

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 16, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SEVENTH SUNDAY of EASTER

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 47)*

One: “Clap your hands, all you peoples; shout to God with loud songs of joy!”

All: “For the Lord, the Most High, is awesome, and a great ruler over all the earth!”

One: “Sing praises to God, sing praises!”

All: “For God is the ruler of all the earth!”

***OPENING HYMN** “Crown Him with Many Crowns” GtG 268

One: Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne;

**All: hark, how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own!**

One: Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,

**All: and hail him as thy matchless King
through all eternity.**

One: Crown him the Lord of love;

All: behold his hands and side,

One: rich wounds, yet visible above,

All: in beauty glorified:

One: no angel in the sky
can fully bear that sight,

**All: but downward bends his burning eye
at mysteries so bright.**

One: Crown him the Lord of peace,
whose power a scepter sways

from pole to pole, that wars may cease,

All: absorbed in prayer and praise.

One: His reign shall know no end;
**All: and round his pierced feet
fair flowers of paradise extend
their fragrance ever sweet.**

One: Crown him the Lord of years,
the potentate of time;
**All: creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.**
One: All hail, Redeemer, hail!
For thou hast died for me;
**All: thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity.**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Dear God, when we are too eager to jump right into things, and unwilling to take the time to prepare, forgive us. When we are too complacent with things as they are, and too lazy to help because it upsets our comfort, forgive us. Forgive us when we get out of sync with your pace and your rhythm in life. Make us attune to you and your working. Make us aware of your presence in our midst and your prodding in our life. Make us open to your leading and your guidance, that we might walk with you and follow in your way. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: The Lord is a God of mercy and compassion. We know this for certain because of Jesus Christ.
All: In Christ, God seeks the lost and forgives the sinner and loves the world.
One: So let us hear and believe this wonderful, good news.
All: That in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. In Jesus Christ we are loved. 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 Acts 1:4-17, 20-26

ACTS 1:4-17, 20-26 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁴ While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by the Father’s own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” ⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹ They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away. ¹³ When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, ¹⁶ “Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus – ¹⁷ for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.” ... ²⁰ “For it is written in the book of Psalms, ‘Let his homestead become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it’; and ‘Let another take his position of overseer.’ ²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us – one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” ²³ So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take the place in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” ²⁶ And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Significant Pause” by Pastor Bill Vincent

It would happen every Monday evening. After dinner, we would begin to see a lot of activity going on over at the fire station next door to our house. The vehicles would pull up and people get out. Others would walk over from nearby houses: the firefighters and EMT's. They all seemed to arrive at a relaxed pace, no rush about them.

So what was up? Where was the fire? What was the emergency?

There was none, of course. They were gathering for their regular Monday evening meeting. There to give a good cleaning to the firetrucks and the ambulance. There to run drills and practice skills. There to learn new techniques and brush up on old ones.

They were there, every Monday evening, to prepare: to get ready for when there was a fire and when there was an emergency; to get ready for when they were needed, so they could effectively and beneficially bring their skills and talents and learning to bear in order to help others in need.

All of us as well have to work at being prepared so we will be ready to act when the time comes.

Like the Boy Scout motto: "Be Prepared."

The athletes running drills and honing skills to train for the Summer Olympics.

Military training and exercises. Skills they hope they never have to use, but they practice and train in order to be prepared if and when they are needed.

Gathering supplies and ingredients and preparing to cook a meal.

Spring cleaning, in preparation for ... I'm not sure what.

And then there were the disciples. Jesus spoke to them of a promise of the Holy Spirit and power ... and a coming mission. They were instructed: do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the promise.

One chapter ends. The next one hasn't begun yet.

And so...

...they waited, devoting themselves to prayer.

...they put their house in order, replacing Judas with Matthias.

In order to be prepared.

This time between Jesus' Ascension and the Day of Pentecost been called a "significant pause" by the 20th century theologian Karl Barth (so notes William Willimon in Acts, Interpretation series, p.20).

A "significant...pause."

A time of excitement and anticipation, with the disciples eagerly waiting and, in their waiting, preparing: looking to see where God will act and how God will act, that they might be ready when God will act.

We do well to prepare: that we might be ready to be used when and where God needs us; that we might be attuned, alert to where God is acting, so that we, too, can be a part of God's

work in the world. For we do not know exactly when or where God will next act; we do not know exactly when or where we will be called upon to respond.

Jesus said,

The wind [spirit] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. (John 3:8 NRSV)

So, we need to be ready to hoist our sails when the wind does blow.

Admittedly, there are pitfalls and dangers along this path.

We can wait, yet fail to prepare – and that's a mistake. We can fail to put our house in order; fail to train, to practice, to exercise. So that when the time comes to act, we're not ready, and we don't have much to offer.

We can be so uncomfortable at waiting and unwilling to wait that we act prematurely – and that, too, is a mistake. Like in baseball, leaving the base before the flyball is caught. Jumping the gun at the starting block and being disqualified from the race. The disciples asked, “When?” and Jesus said, *“It is not for you to know...”* (v.7). We need to remember: it is God's decision when to act; we are trying only to discern when that time is so that we can act in partnership with God. If we jump the gun, we may find ourselves at odds with God.

On the other side, we can become too comfortable with waiting, and become lazy and maybe even complacent, and maybe also fearful of the risk involved in taking action; so that, when the time comes to act, we don't – and that is also a mistake. Maybe we make excuses for not acting, saying that the signals aren't clear enough and we want to be absolutely certain (after all, it's our neck that's on the line); we want to wait until all the data is in.

But waiting is not to be an excuse for not doing anything. We need to prepare, practice. We need to wait with discernment...then act when the time comes.

So, while we wait for God's Spirit wind to blow, what are we doing to get ready, to be prepared?

What can we do?

We can pray. Very important, especially in the inbetween times: between the end of one chapter and the beginning of another.

We look to God for strength and guidance: they *“constantly devoted themselves to prayer.”*

We talk to God and listen for God to speak: keeping lines of communication open, keeping our hearts open, so we can hear and discern

We can engage the Scriptures. Peter referred to scripture in choosing Matthias. What better way to learn more of God's will and ways than to study and reflect upon God's revelation in scripture?

Maybe even memorization of scripture. Now I know some consider this an outmoded form of learning. (Maybe not memorization word for word, but point for point.) Yet it can be, in its own way, a way to prepare for the time when it is needed, a time we often do not know. Stories of those held captive (prisoners of war, Ben Weir-mentioned him recently) who able, in

their captivity, to recall Bible verses/stories. In that time of crisis, God's word, buried somewhere deep in their memory, came back to them to offer comfort and support, hope and encouragement.

Prayer. Scripture. Worship. Engaging in community.
All things we can do while waiting.

Now, I confess: I don't particularly enjoy waiting.
I confess I don't enjoy getting ready and set and prepared, especially when I don't know what I am getting ready and set and prepared for.

But if we don't prepare? Well, for that there is a story told by Abraham Joshua Heschel, Jewish scholar, in his book Quest for God:

a story...about a small Jewish town, far off from the main roads of the land. But it had all the necessary municipal institutions: a bathhouse, a cemetery, a hospital, and law court; as well as all sorts of crafts... – tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, and masons. One trade, however, was lacking: there was no watchmaker. In the course of years many of the clocks became so annoyingly inaccurate that their owners just decided to let them run down, and ignored them altogether. There were others, however, who maintained that as long as the clocks ran, they should not be abandoned. So they wound their clocks day after day though they knew that they were not accurate. One day the news spread through the town that a watchmaker had arrived, and everyone rushed to him with their clocks. But the only ones he could repair were those that had been kept running -- the abandoned clocks had grown too rusty!
(found in March/April 1986 issue of Alive Now!, The Upper Room, Nashville, TN; p.36)

We do not want to be rusty for our God.

We may not like to wait, we may not like to prepare, but the message in our story in Acts seems clear to me: we need to do it anyway. I need to be more disciplined in my prayer life and in training and learning and disciplining myself. We as individuals and as a congregation need to do the same. Otherwise when God wants to use us as a tool of God's purposes, we might turn out to be rusted and ill-prepared and ill-formed for the task, and possibly even useless. And we don't want that. And I don't believe God wants that either.

One can even question whether or not those who go unprepared will ever be used by God. In response, we must say God can use even the least prepared and most ill-equipped person for God's purposes, and on numerous occasions already has. But think how much more effective we will be if we are prepared, well-trained, and well-disciplined – and how much more pleased God will be.

Waiting is also an acknowledgement of our dependence upon God.
William Willimon writes,

Our waiting implies that the things which need doing in the world are beyond our ability to accomplish solely by our own effort, our programs and

crusades. Some other empowerment is needed, therefore the church waits...
(Interpretation, p.21)

All this, and wait faithfully, expectantly, with trust, knowing our waiting is not in vain.

Have you not known? Have you not heard?

-- we read in Isaiah --

*The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
who does not faint or grow weary;
whose understanding is unsearchable.
who gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
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.*

(Isaiah 40:28-31 NRSV)

What a wonderful, moving picture of a community, a people, who wait and pray and prepare so that they are ready to do the will of God.

May we, too, seek to be that kind of people: prepared; eagerly anticipating God's signal; patiently waiting our entrance in the drama; striving to discern God's work in the world; ready for when God says ... "Go."

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (*The Apostles' Creed*)

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,**

**the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Today's translation of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission from Book of Common Worship, copyright 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: God of power and peace,...

People: **...hear our prayer and prepare us as your people.**

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*

Dear God, we give you heart-felt thanks for your grace beyond imagining. Accept the gifts that we offer, and make them productive in fulfilling your will. Enhance our gifts with the empowerment of your Holy Spirit. And accept the offer of our lives, that we might be used to fulfill your purposes here on earth. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "Open My Eyes, That I May See" GtG 451

One: Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth Thou hast for me.

**All: Place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.**

One: Silently now

All: I wait for thee,

One: ready, my God,

All: thy will to see.

One: Open my eyes;

All: illumine me, Spirit divine!

One: Open my ears, that I may hear
voices of truth thou sendest clear.

**All: And while the wave notes fall on my ear,
everything false will disappear.**

One: Silently now

All: I wait for thee,

One: ready, my God,

All: thy will to see.

One: Open my ears;

All: illumine me, Spirit divine!

One: Open my mouth,

**All: and let me bear
gladly the warm truth everywhere.**

One: Open my heart,

**All: and let me prepare
love with thy children thus to share.**

One: Silently now

All: I wait for thee,

One: ready, my God,

All: thy will to see.

One: Open my heart;

All: illumine me, Spirit divine!

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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