

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 20, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TWELFTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: It is good to give thanks to God!
All: **Declare God's steadfast love and faithfulness.**
One: God knows our troubles and remembers our need.
All: **God will respond when we call.**
One: Listen for the voice of God, speaking to us again.
All: **How great is our God, our rock and defender!**

OPENING HYMN "Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun" GtG 663

One: Awake, my soul, and with the sun
your daily stage of duty run;
All: **shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
to pay your morning sacrifice.**

One: Lord, I my vows to you renew.
All: **Disperse my sins as morning dew;**
One: guard my first springs of thought and will,
All: **and with yourself my spirit fill.**

One: Direct, control, suggest, this day,
all I design or do or say,
All: **that all my powers, with all their might,
in your sole glory may unite.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Forgive us, O God, for leading surface lives. We judge others too quickly by the color of their skin or clothes that they wear. We form our opinions by our first impressions without bothering to learn more. We make quick decisions on inadequate information. We only scratch the surface of your word, failing to discover the riches just below the surface. Forgive us, gracious God. Grant us the patience to learn and understand more fully. Grant us the vision to look below the

surface and see things as they really are. Help us to dig into your word, to mine the riches of your guidance and instruction. Enable us to perceive the full character of others, that we might know and love them even as we are known and loved. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from II Corinthians 5)*

One: The good news is this: that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to God, not counting our sins against us.”

All: **“If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”**

One: So rejoice and be glad.

All: **For in Jesus Christ we are renewed, we are loved, 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 READINGS I Samuel 16:1-13 II Corinthians 4:5-12

I Samuel 16:1-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” ² Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’” ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.” ⁴ Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?” ⁵ He said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.” ⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.” ¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.” ¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse,

“Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.”¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

II Corinthians 4:5-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹ For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Runt of the Litter” by Pastor Bill Vincent

The Lord said to Samuel, “Go,
for I have provided for myself a king among Jesse's sons.”

Actually, the people already had a king. But Samuel, as spokesperson for God, had recently had the unpleasant task of informing king Saul that he had messed up with his charge; that he had failed, and failed miserably, to do God's will.

So God had rejected Saul as king over the people.

But, of course, the official channels hadn't gotten the message yet; or if they had, they had failed to act, more than likely out of a prudent respect for or fear of Saul. In other words, Samuel may have said that God had rejected Saul as king, but Saul was still king in name and in power. And woe to the one who tried to say otherwise.

Oh, yes, Samuel grieved the errant ways of Saul. But God finally told Samuel that enough was enough. The time for mourning was over. It was time to move on to the next step God was planning.

So the Lord said to Samuel,
“Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.”

So the Lord provides.

Samuel, however, draws God's attention to a thorny problem.

“How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.”

Smart cookie, this Samuel. He was no dummy when it came to the wiles and ways of political king-making and king-breaking. He knew that even though God had rejected Saul, Saul still had power. And if Saul caught a whiff of this scheme to hatch a new monarchy, right under the nose of Saul, who was still king ... well, Saul might not be very gracious in his response.

So

the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.'"

Once again, God provides. This time providing Samuel with an alibi – a cover – so that his mission may be in secret. God, you see, is no dummy either when it comes to kings and queens and the wiles and ways of court intrigue.

So Samuel went to Bethlehem – undercover, so to speak – and told the residents to prepare themselves for the sacrifice. And when all was ready, and Jesse's eldest son came before him, Samuel thought,

"Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him."

You see, Samuel naturally assumed the eldest was the one chosen by God. It was the way things were done in that day and age – the working assumption. The eldest inherited the majority of his father's fortunes; however many other sons there were, received the leftovers. The eldest had the power, the prestige. The eldest was the most important. Yet, God says, *"I have rejected him."* And so the thought comes to mind, "How then will the Lord provide?"

Well, if it's not the eldest, surely it must be the next one. And so Abinadab passes before Samuel. But

"Neither has the Lord chosen this one."

So it is with the sons of Jesse, from the first down to the seventh. Samuel says,

"The Lord has not chosen any of these."

Then there is this dramatic pause that follows, during which we are left to ponder the bleak prospect that the Lord has been unable to provide.

God had said, *"I will provide a king for myself among Jesse's sons."* But God is running out of options here. The choices become slimmer and slimmer; and if you really want to know, they become less and less desirable. The further away you get from choosing the eldest, the weaker and poorer the choice is. Or so went the conventional wisdom of the day. We seem to be at a dead end, with God's ability to provide drawn into question.

And Samuel says,

"The Lord has not chosen any of these. ... Are all your sons here?"

And Jesse says,

"There remains yet the youngest."

The youngest. The one on the bottom of the heap. The lowest rung on the ladder of social prestige and family status. The runt of the litter. The one you choose when you've run out of all other options. The last resort.

"There remains yet the youngest." And Samuel says,

"Send and bring him."

And when this youngest one arrives – this son of last resort, this runt of the litter of Jesse – the Lord says to Samuel,

"Rise and anoint him; for this is the one."

So the Lord does provide. Not in the way we might expect. Not according to our standards, our working assumptions. But God does indeed provide. Provide so that God's will be done. Provide so that God's people will be cared for. The Lord does provide. But in God's own way and God's own time, with God's own choice.

And so God chooses the runt of the litter over the first-born. And God chooses the scoundrel Jacob over the dependable Esau. And God chooses the outsider, Ruth, over all true Israelite women. And God chooses the fisherman Peter and the tax collector Matthew over the respectable scribes and Pharisees. And God chooses the unknown carpenter, Jesus, over the mighty Caesar.

As Paul puts it, God chooses and uses the common, clay jars of the world to do God's work, to bear God's treasure.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

You see, the glory is not ours, it is God's. The power is not ours, it is God's. The plan is not ours, it is God's.

We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

We are some of those common clay jars. Sinful, undeserving people though we are, God chooses to use us in order to provide the world with peace and compassion, justice and mercy, the very presence of Christ.

We should be honored. We should be humbled. We should be overwhelmed. We should be thinking, "I can't do this! Bring peace to this war- and strife-torn world? Share compassion with a world full of hatred? Establish justice in a world where everyone looks out for number one? Show mercy in the midst of a vicious world? Present the presence of Christ to a world that couldn't care less?" And if we are thinking such thoughts, we're right on target. We cannot. But that's the point. We can't. But God can.

So when we do bring a little peace and share some compassion and win a skirmish in the battle for justice and actually are merciful, we and everyone else will know it was not we who did it, but God working in us. We cannot do it. But God will provide for us to enable us to do God's work. And when that happens, the praise and glory will go to God. And that's how it should be.

God provides for us. And God provides us for others. God provides, though not as we expect.

So when God said, 'I will provide a savior,' the people looked for a king, but God chose instead to send a carpenter.

And God will provide for us a vision, though it may be one of service and sacrifice instead of the ease of luxury.

And God will provide even in our times of tragedy and sorrow. Even when we are battered and victimized by life, God will provide, though it may not be by taking away the pain, but by providing the strength to endure. In the words of Paul:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

Even in our worst nightmare, God will provide. But remember, it will be in God's own way and God's own time, and with God's own choice.

So when we want an answer to our question, and we look to those most obvious answers, God may say, like God said to Samuel, 'I have rejected this one, and that one, and that one.'

Until we, like Samuel, say, ‘Are these all the ones available?’ And the response may not seem promising to us: ‘There remains yet the youngest,’ the runt of the litter, the bottom of the heap, the last resort. And our spirits may sink when we hear God say, ‘This is the one.’

But let it never be said that God does not provide. For God does. Not in the way we might expect. Not according to our standards, and not necessarily according to our liking. But God does indeed provide. Provide so that God's will will be done. Provide so that God's people will be cared for. The Lord does provide. But in God's own way and God's own time, with God's own choice.

God provides for us in unexpected ways. And God also provides us, choosing and using us to provide for others.

So how do we make ourselves open to God's providing and available to God's working? How do we prepare ourselves for God's providing for us, and for God's providing for others by using us?

The Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, ... for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

We prepare for the Lord's using us and providing for us by preparing in our hearts. For the Lord chooses not according to the outward appearance, which tends to be our standard; but the Lord chooses according to the heart.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:5 NRSV)

We love God, and worship God, and prepare for God in our hearts.

We may not be the beautiful people of the world. We may be simple clay jars. We may not be the popular and powerful. We may be the runts of the litter, and not the prestigious. Never mind that. For if our hearts are in the right place – relying on God, trusting in God, looking to God for our strength, our guidance, our life – then God can and will use us to provide for each other and for the world – provide this most precious of treasures: the gift of love, of compassion, of caring; the gift of life, of joy, of peace; the gift of Jesus Christ.

Through it all, God will provide, using us to provide for others, using others to provide for us. Just as God provided for Samuel. Just as God provided by choosing David as king. Just as God provides in Jesus Christ.

God will provide. Let us prepare for it in our hearts. Let us live, believing it is true. For the Lord does provide. In God's own way and God's own time, with God's own choice. But provide nonetheless. For you and for me ... and for the world.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

In life and in death we belong to God.

**Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,**

**and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Lord, in your mercy...

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

**We thank you, great God, for your tenderness and understanding.
You care for us and lift us up. You teach us and nurture us. You are kind to
us even in our failings. You are patient with us even in our ignorance. As
you have blessed us, so make us a blessing for others. May we offer strength
to the weak, understanding to the misunderstood, compassion to the
mistreated, friendship to the abandoned. Use us and our gifts to spread the
news of your love in word and deed. Make us instruments of your will and
your way. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "If Thou but Trust in God to Guide Thee" GtG 816

- 1. If thou but trust in God to guide thee,
with hopeful heart through all thy ways,
God will give strength, whate'er betide thee,
to bear thee through the evil days.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
builds on the rock that nought can move.**

2. **Only be still, and wait God's leisure
in cheerful hope, with heart content
to take whate'er thy Keeper's pleasure
and all-discerning love hath sent.
No doubt our inmost wants are clear
to One who holds us always dear.**

3. **Sing, pray, and swerve not from God's ways,
but do thine own part faithfully.
Trust the rich promises of grace;
so shall they be fulfilled in thee.
God never yet forsook at need
the soul secured by trust indeed.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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