

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FIFTH SUNDAY in LENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We call on your steadfast love and mercy, O God.
All: We are eager to know the God who loves us.
One: Lift us up and draw us to yourself as we worship in this hour.
All: Equip us for our daily living as we seek to be true to your covenant with us.
Unison: **We come to worship the Lord our God.**

***OPENING HYMN** “Now the Green Blade Rises” GtG 247

One: Now the green blade rises
from the buried grain,
**All: wheat that in dark earth
many days has lain;**
One: love lives again,
that with the dead has been;
**All: love is come again
like wheat arising green.**

One: In the grave they laid him,
All: love by hatred slain,
One: thinking that he would
never wake again,
**All: laid in the earth like grain
that sleeps unseen;**
One: love is come again
All: like wheat arising green.

One: Forth he came at Easter
like the risen grain,

**All: he that for three days
in the grave had lain;**

One: raised from the dead,

All: my living Lord is seen;

One: love is come again

All: like wheat arising green.

One: When our hearts are wintry,
grieving, or in pain,

**All: your touch can call us back
to life again;**

One: fields of our hearts that dead
and bare have been:

**All: love is come again
like wheat arising green.**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. 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: The Lord hears our confession and is eager to forgive. Take to heart the good news; believe it, live it.

All: In Jesus Christ we are 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 READING John 12:20-33

John 12:20-33 (New Revised Standard Version)

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Humankind to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

The hour has come.
Everything is set. All the pieces are in place. Now is the time.

The hour has come.
Good thing for us: we (you and I) who are represented in those Greeks who come to Jesus.

Jesus sees the Greeks as an advance scouting party of the "all [people]" who will be drawn to him when he is "lifted up" (12:32). They represent the "other sheep" that he will bring in (10:16), and their appearing is a sign that "the hour" has come. (James D. Ernest, Feasting on the Word)

The hour for Jesus to glorify God: to reveal – and indeed, to celebrate – to reveal, with ultimate clarity, the character and the purpose of God.

The hour has come for Jesus to glorify God...
...by dying like a grain of wheat.

Kind of jarring to hear it like that, don't you think?
'The hour has come for Jesus to glorify God...by dying like a grain of wheat'.
But such is the case.

And why?

Well, because the world – including us (you and me) – all too often stands in opposition to the glory of God; all too often stands against the very character and purpose of God.

-We do not want to do things God's way. We want to do things *our* way.

-We do not want God to be first in our life. *We* want to be first in our life. I mean, it is, after all, our life. (Or is it?)

That's why the hour is so devastating – and gory – because the opposition is so strong, and so vicious. *Our* opposition.

That's why the hour is so devastating ... and so significant (exciting?!), at the same time. For the world exerts all its power – it's ultimate power: death – to say 'No' to God's character and purpose – to say 'No' to God.

And God, through Christ, says 'Yes', breaking the ultimate grip of the world's power. For Jesus holds fast – to God's way, to God's will, to God – and God is glorified: God's character is revealed, God's purpose is advanced. All by Jesus holding fast to God in love...and by God holding fast to Jesus in love.

In that way God is glorified. Because that is God's character. That is God's purpose.

For God so loved the world... (John 3:16)

So, Jesus' hour has come.

Which means *our* hour has come, too.

The moment of decision. The time to choose.

This is the judgment of which Jesus speaks: Choosing for the world as it stands in opposition to God; or choosing for the One who glorifies God and stands with God. Choosing for the darkness; or for the light. Choosing for the world, whose power is ultimately broken; or choosing for God, whose ultimate power is revealed as love: suffering love, sacrificial love, self-giving love.

Our hour has come.

So what will it be?

And what does it look like? What does it mean to stand in opposition to God?

That's probably easy enough. Just look around you...and within you.

What does it look like? What does it mean to seek to glorify God, as Jesus does?

(#1) -Well, it includes that 'dying like a grain of wheat'.

Jesus makes that clear in his words:

...unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves

me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. (John 12:24-26 NRSV)

“Jesus’ servants must relinquish the life that the world offers them.” (Diane G. Chen, Connections, 104a) “The life that the world offers them,” with its eternal and infernal consumption of everything; its dog-eat-dog self-absorption; its “my-way-or-the-highway” stance.

“By holding too tightly to our lives...we lose them, ... by letting go of our lives...we enter into life most profoundly. (David Dark, Connections, 105)

So,

What in your life must die so that you may flourish? What must fall away so that you can rise again in Christ? (*Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*, Questions for Reflection)

Dying, like that grain of wheat.

(#2) -And it seems clear, too, that the focus is our revealing the character and purpose of God: reflecting in the words I speak, the deeds I do, and the choices I make – reflecting that “I’m with God.”

But to reflect the character of God, I have to know the character of God.

And so Jesus will later exhort his disciples,

Abide in me as I abide in you. ... I am the vine, you are the branches. ...abide in me and I in [you] (John 15:4-5 NRSV)

Abide: to remain. That sense of connection, of communing. That relationship. A deep relationship.

We have to dare getting to know this one who calls and claims us; we have to risk getting to know him, even though it may change us.

(#3) -And then bear fruit.

Jesus goes on to say,

... Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit ... My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. (John 15:5,8 NRSV)

As we come to know the character of God, we bear fruit reflective of God’s character of love and grace and mercy; bear fruit – live lives – reflective of God’s purpose for the world, which is community and giving and life.

Bearing the fruit that glorifies God.

What the Apostle Paul calls “the fruit of the Spirit.”

He starts out by contrasting it with “the works of the flesh.” Things like

...enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, ...

By contrast,

Paul writes,

the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:20-21, 22-23 NRSV)

Bear *this* fruit.

(#4) -And do all that for and with others: “the world.”

You see, it’s not just about me. It’s about the world: “all people.”

Remember at the beginning of this gospel, we read those incomparable words,
And the Word became flesh and lived among us.

‘Us’. Not just me. God’s word of love and grace and life

...became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14 NRSV)

Grace for the world. Truth about all the world.

So Jesus says,

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” (John 12:32 NRSV)

“For God so loved the world.” (John 3:16)

If we will do this...

-dying like a grain of wheat – dying to an abusive, self-absorbed life;

-engaging and embracing a relationship with the very one who calls and claims us;

-bearing the fruit of that relationship in kindness and faithfulness;

-and in a **“life of loving service with and for”** (Roger Gench, Looking into the

Lectionary) all people...

...then our hour, too – our choices, our decisions, our life – will bring glory to God.

Jesus’ “hour” has come, and he has glorified God.

His hour has come.

Perhaps it’s time for me to embrace *mine*.

***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.**

**We trust in Jesus Christ,
fully human, fully God.**

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:

preaching good news to the poor

and release to the captives,

teaching by word and deed

and blessing the children,

healing the sick

and binding up the brokenhearted,

eating with outcasts,

forgiving sinners,

and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.

**Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
Jesus was crucified,
 suffering the depths of human pain
 and giving his life for the sins of the world.
God raised this Jesus from the dead,
 vindicating his sinless life,
 breaking the power of sin and evil,
 delivering us from death to life eternal.**

**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!"**

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Our prayers we lift to you.
People: **Glory be to you, O God.**

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*

Most giving and forgiving God, you provide for our every need. You open our lips to offer you praise. You strengthen our hands to respond to Christ's call. With hearts, hands, and voices renewed by your Spirit, we place now before you our commitment to serve. May our gifts be made perfect through Christ to glorify you and bless the world. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "How Clear Is Our Vocation, Lord" GtG 432

One: How clear is our vocation, Lord,

**All: when once we heed your call
to live according to your word**

One: and daily learn, refreshed, restored,

**All: that you are Lord of all
and will not let us fall.**

One: But if, forgetful, we should find
your yoke is hard to bear;

All: if worldly pressures fray the mind

One: and love itself cannot unwind
its tangled skein of care:

All: our inward life repair.

One: We marvel how your saints became
in hindrances more sure:

**All: whose joyful virtues put to shame
the casual way we wear your name,**

One: and by our faults obscure

All: your power to cleanse and cure.

One: In what you give us, Lord, to do,

All: together or alone,

One: in old routines or ventures new,

All: may we not cease to look to you:

One: the cross you hung upon,

All: all you endeavored, done.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: God writes the law of love and service within us and empowers us to live according to that law.

**All: We have experienced God's presence together.
That presence will sustain us as we scatter.**

One: We are people of God, accepted and loved.

All: We are followers of Christ, commissioned for service.

One: Where Christ leads, we will follow.

All: Where our service is needed, we will go.

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

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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