

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 30, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TRINITY SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, let us worship the One who created the world.
All: Let us worship the One who died and rose for us.
One: Come, let us worship the One who gives us life.
All: Let us worship the Lord our God.

***OPENING HYMN “Come, Thou Almighty King” GtG 2**

One: Come, thou almighty King,
All: help us thy name to sing;
One: help us to praise:
**All: Father, all glorious,
o'er all victorious,**
One: come, and reign over us,
All: Ancient of Days.

One: Come, thou incarnate Word,
**All: merciful, mighty Lord,
our prayer attend.**
One: Come, and thy people bless,
and give thy word success;
**All: Spirit of holiness,
on us descend.**

One: Come, holy Comforter,
**All: thy sacred witness bear
in this glad hour.**
One: Thou who almighty art,
**All: now rule in every heart,
and ne'er from us depart,
Spirit of power.**

One: To thee, great One in Three,
**All: eternal praises be,
hence evermore!**

One: Thy sovereign majesty
may we in glory see,
**All: and to eternity
love and adore.**

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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** *(from Psalm 103)*

One: “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.”

All: “The Lord does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.”

One: “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is God’s steadfast love toward those who revere God.”

All: “As far as the east is from the west, so far does the Lord remove our transgressions from us.”

One: My friends, hear and believe the good news.

All: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

***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 Psalm 136

PSALM 136 (New Revised Standard Version)

- ¹ *O give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good,
for God's steadfast love endures forever.*
- ² *O give thanks to the God of gods,
for God's steadfast love endures forever.*
- ³ *O give thanks to the Lord of lords,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ⁴ *who alone does great wonders,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ⁵ *who by understanding made the heavens,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ⁶ *who spread out the earth on the waters,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ⁷ *who made the great lights,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ⁸ *the sun to rule over the day,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ⁹ *the moon and stars to rule over the night,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ¹⁰ *who struck Egypt through their firstborn,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ¹¹ *and brought Israel out from among them,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ¹² *with a strong hand and an outstretched arm,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ¹³ *who divided the Red Sea in two,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ¹⁴ *and made Israel pass through the midst of it,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ¹⁵ *but overthrew Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ¹⁶ *who led the people through the wilderness,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ¹⁷ *who struck down great kings,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ¹⁸ *and killed famous kings,
for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
- ¹⁹ *Sihon, king of the Amorites,*

20 *for God's steadfast love endures forever;*
 and Og, king of Bashan,
 for God's steadfast love endures forever;
 21 *and gave their land as a heritage,*
 for God's steadfast love endures forever;
 22 *a heritage to God's servant Israel,*
 for God's steadfast love endures forever.

23 *It is the Lord who remembered us in our low estate,*
 for God's steadfast love endures forever;
 24 *and rescued us from our foes,*
 for God's steadfast love endures forever;
 25 *who gives food to all flesh,*
 for God's steadfast love endures forever.

26 *O give thanks to the God of heaven,*
 for God's steadfast love endures forever.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "The Case for Redundancy . . .
 and Repetition . . .
 and Saying It Over and Over . . .
 More Than Once . . .
 Or Twice . . .
 Or Even More Times Than That . . ."

by Pastor Bill Vincent

Do we really understand?

The imponderables of the Christian faith. Like today: Trinity Sunday. Big words, words we don't understand: commandments, creeds, resurrection; Virgin Birth, Incarnation; sanctification, justification, reconciliation; grace, faith, hope, love, forgiveness, glory.

With today as Trinity Sunday: Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

Do we really understand?

Maybe we don't really understand.

So what's the point? Why keep on? Why keep coming to church? With doubts, questions. Maybe it's time to give up on this endeavor, to abandon it all, to spend our time better.

Kathleen Norris, in her book Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith, shares about her faith pilgrimage: her questions and doubts, her struggle to understand the 'big words' of the Christian faith. She connected with a Benedictine abbey and writes

I was surprised to find the monks so unconcerned with ...my weighty doubts and intellectual frustrations over Christianity. ... What interested them more was my desire to come to their worship.... They seemed to believe that if I just kept coming back to worship, kept coming home, things would eventually fall into place. (p.63)

Seems ridiculous, don't you think: coming back time and time again – for what? Keep doing something, keep saying the words you don't understand?

Yet maybe it's not so ridiculous.

Norris shares a story about

a heated exchange between a seminary student and an Orthodox theologian at Yale Divinity School. The theologian had given a talk on the history of the development of the Christian creeds. The student's original question was centered on belief: "What can one do," he asked, "when one finds it impossible to affirm certain tenets of the Creed?" The priest responded, "Well, you just say it. It's not that hard to master. With a little effort, most can learn it by heart."

...the student, apparently feeling that he had been misunderstood, asked with some exasperation, "What am I to do . . . when I have difficulty affirming parts of the Creed – like the Virgin Birth?" And he got the same response, "You just say it. Particularly when you have difficulty believing it. You just keep saying it. It will come to you eventually." The student raised his voice: "How can I with integrity affirm a creed in which I do not believe?" And the priest replied, "It's not your creed, it's our creed," meaning the Creed of the entire Christian church. ... "Eventually it may come to you," he told the student. "For some, it takes longer than for others. . ."

Norris concludes,

...I felt fortunate to have found my process of conversion conveyed so well and succinctly: the years of anguishing over creeds and the language of belief, a struggle that I had endured only because I dared hope that eventually the words wouldn't seem like "theirs" but also "mine." It was the boring repetitions of worship language, and even the dense, seemingly imponderable, words of the creeds that had pushed me into belief. And, yes, it had taken a very long time. (p.64-65)

Seems strange to think that.

Boring repetitions can be a hard sell. We tend to think: "If I apply my mind to these concepts and notions and words, I should be able to grasp them and have it make sense to me. Then I'll jump in with both feet; then I'll believe."

But that may be precisely the wrong tack to take.

As Norris points out,

at its Greek root, "to believe" simply means "to give one's heart to." (p.62)

I do not "give my heart to" words, ideas, abstract concepts (at least, not typically). I "give my heart to" another.

Belief, faith, trust have primarily to do with a relationship with another.

Just like a deep, abiding relationship we might have with anyone else: family, friend, spouse, etc, so it is with God. It is a lot of back and forth. And it can often involve a lot of "boring repetition."

-Hello. Goodbye. How are you doing? Have a good day. What's up with you? Good morning. How was your day?

But as the relationship continues, I seek to understand something about this Other with whom I relate. I try to understand this Other through words.

And so does the Church: the collective, time-tested wisdom of the Church that we dismiss to our own detriment. Remember: **"It's not your creed, it's our creed."** (p.65)

An invitation to join in this believing – this relationship – together.

The more I trust God, the more I have faith in God, the more I "give my heart to" God; the more open I am to understanding and knowing God.

The more I understand and know God; the more willing I am to trust God, to have faith in God, to "give my heart to" God.

This approach to the Christian life and faith is not new.

First Augustine, then Anselm and Aquinas, operated with the approach of *Credo ut intelligam*: "I believe in order to understand." I act, I make the choice, I take the step of faith in order better to comprehend the One toward Whom I step in faith.

And so we repeat the words: "Our Father who art in heaven"; "In Jesus Christ we are forgiven". We repeat the words as part of the relationship. Not mindlessly, but in anticipation.

As Norris contends,

...it is in the act of worship, the act of saying and repeating the vocabulary of faith, that one can come to claim it as "ours." ... it is not mindless at all. It is head working inseparably from heart; whole body religion. (p.66)

For there are times when the heart accepts what the head has yet to comprehend, even as there are times when the head accepts what the heart has yet to embrace. I may not fully know, I may not fully understand; but I remain committed to the relationship nonetheless.

So I will repeat the words: "Do this in remembrance of me"; "The peace of Christ be with you". Familiar words, though not fully understood. Words that pique interest in the heart. There's something here that I can't quite put my finger on. So I will say the words – words that do not belong solely to me, but to a much broader segment of humanity, the Church – I will say the words, hoping, anticipating, looking forward to the time when they will mean something significant to me too.

Like putting a jigsaw puzzle together.

I may have a 'relationship' with the puzzle as a whole without understanding how all the pieces of the puzzle go together.

I look at a piece and can't figure out where it goes, how it fits in. I just don't understand it.

So I go on to another piece.

And sometimes on the way to figuring out where one piece fits, I have insight as to where another piece fits.

So I keep at it: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound"; "The Lord is my shepherd". Repetition as a way of attending to the relationship, maintaining contact, nurturing seeds for faith and understanding to grow.

Our coming to faith, growing in understanding is not always a logical, "I can prove A, then I prove B, then I prove C" process. Sometimes – maybe more often than not – it is a "now I get it" experience.

And it seems to me we can only "get it" if we have been exposed to it, and are conversant with it, and familiar with it, in relationship with 'it'. Knowing the stories of the Bible, the vocabulary, the language of faith. And only as we know them, is the ground fertile for seeds to sprout under the right conditions – conditions we may not know or foresee. The seeds of faith and understanding and insight may be dormant as of now. But under the right conditions they can sprout. But if the seeds are not there to begin with, then even the best of conditions will be hard put to produce a harvest of understanding.

So, do we really understand?

Probably not. Sometimes more so than others.

But that is not cause for giving up on the cause. Doubt, questioning, wondering is only evidence of the journey, the growth in our relationship with God, our growth in understanding.

And that desire to understand, that yearning to 'believe in order to understand' may simply be an indication that we have not given up on the relationship ... and a reminder that God has not given up on the relationship either.

For

for God's steadfast love endures forever.

***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: Lord, 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*

Thank you, O Lord our God, for your love for us and your life given to us. We offer our lives to you, that your word may be proclaimed and your love be embodied for the furtherance of your kingdom in the world. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud" GtG 11

One: Source and Sovereign,

All: Rock and Cloud,

One: Fortress, Fountain, Shelter, Light,

All: Judge, Defender, Mercy, Might,

One: Life whose life all life endowed:

May the church at prayer recall
that no single holy name
but the truth behind them all
is the God whom we proclaim.

All: Word and Wisdom,

One: Root and Vine,

All: Shepherd, Savior, Servant, Lamb,

One: Well and Water,

All: Bread and Wine,

One: Way who leads us to I AM:

**All: May the church at prayer recall
that no single holy name
but the truth behind them all
is the God whom we proclaim.**

One: Storm and Stillness,

All: Breath and Dove,

One: Thunder, Tempest, Whirlwind, Fire,

All: Comfort, Counselor, Presence, Love,

One: Energies that never tire:

**Unison: May the church at prayer recall
that no single holy name
but the truth behind them all
is the God whom we proclaim.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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