is subject to God's power.**  
One: Creation continues as the universe expands.  
All: **God rules all time and space, yet cares about us.**  
One: We lift up our eyes to see God's wonders.  
All: **We open our ears to receive God's message.**

**\*OPENING HYMN "This Is My Father's World" GtG 370**

One: This is my Father's world,  
All: **and to my listening ears  
all nature sings, and round me rings  
the music of the spheres.**  
One: This is my Father's world;  
All: **I rest me in the thought  
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas,  
his hand the wonders wrought.**  
  
One: This is my Father's world.  
All: **O, let me ne'er forget**  
One: that though the wrong seems oft so strong,  
All: **God is the ruler yet.**  
One: This is my Father's world.  
The battle is not done:  
All: **Jesus who died shall be satisfied,  
and earth and heaven be one.**

*(Public Domain)*

**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Dear God, you demonstrate your power to provide and protect,  
yet still we find it hard to trust you.  
You call us with tenderness,  
yet we turn away.  
You offer us life,  
yet we deem the price too high.  
Forgive us, gracious Lord.  
Touch us with your love  
that our hard hearts may melt  
and our stubbornness may evaporate,  
and your new life may be given birth within us,  
to the glory of your name  
and for the fulfillment of your purposes.  
For we pray in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from II Corinthians 5)*

One: The good news is this: that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to God, not counting our sins against us."  
All: **"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"**  
One: So rejoice and be glad.  
All: **For in Jesus Christ we are renewed, we are loved, we are forgiven.**

**\*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** Isaiah 40:12-31

It is the time of exile.  
The people have been uprooted from their homeland, torn from the only home they have ever known.  
The sentiment is echoed in one of their psalms:  
*How could we sing the Lord's song  
in a foreign land? (Psalm 137:4 NRSV)*

“The Lord will not hear, we have been taken too far away. Surely we are forsaken. The circumstances of my life are hidden from God and erased from God's sight. And God does not care for me, or cannot.”

Like the question raised in another of their psalms:

*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* (Psalm 22:1 NRSV)

And into these dark circumstances, in response to this despairing question, the prophet offers this response:

ISAIAH 40:12-31 (New Revised Standard Version)

*12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of the hand  
and marked off the heavens with a span,  
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure,  
and weighed the mountains in scales  
and the hills in a balance?*

*13 Who has directed the spirit of the Lord,  
or as ... counselor has instructed the Lord?*

*14 Whom did God consult for ... enlightenment,  
and who taught God the path of the right?*

*Who taught God knowledge,  
and showed God the way of understanding?*

*15 Even the nations are like a drop from a bucket,  
and are accounted as dust on the scales;  
see, the Lord takes up the isles like fine dust.*

*16 Lebanon would not provide fuel enough,  
nor are its animals enough for a burnt offering.*

*17 All the nations are as nothing before the Lord;  
they are accounted by God as less than nothing and emptiness.*

*18 To whom then will you liken God,  
or what likeness compare with God?*

*19 An idol? -- A worker casts it,  
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold,  
and casts for it silver chains.*

*20 As a gift one chooses mulberry wood  
-- wood that will not rot --  
then seeks out a skilled artisan  
to set up an image that will not topple.*

*21 Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
Has it not been told you from the beginning?  
Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?*

*22 This is the one who sits above the circle of the earth,  
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;*

*who stretches out the heavens like a curtain,  
and spreads them like a tent to live in;*

<sup>23</sup> *who brings princes to naught,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing.*

<sup>24</sup> *Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown,  
scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth,  
when God blows upon them, and they wither,  
and the tempest carries them off like stubble.*

<sup>25</sup> *To whom then will you compare me,  
or who is my equal? says the Holy One.*

<sup>26</sup> *Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
Who created these?*

*The one who brings out their host and numbers them,  
calling them all by name;  
because God is great in strength,  
mighty in power,  
not one is missing.*

<sup>27</sup> *Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,*

*"My way is hidden from the Lord,  
and my right is disregarded by my God"?*

<sup>28</sup> *Have you not known? Have you not heard?*

*The Lord is the everlasting God  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*The Lord does not faint or grow weary;  
God's understanding is unsearchable.*

<sup>29</sup> *God gives power to the faint,  
and strengthens the powerless.*

<sup>30</sup> *Even youths will faint and be weary,  
and the young will fall exhausted;*

<sup>31</sup> *but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.*

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** “Have WE?” by Pastor Bill Vincent

The people are despondent and despairing; without hope, believing they have been abandoned by their God: “Surely we have been wrenched from the grasp of our God!”

And the prophet asks: *“Have you not known? Have you not heard?”*

Yes, they had.

Only they lived as if they had not.

Have we not known? Have we not heard?

In fact, we have heard, we have known.

Only we live as if we had not heard, as if we did not know.

We cower before threats to life and limb, as if we were but helpless babes in arms and knew not the Almighty God, Lord of heaven and earth.

We stumble blindly down the pathways of life as if we heard not the voice of our Master, and the divine call to mercy and forgiveness, justice and compassion.

We fumble in our mind’s eye for some truth upon which to lay hold, as if we had not been told from the beginning of the one who is the way and the truth and the life.

We walk with our knees shaking and our lives quaking, as if we did not understand that the foundations of the earth itself rest upon the rock that is our Lord and our God, our refuge and our strength.

At a pastor’s retreat, we talked about the changes we were all experiencing: changes in the world and culture, in our community and our lives.

And the leader sought to remind us each time that we always have access to the power of the living God.

Some change may be good, some change may be not-so-good. And often we do not know the difference.

Yet even in the midst of changing times and times that change,

*...we will not fear, though the earth should change,*

*though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;*

*though its waters roar and foam,*

*though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*

(Psalm 46:2-3 NRSV)

The foundation of our assumptions and presumptions about life quakes beneath us.

Mountains of responsibility tremble.

Mountains of expectations shake.

The sea of life roars and foams, tossing us this way and that.

And we are terrified.

And we despair.

Yet in the midst of forces that seem to unmake us, God is our refuge and strength a very present – an ever-present – help in times of trouble.

The one who holds in the divine hands the fiery stars and the deathly cold of space, holds us in those same hands.

The God who guides each fragile monarch butterfly on its 2,000-mile migration guides us from womb to tomb...and beyond.

The one who weeps for each sparrow who falls by the way weeps each time we fall by the wayside.

The God who cares enough to bring the sun up every morning, cares as well for us.

The one who searches out the heavens and knows every star by name, searches out the human heart and knows our deepest pain.

The God who crafts the delicate hoarfrost and forms each crystalline snowflake, seeks to craft and form us as well.

The power and majesty and might of the Creator God are available to us for the living of our days, for walking in God's ways.

With an important clarifier.

Children's song:

**My God is so big, so strong and so mighty,  
there's nothing my God cannot do...for you!**

True.

However, just because there's nothing God cannot do does not mean God will do just anything for me.

All things may be possible. But, as Walter Brueggemann once noted,

**not all things are promised.** (*Genesis*, Interpretation series)

God did not promise a rose garden, but God did promise help and strength. God did not promise freedom from suffering, but did promise perseverance and peace, even in suffering.

God's power and majesty and might are available to us, but not for our personal will and whim, or to condone our own twisted version of life.

For God will be true to Godself. So God will be true to us with a truth beyond the truest true, a truth with which we, unfortunately, are all too *unfamiliar*.

Which may be why the way in which God leads and the way in which God helps may not always be to our liking.

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.*

(Isaiah 55:8 NRSV)

The way to life may be through death on a cross. The way to joy may be through the sorrow of loss. The way to strength may be through embracing our weakness. The way to wisdom may be through the foolishness of the gospel. The way to peace may be through the turmoil of confrontation.

For it is God's way and God's life, God's peace and God's justice that God seeks to establish in our lives.

All of which is God being true to God, and we can ask for nothing better – or truer – in life than that.

And so I wonder...

When we hear of wars and rumors of wars, conflict and confrontation, do we respond out of fear and despair? or out of faith and determination?

Not to suggest I know the answer to the world's problems or governmental policy questions.

But I am suggesting that responding out of faith will bring us far closer to God's purposes and way for us than responding out of fear.

*"I can do all things through the one who strengthens me"* (Philippians 4:13 NRSV), the Apostle Paul wrote.

He knew whereof he spoke.

He described his life: flogged, whipped, beaten, stoned, ship-wrecked, imprisoned (see II Corinthians 11:23-27). All along he sought to be faithful to the one he followed.

The one he followed, who even in the most despairing time of *his* life – hanging from a cross – prayed to God, *"Into your hands I commit my spirit"* (Luke 23:46).

Into the hands of the one who...

*takes up the isles like fine dust ...  
and weigh[s] the mountains in scales  
and the hills in a balance?*

Into these hands we commit our lives.

So, even in pandemic and pandemonium, through political upheaval and economic chaos, we can run with perseverance the race set before us and not be weary, if we would but wait at the feet of the Lord of heaven and earth

*who has measured the waters in the hollow of the hand  
and marked off the heavens with a span.*

We can walk even in the way of sorrows – to our own cross – and not faint, if we would but wait upon the one who waits upon us in Jesus Christ, and offers us life beyond our imagining.

Surely the one who lifts up the Rockies from their base and carves the Mississippi's run to the sea, knows something of this life we live.

Surely the one who clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the air, can be trusted for this life we live.

Yes, all too often the experience of the exiles echoes our own experience. And there are those times when we ask the questions of our exile from faith, from hope:

-Has God forsaken us?

-Has God forgotten us?

-Have the circumstances of life hidden us from the grace-filled gaze of God?

-Has the situation of life snatched us from the guiding grasp of God?

To which Paul answers a resounding ‘No!’

*Not life or death, nothing that happens today or may happen tomorrow, no power from on high nor power from below – absolutely nothing has any power to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)*

The prophet could not agree more.

*Have you not known? Have you not heard?*

*The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

Have we not known? Have we not heard?

Indeed, we have.

So let us live by that hearing.

Let us live in that knowledge.

And let us walk and work and worship with confidence, trusting in the God who made us with the divine hands, and holds us in those hands even now.

And let the gathered people of God breathe a sigh of relief, and let them say, ‘**Amen**’.

#### **\*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.**

**With believers in every time and place,  
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death  
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

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

#### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**Pastor:** We lift up our hearts to you, O God.

**People:** In your mercy and glory, hear our prayer.

#### **THE EUCHARIST**

#### **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*



*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**For the goodness and abundance of your gifts, we give you thanks, O Lord.  
For the beauty of creation and the joy of living, we give you thanks.  
Accept the offering of our gratitude  
that we might be strengthened in our faith.  
Accept the offering of our gifts and ourselves  
that your bounty may be shared  
and your love spread throughout the world.  
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. Please drink the cup as you are served.)*

*Prayer*

## SENDING

### \*CLOSING HYMN “Wherever I May Wander”

One: Wherever I may wander,

**All: wherever I may be,**

One: I'm certain of my Maker's love;

**All: God's care is over me.**

One: God made the great high mountains,  
and made the wide blue sea;

**All: God made the sky where airplanes fly;  
God made the world, and me.**

One: Throughout the whole creation

I see God's loving care  
for everyone in every land,  
God's children everywhere.

**All: Wherever I may wander,  
wherever I may be,  
I'm certain of my Maker's love;  
God's care is over me.**

*One-time worship service use granted without fee (Westminster John Knox Press).*

### \*CHARGE AND BLESSING

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

**People: ...Amen.**

### POSTLUDE

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