

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 6, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**TENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: We come as God's people to give thanks and praise.  
**All: We come as God's people to learn and to grow.**  
One: We come because of God's call and our deep need.  
**All: So come, let us worship the Lord our God.**

**\*OPENING HYMN "Now Thank We All Our God" GtG 643**

One: Now thank we all our God  
**All: with heart and hands and voices,**  
One: who wondrous things hath done,  
**All: in whom this world rejoices;**  
One: who, from our mothers' arms,  
**All: hath blessed us on our way**  
**with countless gifts of love,**  
**and still is ours today.**

One: O may this bounteous God  
through all our life be near us,  
**All: with ever joyful hearts**  
**and blessed peace to cheer us;**  
One: and keep us in God's grace,  
**All and guide us when perplexed,**  
One: and free us from all ills  
**All: in this world and the next.**

One: All praise and thanks to God,  
who reigns in highest heaven,  
**All: to Father and to Son**  
**and Spirit now be given:**

One: the one eternal God,  
All: **whom heaven and earth adore,  
the God who was, and is,  
and shall be evermore.**

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**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Help us, we ask you, O God. The paths we have to choose are not clear. The decisions we have to make are muddied by our own selfishness and fear. You call to us, offering your guidance; yet too often we do not listen. Even when your way be clear, we choose another and go our own way. Forgive us, gracious Lord. Renew in us the heart-felt desire to love and serve you. Open our hearts to the guidance of your Spirit. And grant us the courage to follow the path you show us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from I John 1)*

One: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us."

All: **"If we confess our sins, the one who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing."**

One: By confessing our sins we speak the truth, trusting in God's grace and mercy. So let us hear and proclaim the good news...

All: **...For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Amen. Alleluia!**

**\*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 Samuel 8:1-11, 16-22

I Samuel 8:1-11, 16-22 (Today's English Version/Good News Translation +)

*<sup>1</sup> When Samuel grew old, he made his sons judges in Israel. <sup>2</sup> The older son was named Joel and the younger one Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. <sup>3</sup> But they did not follow their father's example; they were interested only in making money, so they accepted bribes and perverted justice.*

<sup>4</sup> Then all the leaders of Israel met together, went to Samuel in Ramah, <sup>5</sup> and said to him, "Look, you are getting old and your sons do not follow your example. So then, appoint a king to rule over us, so that we will have a king, like other nations." <sup>6</sup> Samuel was displeased with their request for a king; so he prayed to the LORD, <sup>7</sup> and the LORD said, "Listen to everything the people say to you. You are not the one they have rejected; I am the one they have rejected as their king. <sup>8</sup> Ever since I brought them out of Egypt, they have turned away from me and worshiped other gods; and now they are doing to you what they have always done to me. <sup>9</sup> So then, listen to them, but give them strict warnings and explain how their kings will treat them."

<sup>10</sup> Samuel told the people who were asking him for a king everything that the LORD had said to him. <sup>11</sup> "This is how your king will treat you," Samuel explained. "He will make soldiers of your sons; some of them will serve in his war chariots, others in his cavalry, and others will run before his chariots. ... <sup>16</sup> He will take your servants and your best cattle and donkeys, and make them work for him. <sup>17</sup> He will take a tenth of your flocks. And you yourselves will become his slaves. <sup>18</sup> When that time comes, you will complain bitterly because of your king, whom you yourselves chose, but the LORD will not listen to your complaints."

<sup>19</sup> But the people refused to listen to Samuel, and said, "No! We want a king, <sup>20</sup> so that we will be like other nations, with our own king to rule us and to lead us out to war and to fight our battles." <sup>21</sup> Samuel listened to everything they said and then went and told it to the LORD. <sup>22</sup> The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel told all the men of Israel to go back home.

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

### **SERMON "Messy Living" by Pastor Bill Vincent**

Life can be messy: a messy kind of living that Spring cleaning will not help.

The "messiness" of decisions, choices we have to make: not always clear, not always cut and dry, not neat, not tidy. Not all decisions, of course, but often some of the more important ones: ones we agonize over making, or go back to and agonize over having made them.

How do I respond to the friend I now believe to be an alcoholic? Do I say something? Do I confront him or her? What do I do? How do I love that person?

The reversal of roles between parent and child, with the aging of the parent and increased evidence of forgetfulness. How care for them? Stay at home? Go to a care facility? How provide appropriate care? How maintain one's dignity?

Dealing with the ambiguity of life. Hard choices and difficult decisions with – seemingly – no clear-cut, black and white answers.

The people's choice seemed to be clear, with their loose confederation of tribes. A crisis would arise; they would cry to the Lord; and the Lord would raise up a leader. Time and time again this cycle occurred. Samuel was now the leader – judge and prophet – and sought to pass on the mantle to his sons. But they were corrupt and no good.

So the people come to Samuel and say they want a king *“like other nations.”*  
Of course, as someone notes,

**The [leaders] of Israel were wise in diagnosing their trouble; they may not have been so wise in prescribing the cure.** (John C. Schroeder, Interpreter’s Bible pp.918-919)

How often is this the case? It is far easier to criticize than to guide. It is far easier to delineate what the problem is, and far more difficult to suggest a helpful solution – or be a part of a helpful solution.

So the people ask for a king *“like other nations.”*

But God had called them to a life different from *“other nations,”* with their unique relationship with the Lord. The Lord was the one to *“rule us and ... fight our battles.”*

Ah, the difficulty of being different.

It is hard to be different, to *“go against the flow.”* To *“stick out like a sore thumb”* for your principles, your way of life. To be a light surrounded by darkness. To be salt in the presence of the bland.

It is so much easier to blend in. We want to be like everyone else.

So the people chose not to be different. And the passage clearly states that this choice is a rejection of God.

You would think that would be the end of the matter, that would settle the issue.

But what we are finally left with in our passage is not such a quick, clear judgment on the matter. For God allows the choice of a king, even though that choice is roundly criticized.

But there is more. In the larger context of the biblical message – and even the more immediate storyline – there is even a sense of divine affirmation of their choice...in a way. For out of this decision to allow a king there comes a David: one who, even as king, is hailed and blessed as God's chosen one. Which might ring some bells for us, reminding us of the ultimate Chosen One who is of the line and lineage of David, one Jesus of Nazareth.

So, our story reflects something of the complexities and ambiguities of life: God's response to the people's request is not a simple No or Yes. God's response is both a No and a Yes: a No that mourns the rejection of God; a grudging Yes that acknowledges the pain the people will experience from the consequences of their choice, but also acknowledges that even down this path – a path not of God’s choosing – even down this path God will work – though maybe not in the way the people expect.

There is, it seems, a tension here: between affirming that the request of the people was against God's will, and therefore displeasing to God; and the affirmation, made in the wider context, that God was able to use even that bad decision to accomplish God's will amongst the people.

Not clean, not black and white, not clear-cut; but messy.

And true for our own decisions as well.

The suspected alcoholic? The older parent and child?

It might be nice to think those situations would be clear-cut. But the decisions we make are not always, nor often, simple, cut and dry ... though some people may try to make it so.

Sometimes it is not so clear cut as Right and Wrong, at least not that we can see. But as the noted biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann reminds us,

**Real history never happens in a straight line of clean motivations. It happens, rather, by odd alliances, strange loyalties, and daring choices through which the faithful discern the working out of [God's] intent.** (Interpretation, p.60)

But typically, "**the faithful discern the working out of [God's] intent**" only after the fact.

Whereas we live before that "after the fact." We still have choices and decisions to make without the benefit of hindsight.

So what can we discern? What guidance is there for us? What does that tell us, for us, here and now?

For one, listening to each other is important.

Samuel listens. God listens. The people? Not so much. But listening is vital. And not listening can surely have dire consequences. Note that the people do not really listen, and part of God's response is that the time will come when God will not listen to them. A harsh statement, and difficult to reconcile theologically in the larger context of "good news" (like God answering prayer). Still, the statement remains; and whatever else it means, it signals the painful consequences of not listening.

We need to make wise decisions, and make them carefully. And, listen to others in making those decisions. Friends, family, someone you trust, even yourself. Talk to someone and hear what they hear you saying; you may hear yourself better. And through it all, listen for God's voice through others. Be open and attentive to that voice. Familiarize ourselves with that voice. Be willing to risk hearing that voice of God ... and following its dictates.

But we can only do that if we are willing to listen.

For another, let us affirm that not all is ominous; there is a bright spot in the midst of the greyness and messiness; there is grace: that even in the bad choices, the poor choices, and even the dead wrong choices, God has the freedom and the mercy, the power and the will to work. We need to trust God to work with us, to work for us. And to bring about God's plan and intention for us and for the world. Maybe by a more circuitous route than God might originally have planned. But still to the ultimate goal. The prime example of this is the cross: the death of the truly innocent man for all the wrong reasons – yet God is able to use it for our good.

This does not give us a blank check to do whatever we want because somehow God will clean up whatever mess we make. It is instead the foundation for Martin Luther's tongue-in-cheek charge to go out and "Sin boldly."

Believe me: Martin Luther was not encouraging us to sin. But he was reminding us to do our part, to do our best – listening, seeking to be faithful in our decisions – then step out, confident that even if our choice is wrong, the choice and its consequences cannot carry us beyond the realm of the care of God – God will still be with us. God's presence may not erase

the consequences of our act. But God will still be with us. And in light of the crucifixion and resurrection, we can make this affirmation firmly and live it with full confidence.

Choices may still be difficult. Life may still be messy.

But if we listen – truly listen – life will be easier and clearer, though not (by any stretch of the imagination) crystal clear.

And if we trust God, we will experience a greater sense of peace about our decisions, knowing that no matter what we decide and no matter what comes – no matter where our decision takes us – God will always be there to work, to will, and to care.

### **\*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:** God of grace and mercy...

**People:** ...hear our prayer.

## THE EUCHARIST

### OFFERING

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**We are glad, O God, that you stand with us through the good times and the bad times in life. Make us ever aware of your presence. Make us ever mindful of your guidance. And make us ever grateful for your sustaining grace and power. Accept the offering of our gifts and ourselves, that your work of love, mercy, and peace might be done through us. For it is in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.**

### SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

*Invitation to the Lord's Table*

*Prayer of Thanksgiving*

Leader: The Lord be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

**People: We lift them to the Lord.**

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

*(The prayer continues...)*

*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.**

*Breaking of the Bread*

*Communion of the People*

(Please hold the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

*Prayer*

**SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “God Be with You Till We Meet Again” GtG 541

One: God be with you till we meet again;

**All: loving counsels guide, uphold you,**

One: with a shepherd's care enfold you:

**All: God be with you till we meet again.**

One: Unseen wings protecting hide you,  
daily manna still provide you:

**All: God be with you till we meet again.**

One: When life's perils thick confound you,  
put unfailing arms around you:

**All: God be with you till we meet again.**

One: Keep love's banner floating o'er you;  
smite death's threatening wave before you:

**All: God be with you till we meet again.**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**People: ...Amen.**

**POSTLUDE**

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Pastor Bill will be on Study Leave this coming week, including next Sunday, June 13<sup>th</sup>. We recommend you check out the following for online worship opportunities (in lieu of our own in-person worship):

St Mark's Presbyterian Church, Ballwin MO  
[www.discoverstmark.org](http://www.discoverstmark.org)  
Click on Livestream Worship Services – 10:00 am

Southminster Presbyterian Church, Crestwood MO  
[www.southminsterstlouis.org](http://www.southminsterstlouis.org)  
Scroll down to This Week's Service – 10:00 am

John Knox Presbyterian Church, Florissant MO  
Worship at 9:30 am - Facebook page:  
<https://www.facebook.com/JohnKnoxPresbyterianChurchFlorissantMO/>