

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 9, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**SIXTH SUNDAY of EASTER**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: The love of God urges us on.  
**All: The love of God calls us together**  
One: By grace God claims us.  
**All: With joy we join in the song.**  
**Unison: Come, let us worship the Lord our God.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” GtG 366 *[Tune 761]*

One: Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven,  
**All: to earth come down,  
fix in us thy humble dwelling;**  
One: all thy faithful mercies crown.  
**All: Jesus, thou art all compassion;**  
One: pure, unbounded love thou art;  
**All: visit us with thy salvation;  
enter every trembling heart.**

One: Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit  
into every troubled breast;  
**All: let us all in thee inherit;  
let us find the promised rest.**  
One: Take away the love of sinning;  
**All: Alpha and Omega be;**  
One: end of faith,  
**All: as its beginning,**  
One: set our hearts at liberty.

One: Come, Almighty to deliver;  
**All: let us all thy life receive;**  
One: suddenly return, and never,  
nevermore thy temples leave.  
**All: Thee we would be always blessing,  
serve thee as thy hosts above,**  
One: pray, and praise thee without ceasing,  
**All: glory in thy perfect love.**

One: Finish then thy new creation;  
**All: pure and spotless let us be;**  
One: let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee:  
**All: changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love, and praise.**

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#### **\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**You call us to newness, O God, but we'd just as soon keep doing things the way we've always done them; don't bother us with suggestions of a different and better way of living. You knock on our door, offering us renewal and life; yet we are more than willing to continue with our ho-hum, hum-drum life. Forgive us for shunning you and your ways. Make us eager to embrace the freshness of your life among us. Help us to welcome your Spirit in our lives. Renew us and revitalize us, that we may be part of your new creation in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

#### **\*SILENT CONFESSION**

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

One: "The love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all, therefore all have died."  
**All: "And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them."**  
One: Because Christ died, we receive forgiveness for our sins.  
**All: Because he was raised from the dead, we receive new life in him.**  
One: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!"  
**All: Let us rejoice in our new creation in Christ!**

## **\*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**

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SCRIPTURE READINGS** I Samuel 10:6-11  
Acts 10:34-48

**SERMON** “Watch Out!” by Pastor Bill Vincent

There were those who didn't want the change. Sure, things weren't always safe and secure, and they were embroiled in some pretty fiesty squabbles right now with their neighbors, the Philistines. But things would work themselves out all right. They always did. The same set-up, the same programs had gotten them through thus far; and if they were good enough for mom and dad, they're good enough for them. Who needed a king anyway?

Then there were those who definitely wanted the change. Strong leadership was needed to resolve the less than neighborly squabble with the Philistines. Someone was needed with good political sense, who could turn things around and show the people how to do things the way the hip, up-and-coming crowd did things. A king was definitely what they wanted.

And, in a way, neither party got what they wanted – or what they expected.

As the story is presented to us in I Samuel, the people had demanded a king, and God had – maybe somewhat reluctantly – agreed. Samuel wasn't all that thrilled with it either. But then, maybe a king would work out for the people after all. Maybe it wasn't such a bad idea. And when God said Yes, who was Samuel to say No?

So Samuel was instructed by God to choose – in secret for now – this man Saul. And having anointed him, in secret, as king, Samuel told Saul that the Spirit of God would come upon him and change him. And change him it did.

We hear the story as Samuel says to Saul,

**I SAMUEL 10:6-11** (New Revised Standard Version)

*<sup>6</sup> “Then the spirit of the Lord will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy along with them and be turned into a different person. <sup>7</sup> Now when these signs meet you, do whatever you see fit to do, for God is with you. <sup>8</sup> And you shall go down to Gilgal ahead of me; then I will come down to you to present burnt offerings and offer sacrifices of well-being. Seven days you shall wait, until I come to you and show you what you shall do.”*

<sup>9</sup> As Saul turned away to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart; and all these signs were fulfilled that day. <sup>10</sup> When they were going from there to Gibeah, a band of prophets met him; and the spirit of God possessed him, and he fell into a prophetic frenzy along with them. <sup>11</sup> When all who knew him before saw how he prophesied with the prophets, the people said to one another, "What has come over the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

And now watch out, those of you who didn't want a king in the first place, but wanted to leave things as they were. Watch out! For God is at work redoing the whole structure of your life.

And watch out, those of you who did want a king. Those of you who wanted a big change in order to be like all the rest of the people. Watch out! For what you thought you were going to get is not what you got. Not a smart, sophisticated, savvy leader. But someone caught up in a prophetic frenzy. Literally, out of his mind. Because what's in his mind – and heart – is God's own Spirit.

And watch out, Saul. Watch out! For God will change you and remake you into a new person, giving you a new heart "fit for your new estate" as king over Israel.

And the people ask, "*Is Saul also among the prophets?*" Like a fish out of water, Saul seemed out of place, contrary to the people's expectations and assumptions. But that's what can happen when the Spirit of God lays hold of you, and you receive a new heart, and become a new person, and share in God's new creation.

So, watch out!

Many years later, in a different time and a different place, Peter didn't know what he was getting into. But that should have come as no surprise, seeing all the changes he had experienced from the start under the influence of Jesus. He started out a plain and simple fisherman. Now look at him: an itinerant preacher like his Master, sharing the wonderful, wonder-filled things he had experienced in this Jesus.

But more was in store for him, and for the whole band of followers of Jesus.

For the most part they had stuck with their own kind, sharing this good news with their fellow Jews, who had similar hopes and dreams about God's working in the world, who at least started from the same point in terms of assumptions and presuppositions about God and the world.

But God had other things in store for Peter, and for the church. God was about to do a new thing.

And so Peter had a vision regarding a sheet with all sorts of animals on it: 'Kill and eat,' a voice said. 'No,' said Peter, 'not anything that is unclean.' That distinction between clean and unclean animals. 'Don't call unclean what God has declared clean.'

Then men from Cornelius arrive. Cornelius: a Roman soldier, part of the occupation force of Peter's homeland. Gentiles – i.e., non-Jews. And Jews had as little dealings with Gentiles as was possible: not entering into a Gentile's house, not having a Gentile come into a Jewish house, not eating with Gentiles.

The regulations regarding contact with non-Jews (Gentiles) were fairly restrictive, and very ingrained in the Jewish way of thinking. 'Stick to your own, those you know, those like

you in looks and dress and where they live and how they act and what they believe.’ But before we judge them too quickly from our 21<sup>st</sup>-century perspective, let us remember that from the Jewish standpoint of 1<sup>st</sup>-century Judea, it was a matter of identity and survival as a people that they maintain that distinction.

And we can understand this. We believe certain things and make certain choices regarding our way of life and style of living. We tend to congregate with those who tend to share our perspective and our certain set of values.

And yet, as I have said, God had something else in store for Peter. With that vision of clean and unclean foods, and that visit with Jewish and Gentile contacts. *“What God has called clean, you must not call unclean”* (10:15).

And as Peter listened and experienced and followed the leading of the Spirit, he realized that God was up to something – though maybe not yet fully realizing its significance. And he said to Cornelius and all the others,

ACTS 10:34-48 (New Revised Standard Version)

*<sup>34</sup> Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation anyone who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God. <sup>36</sup> You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. <sup>37</sup> That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. <sup>39</sup> We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; <sup>40</sup> but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, <sup>41</sup> not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. <sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*

*<sup>44</sup> While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. <sup>45</sup> The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, <sup>46</sup> for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, <sup>47</sup> “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” <sup>48</sup> So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.*

So watch out, Peter. Watch out! For you were sent to preach the gospel to more people than you at first thought.

And watch out, church. Watch out! For God shows no partiality toward those who love God and seek after God. And neither should you show partiality – neither should we.

God was doing a new thing, and continues to do a new thing in the life of people and of the church and of the world.

Look at the Apostle Paul. The man who had so dedicatedly persecuted the early church and hounded the first believers, was himself transformed, turned around, to become a new person; all by the power and working of God's Spirit in his life.

No, one does not have to have a Damascus road experience like Paul to experience God's transforming newness in one's life. For many, that transformation occurs more gradually, more subtly, less dramatically. But in the end, the effect is little different from Paul's tremendous about-face.

God is doing a new thing.

On the one hand, there is the change that comes from within: the radical change God creates when God claims us as God's own.

Saul, who was to become king, became a different person, received a new heart. And though later he would have his problems, still the point is made: Saul was a changed man. God was at work, in him, on him, and through him.

Such a transformation might be hard for those around us to take in, to accept, to live with. It can mean difficulty with friends who don't quite understand why you want to go to church and be with those "goody-two shoes" all the time now, when before you were partying down, boozing it up, the life of the party. The shift in focus that comes from a 180 degree turn around – from self-centeredness to God-centeredness – can be hard to explain to someone who doesn't see it that way.

But there is also the change that maybe seems more thrust upon us from without. The change in what God is doing around us that forces us to look at the world differently, and look at life differently, and look at our family and friends differently, and look at the complete stranger differently.

Peter experienced a radical change from without, with the pouring of the Spirit on the Gentiles, signaling God's ready acceptance of the Gentiles as is, as they were, into the life and mission and ministry of the church that is God's purposes. The effect on Peter – and by way of Peter, on the church – was dramatic and far-reaching, with wide-ranging consequences.

Peter had his vision of God's working and the church's mission transformed from one that was narrow and confined solely to the Jews and the Jewish way of life, the Jewish circle – to those that looked like him and talked like him and thought like him – to a vision that expanded to include and indeed embrace the whole world and all the different people in it – even those who looked different and talked different and even thought differently from Peter.

And that radical change from without forced him to step back and reassess himself and his previous preconceptions and prejudices, forcing him to accept a new way of thinking, a new direction, and a new approach in his attempt to live faithfully before God.

For that, in the end, is the common denominator, the connecting factor: faithfulness to God.

Saul sought to be faithful to God, and was open to God's using him in a new way, and even open to God's changing him into a new person.

Peter sought to be faithful to God; and in witnessing God's working in a strange, different, and previously un-heard of way, Peter was forced to change in order that he might

remain faithful and not be left behind by a God that was forging ahead in a new and exciting – and yes, somewhat scary – direction.

But that's the way God works. God breaks through the old, set assumptions of what it means to be God's people; breaks through the established patterns of the way we've always done it; and creates a new beginning, a new thing, a new person, a new identity, a new way.

So watch out...for the power and work of the Spirit of God. For it will challenge your most basic and beloved assumptions about life. And it will shatter the comfortable and secure walls of privilege and partiality for "our kind." And it will change you, "giving you a new heart fit for your new estate," making you a new and different person, showing you a new and different way.

We can either accept this working of God's Spirit and be a part of it.  
Or ignore it. We don't have to play along. And plenty of people choose to do just that.  
But in the end, resistance is futile. Trying to stand in the way of God's Spirit is an empty effort. Just remember those who tried to do so with Christ himself. 'Kill him,' they said; 'eliminate him; eradicate him from the situation, and that should take care of things.' Right? Wrong! when the place where they left him for dead turned up empty.

Watch out, for the power of the resurrection is let loose upon the world.  
Watch out, for the wind blows where it will, and you neither know from whence it came nor wither it goes.

Watch out, for this Spirit will turn your world upside down.  
But no need to be on the defensive, or frightened. For we watch for, look for the Spirit with eager longing and earnest anticipation. Because the God whose Spirit will turn us inside out and our world upside down, is the God in whose hands resides the gift of life.

Yes, we may be forced to make some hard choices, to give up some dearly loved privileges, and long held assumptions about everything from the church to our friends to the bum on the street to the nature of life itself.

But believe me, it will be worth it. For what we receive is life itself – true life in communion with the God of life who catches us off guard more often than not, and does so always in love.

So watch out, for the Spirit of God is at work in our midst. It is a wonder, like the mystery of life itself. It is upsetting, yes, but also exciting. So, look for it. Watch for it. And welcome the Spirit into your life – for it offers you the wonder and mystery of true life: life as a part of God's purposes, life as a very child of God.

## **\*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:** O God, in your mercy...  
**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, as the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard your word, so fill us as we come before you in response to Christ's gift of love. By your Spirit, enable us to bear the fruit of his life and be a blessing to the world with our faith. Accept our offerings as a sign of your harvest in our lives, and our commitment to labor on behalf of all your children. Through our work, may they come to know your love and life. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

## **SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** "Breathe on Me, Breath of God" GtG 286

One: Breathe on me, Breath of God;  
**All: fill me with life anew,  
that I may love what thou dost love,  
and do what thou wouldst do.**

One: Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
until my heart is pure,  
**All: until with thee I will one will,  
to do and to endure.**

One: Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
till I am wholly thine,  
**All: until this earthly part of me  
glows with thy fire divine.**

One: Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
**All: so shall I never die,  
but live with thee the perfect life  
of thine eternity.**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**POSTLUDE**

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