

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 18, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRD SUNDAY of EASTER

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Life has been revealed to us in this Easter season.
All: We gather once more to testify to life.
One: We declare to each other what we have experienced.
All: In community we find the life God intends...or the life finds us.
Unison: So come, let us worship the Lord of life and resurrection!

***OPENING HYMN** “Christ Jesus Lay in Death’s Strong Bands” GtG 237

One: Christ Jesus lay in death’s strong bands
for our offenses given;
**All: but now at God’s right hand Christ stands
and brings us light from heaven;**
One: therefore let us joyful be
and sing to God right thankfully
loud songs of hallelujah!
All: Hallelujah!

One: Our Savior Jesus, God’s own Son,
here in our stead descended;
**All: the knot of sin has been undone;
the reign of death is ended.**
One: Christ has crushed the power of hell;
now death is but an empty shell.
**All: Its sting is lost forever!
Hallelujah!**

One: Here the true Paschal Lamb we see,
whom God so freely gave us.
**All: He died on the accursed tree
so strong his love to save us.**

One: See, his blood now marks our door:
faith points to it;
death passes o'er,
and Satan cannot harm us.

All: Hallelujah!

One: So let us keep the festival where-to the Lord invites us;

**All: Christ is the very joy of all,
the sun that warms and lights us.**

One: Now his grace to us imparts eternal sunshine to our hearts;

All: the night of sin is ended!

Hallelujah!

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION** “Before I Take the Body of My Lord” GtG 428

One: Before I take the body of my Lord,
before I share his life in bread and wine,

All: I recognize the sorry things within:

Unison: these I lay down.

One: The words of hope I often failed to give,

All: the prayers of kindness buried by my pride,

One: the signs of care I argued out of sight:

All: these I lay down.

One: The narrowness of vision and of mind,

All: the need for other folk to serve my will,

One: and every word and silence meant to hurt:

All: these I lay down.

One: Of those around in whom I meet my Lord,

All: I ask their pardon

One: and I grant them mine,

All: that every contradiction of Christ's peace

Unison: might be laid down.

One: Lord Jesus Christ,
companion at this feast,

**All: I empty now my heart
and stretch my hands,**

One: and ask to meet you here
in bread and wine

All: which you lay down.

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*SILENT CONFESSION

*ASSURANCE OF PARDON (from I John 1 & 2)

- One: "If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
- All: As we confess our sins, we expose our wounds to Love's healing and our self-deceit to Love's correction.**
- One: "Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."
- All: On the cross, Christ gives his life that we may have new life through the forgiveness of our sins and the restoration of our life in the light of God's grace and love.**
- One: Our prayers have been heard
and God's promises are sure.
In Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven.
- All: Thanks be to God!**

*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 I John 1:1-2:2

I JOHN 1:1-2:2 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—² this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—³ we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ. ⁴ We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

⁵ This is the message we have heard from God and proclaim to you, that God is light and in God there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with God while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷ but if we walk in the light as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus God's Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, God, who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and God's word is not in us.

2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Really Real” by Pastor Bill Vincent

The writer of this letter wants to make it clear from the very beginning: of paramount importance is to convince us that this is really real; this is true, this is actual; this is real.

He starts off at the very beginning:

*We have seen, we have seen, we have seen;
we have heard, we have heard;
we have looked at and touched.*

This resurrection, this risen Lord is real, true. Yes!

He’s trying to make that point about other things as well.

Like our sin.

Because, “*if we say that we have no sin,*” that ain’t real.

I was watching the news yesterday morning: the story about another mass shooting. And something ain’t right.

I read about next Sunday being Blue Sunday: A Day of Prayer for Abused Children and Those Who Rescue Them. And April as Child Abuse Prevention Month. Where we remember that

-One in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused before their 18th birthday.

-Within one year of aging out of the foster care system, 66% of victims will be homeless, in jail or dead.

(www.bluesunday.org)

And something ain’t right.

April is also Earth Month. April 22nd, Earth Day.

Just this week, as I opened up my computer and booted it up, I was met with a beautiful picture of this glacier in the mountains with this nice pool in it. A beautiful picture...until I began to reflect further on it. Until I realized that that pool of crystal clear water in the midst of that glacier was indicative of an uglier truth: of global warming and all that we are doing to mistreat and abuse this world. Now, one glacial pool may not say as much. But the preponderance of glacial pools and the rate of glacial melting in our day and age do say as much.

And something ain’t right.

Do we need to be reminded of it?

Actually, it hit me square in the face with that hymn we used as our Prayer of Confession:

**The words of hope
I often failed to give,
the prayers of kindness
buried by my pride,
the signs of care
I argued out of sight:**

...

**The narrowness of vision
and of mind,
the need for other folk
to serve my will,
and every word and silence
meant to hurt:....**

(Glory to God #428 "Before I Take the Body of My Lord"; words by John L. Bell and Graham Maule, 1989)

[--raise my hand--] Guilty as charged.

Sin is real. And our part in it is undeniable.

But to face it – with institutions of the world as a whole and my own individual sin – to face it square on – raw, naked, all by itself – is to be overwhelmed.

But notice that John doesn't start there.

John doesn't start with the darkness but with the light.

God is light,

he says, after he has spoken about this wondrous light they have heard and seen and touched in the resurrection.

Because if we start with this incredible, wondrous good news of God's light and life and love, then we can face up to our sin – courageously, humbly – for we know that there's something more to the story. Something more to our story than simply the deadend of our darkness. Something more to our story than simply the deadend of our sin and rebellion against God and rejection of God's way of light and life and love.

So John wants us to know for certain – from the get-go, from the very beginning – that the resurrection – the risen Lord, the pinnacle of God's revelation of God's light and life and love – is true, real; definitely, absolutely; really real.

And so too is that forgiveness. That forgiveness and that restoration and that embrace God offers because of Christ and his giving of himself and his new life.

And so we say we believe. And that is wondrous and that is good.

Until we turn around and realize that...we still sin. We still turn away from God. We still don't give those words of kindness. We still fail to walk in the light.

And again, are we meant to despair?

George Stroup, professor at Columbia Theological Seminary, shares something of that twist, but also that hope.

Christians who live in communion with God [that fellowship, that saying we believe] **need not deny that they are sinners, or pretend that shadows do not continue to fall across their journey toward the light. They should not despair when in the days and weeks that follow Easter the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, because in the communion** [and the life] **they have with God they have an advocate, Jesus the Son, who is righteous, even when they are not, and it is his truthfulness, his atoning sacrifice, that calls them out of the shadows and enables them, with confidence and not in terror, to confess their sins and to walk toward the light.** (Feasting on the Word, “Theological Perspective”)

It is this light from God that enables us to face that darkness – even the darkness within – and then to turn to walk in the light.

It is God’s work and Christ’s life that makes our new life possible, because the resurrection – the risen Lord, whom we know and experience and in whose life we can live – is really real...even now.

Joel Green (professor, Fuller Theological Seminary) offers a helpful image, it seems to me. For we can too often think, “OK, God is light and our sin is darkness, and it’s one or the other.” But Green reminds us that maybe it’s not quite as simple as that...and maybe more hopeful. If we think of the light and think of the darkness as spheres of influence and allegiance, and the center as the direction toward which one is walking or living.

In order to make sense of John’s message at this point, it may be helpful to set aside one way of viewing the picture he paints, as though light is found in one container, darkness in another, and people can be divided into one or the other. An alternative would be to think of spheres of influence and allegiance. Here the emphasis falls not on boundaries that separate one group from another, but on the center toward which one is walking (or living). (Connections, “Connecting the Reading with Scripture,” p.211b)

So that when we say we live in the light and we claim God as light and want that light to be our light, we have turned to face in that direction. We still know that there is darkness within us. But we are turned toward the light. And that’s the hope. And that gives us that new life and the possibility of living that new life.

-So that when we speak out against hate and despair that all too often leads to mass shootings,

-when we advocate for children who cannot speak for themselves in the midst of the violence that they know in their lives,

-if we pick up trash and recycle and seek to reduce our own carbon footprint in the world;

-when we speak words of hope,

-when we pray for kindness so that it leads to acts of kindness,

-when we use our words, and our silence, to heal and reconcile,
then we are walking in the light, and living that new life.

And we can see it in our lives and hear it in the lives of one another, and the world can touch it in us and know it as well.

This resurrection, this risen Lord is not some figment, but we have seen it and heard it and touched it. It's real.

Yes, our sin, our darkness, is real as well. And we are all too often seen in it and hear it and it touches our lives.

But that resurrected Lord is here. And so too is his new life...in us.
And we can see it. And we can hear it. And we can touch it.
And thank God the world can too.

So embrace it. Claim it. Even as this Lord claims you.
Know that light and that life. And live it.

For – God's honest truth – it's really real. For you. For me. For the world.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

We trust in God,

whom Jesus called Abba, Father.

**In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image,
male and female, of every race and people,
to live as one community.**

But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.

**Ignoring God's commandments,
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
accept lies as truth,
exploit neighbor and nature,
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
We deserve God's condemnation.**

Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.

**In everlasting love,
the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
to bless all families of the earth.**

**Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.**

**Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.**

**Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.**

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Hear us, O God...
People: ...your mercy is great.

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*

Giver of eternal gladness,
from whom flow endless blessings:
All that we have is from your creative hand.
All that we can give away we do through Jesus' love.
All our renewal comes from the Holy Spirit's wisdom.
Deal graciously with our giving
that your church may be empowered
in the proclamation of good news
and the transformation of human life.
In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

*CLOSING HYMN "Lord, the Light of Your Love Is Shining" GtG 192

One: Lord, the light of your love is shining,
All: in the midst of the darkness, shining;
One: Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us;
All: set us free by the truth you now bring us.
One: Shine on me;
All: shine on me.

One: Shine, Jesus, shine;
All: fill this land with the Father's glory.
One: Blaze, Spirit, blaze;
All: set our hearts on fire.
One: Flow, river, flow;
All: flood the nations with grace and mercy.
One: Send forth your word, Lord,
All: and let there be light.

One: Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
from the shadows into your radiance;
All: by the blood I may enter your brightness.
One: Search me; try me;
All: consume all my darkness.
One: Shine on me;
All: shine on me.

One: As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
All: so our faces display your likeness;
One: ever changing from glory to glory,
All: mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
One: Shine on me;
All: shine on me.

One: Shine, Jesus, shine;
All: fill this land with the Father's glory.
One: Blaze, Spirit, blaze;
All: set our hearts on fire.
One: Flow, river, flow;
All: flood the nations with grace and mercy.
One: Send forth your word, Lord,
All: and let there be light.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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