

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 25, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FOURTH SUNDAY of EASTER

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: Come and worship, for Christ is Lord and lives in you and in me.
All: Come and worship, for God is good and invites us to accept God's love.
- One: Come and worship, for the Spirit dwells in our midst, empowering us towards newness and wholeness.
All: We come to worship the Lord our God.

OPENING HYMN "Great God, Your Love Has Called Us Here" *[tune 703]*

- One: Great God, your love has called us here
as we, by love, for love were made.
**All: Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonored, disobeyed.**
- One: We come, with all our heart and mind
All: your call to hear, your love to find.
- One: We come with self inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined
All: yet seeking hope for humankind.
- One: Great God, in Christ you call our name
and then receive us as your own
**All: not through some merit, right, or claim
but by your gracious love alone.**
- One: We strain to glimpse your mercy seat
All: and find you kneeling at our feet.
- One: Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friends.

**All: Suffer and serve till all are fed
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.**

One: Great God, in Christ you set us free

All: your life to live, your joy to share.

One: Give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair

**All: and offer all that faith can do
while love is making all things new.**

Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, have mercy on us.

**We have made promises in words
that have not been lived out in truth.**

**We have too easily pushed aside your commands
in favor of our own desires.**

**We have failed to use our overflowing cups
to fill the cups of sisters and brothers
who need what we could offer.**

**Forgive us, O Lord, and abide in us
by the power of your Spirit
that our lives may demonstrate
the love we know in you.**

In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: We seek God's grace with boldness
because we trust in Jesus Christ,
the One who loves us and laid down his life for us.

**All: This is the good news of the gospel:
in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.**

Unison: 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 3:1-2,11,16-24

I JOHN 3:1-2,16-24 (various)

¹ See what kind of love the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know God. ² Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when Christ is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

...

¹¹ This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

...

¹⁶ This is how we know love: Christ laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ Whoever has the goods of the world and sees a brother or sister who has need, yet closes their heart against them...how does the love of God abide in that person? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in truth and deed. ¹⁹ This is how we will know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts in God's presence. ²⁰ Even if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts and knows all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; ²² and we receive from God whatever we ask, because we keep God's commandments and do what pleases God. ²³ This is God's commandment, that we believe in the name of God's Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another as commanded. ²⁴ All who keep God's commandments abide in God, and God abides in them. And by this we know that God abides in us, by the Spirit that God has given us.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Don't Talk of Love...” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Eliza Doolittle is irritated. In the musical “My Fair Lady,” Eliza has been taught to speak “proper like” in order to pass in high society. She has a young suitor – or would-be suitor – who can do the same; but it seems that's all he can do: talk. In her irritation, Eliza challenges him:

“Don't talk of love...

Show me!”

(“Show Me” by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe)

Seems appropriate to mention this, seeing as it is we live in the “Show Me” state.

But for our purposes, I want us to think of “show me” not as in the entrenched skeptic with arms crossed, saying, “Just try to convince me I'm wrong; I dare you.”

But “show me” as in demonstrate the reality of what is said: that something is really real (like we mentioned last week).

Like a tulip. You know, the beautiful flowers we have seen much of recently, in our yards, in the yards of neighbors, as we drive down the street.

You don't have to tell me there's a bulb in the ground beneath the surface. The existence of the flower demonstrates quite conclusively that there's a bulb there.

So, don't tell me there's a bulb of love in the ground – or your heart – show me.

Because sometimes the bulb's a dud.

Are we?

But I get ahead of myself.

Actually, we need to take a step (or two) back before we proceed.

For the starting point for my being able to demonstrate love is my knowing I am loved. Which is precisely where John starts.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us in that we should be called God's children, and that is what we are! (v.1)

Of course, we could respond, "That's nothing but 'words, words, words'."

Except that God "shows us."

The Apostle Paul says,

God proves God's love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8 NRSV)

John says simply,

This is how we know love: Christ laid down his life for us. (v.16)

Christ's giving of his life, Christ's giving up his life, demonstrates quite conclusively his love for us, God's love for us.

From that foundation – a foundation we must never forget, a foundation we must always hold before us, a foundation that is our assurance and confidence – from that foundation – and from that example – we are empowered to love...and not be a dud bulb.

We can live into that love, embrace that love, show that love by loving one another.

This is how we know love: Christ laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. Whoever has the goods of the world and sees a brother or sister who has need, yet closes their heart against them...how does the love of God abide in that person? (v.16-17)

John gets right to the point: simple, practical.

And we could spend all day working out the implications and describing what this looks like.

But instead, this morning, let me simply offer a couple of insights.

Lindsey Jodrey (of Princeton Theological Seminary) reminds us of another story about Jesus: he has gathered with his disciples the night before he is betrayed, and washes his disciples' feet...right before he gives them a 'new commandment': to love one another.

Jodrey writes,

In a desert climate where most travel was on foot, washing someone's feet was no small task. In fact, this task was saved for servants and slaves of the lowest ranks. It was a humble job, but it was also essential. ... To wash someone's feet was to recognize the need of another and to use one's own effort and resources to meet that need. (Connections, 242-243)

Did you hear it?

-needs

-resources

-effort...or action

We're not called to meet all the needs of the world, but the needs we see. So we have to look.

We're not expected to offer resources that we do not have, but the resources we do have. Which means we have to be honest about the resources that are available to us.

And not in words only, but we must act: we must do something.

For if I see a need and do not act, I do not love.

If I deny the resources available to me to offer to meet that need, I do not love.

I mentioned last week that today is Blue Sunday: A Day of Prayer for Abused Children and Those Who Rescue Them. Do we see the need? What resources are available to us? And will we act?

This past Thursday was Earth Day, this month of April Earth Month.

Surely we see the need.

What resources will we bring to bear to demonstrate Christ's "lay down one's life" love for the world? for the creation? for all God's creatures? We may not have the resources to address everything needed, but what resources do we have?

And will we put aside our convenience in order to do the right thing for the planet?

We heard the verdict this week in the trial of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd. Just this week there were other instances of shootings and death and the cry of injustice.

Will we acknowledge the need to stand up for the dignity of every human life? Will we claim the resources of time and voice and connections? And will we act?

For to say it and not do it is not to mean it at all.

And so Jesus said,

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." (Matthew 21:28-31 NRSV)

Claudia Highbaugh (Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life, Connecticut College, New London, CT) shares this:

Love in deed...is the active and willing response to meet the needs at hand with the goods at hand. (Feasting: Pastoral Perspective)
And don't ever doubt that you have 'goods at hand'.

There was a contest to find the most caring child.

The winner was a four year old child whose next door neighbor was an elderly gentleman who had recently lost his wife. Upon seeing the man cry, the little boy went into the old gentleman's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his Mother asked what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, "Nothing, I just helped him cry." (story attributed to author and lecturer Leo Buscaglia)

He saw the need, knew he had something to offer, and did it.

Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in truth and deed. (v.18)

**"Don't talk of love...
Show me!"**

Just as God showed us.

***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)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Source of love, Renewer of life...

People: ...hear our prayer.

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*

**Gracious God, we give you thanks
that you have shown us the meaning of love
through Jesus Christ, who gave his life for us.
Show us how to share Christ's love
by giving our lives for one another;
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.**

SENDING

CLOSING HYMN "Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service" *[tune 490]*

One: Lord, whose love through humble service
bore the weight of human need,

All: **who upon the cross, forsaken,
offered mercy's perfect deed,**

One: we, your servants, bring the worship
not of voice alone, but heart,

All: **consecrating to your purpose
every gift that you impart.**

One: Still your children wander homeless;

All: still the hungry cry for bread;

One: still the captives long for freedom;

All: still in grief we mourn our dead.

One: As, O Lord, your deep compassion
healed the sick and freed the soul,

**All: use the love your Spirit kindles
still to save and make us whole.**

One: As we worship,

All: grant us vision,

One: till your love's revealing light,
in its height and depth and greatness,

All: dawns upon our quickened sight,

One: making known the needs and burdens
your compassion bids us bear,

**All: stirring us to tireless striving,
your abundant life to share.**

One: Called from worship to your service,

All: forth in your dear name we go,

One: to the child, the youth, the aged,

All: love in living deeds to show;

One: hope and health, goodwill and comfort,
counsel, aid, and peace we give,

**All: that your servants, Lord, in freedom
may your mercy know and live.**

Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.

CHARGE AND BLESSING

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

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

The Prayer of Confession is reprinted by permission of United Church Press from *Led by Love* by Lavon Bayler. © 1996 by United Church Press.

The Prayer of Confession, Assurance of Pardon, and Prayer of Dedication are reprinted by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. © 2014.