

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 31)*

- One: "I come to you, Lord, for protection. Save me, I pray!"
All: **"Be my refuge to protect me, my defense to save me."**
One: "You are my refuge and defense. Guide me and lead me as you have promised."
All: **"I place myself in your care, O Lord."**
One: "Be strong, be courageous, all you that hope in the Lord."
All: **Let us worship the Lord our God, our refuge and our strength.**

***OPENING HYMN** "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" GtG 275

- One: A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing.
All: **Our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.**
One: For still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe.
All: **His craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.**

One: Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
All: **were not the right man on our side,
the man of God's own choosing.**
One: Dost ask who that may be?
All: **Christ Jesus, it is he.**
One: Lord Sab-a-oth his name,
from age to age the same,
All: **and he must win the battle.**

One: And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,

**All: we will not fear, for God hath willed
his truth to triumph through us.**

One: The Prince of Darkness grim,

All: we tremble not for him.

One: His rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure.

All: One little word shall fell him.

One: That word above all earthly powers,
no thanks to them, abideth.

**All: The Spirit and the gifts are ours
through him who with us sideth.**

One: Let goods and kindred go,

All: this mortal life also.

One: The body they may kill;

All: God's truth abideth still.

Unison: His kingdom is forever.

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Dearest God, we confess that our strength is unequal to the task of life before us. Faced with decisions to be made, we cannot find our way through the mire of choices and options. The strength we need to carry on is lacking on our own. The confidence we need to do our best is often absent when we need it most. Forgive us our weakness and our lack of faith in you. Touch us by your Spirit that we might be transformed as your faithful people. Grant us grace and courage that we might follow in your way and work to do your will. In the name of your faithful Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: In the strength of the Lord Almighty we confide.

All: In the mercy of God we trust.

One: By the power of God we are restored.

All: By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we are renewed.

One: So rejoice and celebrate this day!

All: For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved, we are given new life. 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 I Samuel 17 (selected verses)

I SAMUEL 17 (selected verses) (Today's English Version/Good News Translation)

¹ *The Philistines gathered for battle in Socoh, a town in Judah....* ² *Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in Elah Valley, where they got ready to fight the Philistines. ...*

⁴ *A man named Goliath, from the city of Gath, came out from the Philistine camp to challenge the Israelites. He was over nine feet tall* ⁵ *and wore bronze armor that weighed about 125 pounds and a bronze helmet.* ⁶ *His legs were also protected by bronze armor, and he carried a bronze javelin slung over his shoulder.* ⁷ *His spear was as thick as the bar on a weaver's loom, and its iron head weighed about fifteen pounds. A soldier walked in front of him carrying his shield.* ⁸ *Goliath stood and shouted at the Israelites, "What are you doing there, lined up for battle? I am a Philistine, you servants of Saul! Choose one of your men to fight me.* ⁹ *If he wins and kills me, we will be your servants; but if I win and kill him, you will be our servants.* ¹⁰ *Here and now I challenge the Israelite army. I dare you to pick someone to fight me!"* ¹¹ *When Saul and his men heard this, they were terrified.*

[David is re-introduced in the passage as the youngest of Jesse's sons, going back and forth from feeding his father's sheep to taking provisions to his brothers who are with Saul's army.]

²⁰ *David got up early the next morning, left someone else in charge of the sheep, took the food, and went as Jesse had told him to. He arrived at the camp just as the Israelites were going out to their battle line, shouting the war cry.* ²¹ *The Philistine and the Israelite armies took positions for battle, facing each other.* ²² *David left the food with the officer in charge of the supplies, ran to the battle line, went to his brothers, and asked how they were getting along.* ²³ *As he was talking with them, Goliath came forward and challenged the Israelites as he had done before. And David heard him.* ²⁴ *When the Israelites saw Goliath, they ran away in terror. ...*

²⁶ *David asked the men who were near him, "What will the man get who kills this Philistine and frees Israel from this disgrace? After all, who is this heathen Philistine to defy the army of the living God?" ...*

³¹ Some men heard what David had said, and they told Saul, who sent for him.
³² David said to Saul, “Your Majesty, no one should be afraid of this Philistine! I will go and fight him.”

³³ “No,” answered Saul. “How could you fight him? You’re just a boy, and he has been a soldier all his life!”

³⁴ “Your Majesty,” David said, “I take care of my father’s sheep. Any time a lion or a bear carries off a lamb, ³⁵ I go after it, attack it, and rescue the lamb. And if the lion or bear turns on me, I grab it by the throat and beat it to death. ³⁶ I have killed lions and bears, and I will do the same to this heathen Philistine, who has defied the army of the living God. ³⁷ The Lord has saved me from lions and bears; the Lord will save me from this Philistine.”

“All right,” Saul answered. “Go, and the Lord be with you.” ³⁸ He gave his own armor to David for him to wear: a bronze helmet, which he put on David’s head, and a coat of armor. ³⁹ David strapped Saul’s sword over the armor and tried to walk, but he couldn’t, because he wasn’t used to wearing them. “I can’t fight with all this,” he said to Saul. “I’m not used to it.” So he took it all off. ⁴⁰ He took his shepherd’s stick and then picked up five smooth stones from the stream and put them in his bag. With his sling ready, he went out to meet Goliath.

⁴¹ The Philistine started walking toward David, with his shield bearer walking in front of him. He kept coming closer, ⁴² and when he got a good look at David, he was filled with scorn for him because he was just a nice, good-looking boy. ⁴³ He said to David, “What’s that stick for? Do you think I’m a dog?” And he called down curses from his god on David. ⁴⁴ “Come on,” he challenged David, “and I will give your body to the birds and animals to eat.”

⁴⁵ David answered, “You are coming against me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the Israelite armies, which you have defied. ⁴⁶ This very day the Lord will put you in my power; I will defeat you and cut off your head. And I will give the bodies of the Philistine soldiers to the birds and animals to eat. Then the whole world will know that Israel has a God, ⁴⁷ and everyone here will see that the Lord does not need swords or spears to save the people. The Lord is victorious in battle and will put all of you in our power.”

⁴⁸ Goliath started walking toward David again, and David ran quickly toward the Philistine battle line to fight him. ⁴⁹ He reached into his bag and took out a stone, which he slung at Goliath. It hit him on the forehead and broke his skull, and Goliath fell face downward on the ground. ⁵⁰ And so, without a sword, David defeated and killed Goliath with a sling and a stone!

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Choose Your Weapons” by Pastor Bill Vincent

The town of LeChambon used a different tactic.

The Nazis in World War II were armed, organized, and determined. One thing they were determined to do was to get rid of all the Jews in Europe. In the 1940s, the French village LeChambon had only a few hundred people, most of them farmers with small farms. They were not rich, but they were faithful Christians.

When the people of LeChambon heard about what the Nazis were doing to Jewish people, they knew it was wrong. So they did what they could to help the Jews. Farm families brought Jewish families to live with them. When the Nazis came looking for Jews, they hid them or said that they were relatives who had come to visit.

A hotel in town welcomed Jewish families. If they could pay, they did. If they couldn't, it didn't matter. Everyone pretended they weren't Jews. They would tell people, “Oh, there aren't any Jews in LeChambon.” ...

LeChambon especially welcomed Jewish children. Three new children's homes and a special high school were started for the Jewish refugee children.

Most of the Jews stayed only a short time, leaving when they could escape to nearby Switzerland or some other safe country. Some people in LeChambon helped the refugees get fake passports. One farmer hid passports in his beehives in the woods. Other people guided the refugees along the back roads into Switzerland.

Almost everybody in LeChambon helped. Nobody was in charge of the whole thing. Everybody just did whatever they could. They knew it was dangerous, but they did it because it was the right thing to do. By the time the war was over and the Nazis had lost, the people had saved 5,000 Jews! (“God's Brave People,” AC53, The StoryTeller Series, Cooperative Publication Association)

Not necessarily a conventional “weapon” of war.

To face up to the challenge, the battle ... like David. Not to sweep the threat under the rug or pretend it not there. But to faced up to it with confidence and faith.

And to use the ‘weapons’ at our disposal: the talents, abilities, gifts, and resources we have been given – just like David – individually, and as a church: the word of God, the truth, love, the community itself.

**The Spirit and the gifts are ours
through Him who with us sideth
 (“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”)**

Now, I confess, I am not always comfortable with the use of militaristic imagery in the church, especially when it sets up an “us vs. them” mentality and a stance that “Of course we're always right.”

Nevertheless, there are giants among us.

The giants we combat are not only the evils beyond us – treachery, injustice, hate, violence – but also the giants within: the struggles we have with ourselves and our pride (which overlooks our weaknesses), our shame (which ignores our strengths), our self-deceit (which clouds the issue of who, and whose, we are), and our own inclination to strike back (our own violence).

But God gives us different gifts and weapons in this war, in this battle.

Like forgiveness and reconciliation. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, we called to be “ambassadors of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:18-20). Not necessarily a conventional “weapon” of the war on crime, especially in a society where punishment, punitive damages, and “three strikes and you’re out” are the typical battle cries.

But the church and individual Christians are not always called to fight crime or violence with the conventional "weapons" of the society.

In the latter half of the 1970s, the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program was developed. It has spread to over 100 chapters in this country and Canada, and over 1000 worldwide. I first heard about it when we were in Central Illinois, though I understand that chapter is no longer operating, which may simply be a commentary on our society’s unwillingness to embrace such unconventional means and methods.

In the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program, people are invited to participate: the victim to be able to share the pain inflicted; the offender to take responsibility for the harm caused; and both to seek to make things right. This process of mediation seeks to bring people together rather than keep them apart: it seeks reconciliation, forgiveness, healing.

Now, I am aware of the irony of talking about non-violence and reconciliation from a story in which David kills Goliath.

But also note the irony – and almost the comedy – of the scene in which the young David is trying on the adult Saul’s armor...and can barely walk!

We are called to use different weapons, different tools, different tactics.

When others shout the loudest, we speak calmly.

When others hurl insults and call names, we respect as fellow children of God.

When others seek to divide and conquer, we seek to come together and win over by grace and love.

With what will we "do battle"? With alien weapons thrust upon us by cultural expectations? Or with the power of the Lord and the natural gifts given us?

And so David, facing someone twice as tall as he is, goes to battle without heavy armor or the weapons of choice for his day, but with his natural skill at using a slingshot and his trust and faith in God.

And so Moses faces off against the most powerful king and kingdom in the world in the person of the Pharaoh of Egypt, and does so not with a well-trained and well-equipped army, but with his walking stick and the word of the Lord.

And so the people of LeChambon face the iron fist of Nazism with the open hand of caring.

And God even gets into the act. (Surprise, surprise!)

God faces off against the hardness of the human heart and the violence of the nations, not with fists of iron and the strong and the mighty, but with a gentle man described by the prophet as one like a bruised reed and a dimly burning wick, who did not lift up his voice, and was like a sheep who before its shearers is silent; and it is through his wounds that we are healed (see Isaiah 42:2-3; 53:5&7).

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

(Isaiah 55:8-9 NRSV)

Seems rather foolish, don't you think.

Which may be precisely the point.

For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. ... But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong ... so that no one might boast in the presence of God. (I Corinthians 1:25,27,29 NRSV)

And of course, the ultimate example is that of the cross, considered by many to be silly, foolish. Yet what a victory God won there.

God's foolishness is to use us, in our faithfulness (and attempts at such), doing what we can with what we have to accomplish God's purposes and to demonstrate God's presence, God's glory, God's grace.

You see, the point is not for us to stand on the winner's pedestal; the point is not for us to be victorious. God has already won the victory.

The point is for us to be faithful to God and God's way, trusting in the faithfulness of God.

So David says,

"You are coming against me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty.... Then the whole world will know that Israel has a God, and everyone here will see that the Lord does not need swords or spears to save the people.

All God needs is common clay pots.

Sound familiar?

We mentioned these words of Paul just last week:

But we have this treasure

...this ministry, this task, this calling; this gift that is a way of life, a way that is true life...

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. (II Corinthians 4:7 NRSV)

The church does not necessarily work nor seek to succeed in ways the rest of the world would expect or would think effective, efficient, or expedient.

Sometimes all it needs is paper.

A Jewish cemetery had been desecrated; ... swastikas were painted on a home occupied by an interracial couple.

...not in Nazi-occupied France, but in Billings, Montana .

One day in December a brick was flung through the bedroom window of a young Jewish child. It seems that a menorah and other symbols of the Jewish faith were being displayed as part of the family's Hannukah celebration. The police who investigated suggested the family remove the symbols.

[But the] **director of the Montana Association of Churches** [had another idea]. ...

She organized area churches.... Paper menorahs were made and distributed. Hundreds of these symbols appeared in windows. [The local paper] published a full-page drawing of a menorah and invited people to put it in their windows. By the end of the week there were six to ten thousand menorahs on display in Billings. [Yes,] More acts of violence greeted the menorahs, but the people remained steadfast, and over time, the number of incidents decreased. (Minute for Mission, Presbyterian Peacemaking Offering)

In the battle for the heart of a community, rocks of hatred thrown in violence were met with paper menorahs raised for peace.

Ernest Shurtleff was asked by his classmates to write a poem for their seminary graduation in 1887.

Lead on, O King Eternal!

he wrote.

The day of march has come...

...we lift our battle song.

But then he tempers this imagery with these telling words:

For not with swords loud clashing,

Nor roll of stirring drums,

With deeds of love and mercy

The heav'nly kingdom comes.

The difference between the way the world fights and seeks to win, and the way God fights and will win. The disparity between the conventional and unconventional weapons of this “war” of evil vs. good, injustice vs. justice, violence vs. peace.

Which weapons will we choose?

Remembering how God has safe-guarded and provided for us in the past – just like David – we can trust in God; and rise to the challenge, knowing God will be with us in the present, and for the future; as, “with deeds of love and mercy,” with deeds of reconciliation and caring, we fight, we live.

***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.**

**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!"**

**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: Saving God...
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*

O God, with food to renew us, homes to shelter us, and relationships to restore us, we are blessed time and time again by the abundance of these your gifts to us. And we give you thanks. Guide us as we give in gratitude, “serving you whom we adore” with our offerings, our abilities, and our lives. For it is in Christ’s name that we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Lead On, O King Eternal!” GtG 269

- 1. Lead on, O King eternal!
The day of march has come;
henceforth in fields of conquest
your tents shall be our home.
Through days of preparation
your grace has made us strong,
and now, O King eternal,
we lift our battle song.**
- 2. Lead on, O King eternal,
till sin's fierce war shall cease,
and holiness shall whisper
the sweet amen of peace;
for not with swords' loud clashing,
nor roll of stirring drums;
with deeds of love and mercy
the heavenly kingdom comes.**

**3. Lead on, O King eternal:
we follow, not with fears,
for gladness breaks like morning
where'er your face appears;
your cross is lifted o'er us;
we journey in its light.
The crown awaits the conquest;
lead on, O God of might!**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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