

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 11, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**FIFTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP** *(from II Corinthians 13 & Psalm 118)*

One: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with you all.

**All: And also with you.**

One: This is the day that the Lord has made;

**All: let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "O Day of Rest and Gladness" GtG 393

One: O day of rest and gladness,

**All: O day of joy and light,**

One: O balm for care and sadness,  
most beautiful, most bright;

**All: on you, the high and lowly,  
through ages joined in tune,**

One: sing "Holy, holy, holy"

**All: to the great God triune.**

One: On you, at earth's creation  
the light first had its birth;

**All: on you, for our salvation  
Christ rose from depths of earth;**

One: on you, our Lord victorious  
sent Spirit forth from heaven.

**All: And thus on you, most glorious,  
a triple light was given.**

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**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

We come before you, holy God,  
to lay bare our hearts and confess our sin.  
Instead of acknowledging you as our God,  
we make our own idols.  
Instead of proclaiming Jesus Christ as our Lord,  
we proclaim ourselves.  
Instead of seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit,  
we prefer to follow our own counsel.  
Forgive us, gracious God.  
Redirect our wrong ways  
and lead us to the ways you intend and command.  
Guide our feet  
to walk in the ways of faithfulness.  
In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: By the grace of God, through the power of the Spirit, in Jesus Christ we  
are forgiven.  
All: **In Christ we have died to our old selves and have become new  
creations.**  
One: Therefore we proclaim Jesus Christ as our Lord. May the life of Jesus be  
manifest in us.  
All: **Thanks be to God.**

**\*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** Mark 2:23-3:6

MARK 2:23-3:6 (various)

<sup>2:23</sup> *One sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields. As the disciples made  
their way, they were picking the heads of grain. <sup>24</sup> The Pharisees said to him, "Look,  
why are they doing what is not permitted on the sabbath?" <sup>25</sup> He said to them, "Haven't  
you ever read what David did when he was in need, when he and those with him were  
hungry? <sup>26</sup> During the time when Abiathar was high priest, David went into God's house*

*and ate the bread of the presence, which only the priests were permitted to eat. He also gave bread to those who were with him.”* <sup>27</sup> Then he said to them, “The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; <sup>28</sup> so the Son of Humankind is lord even of the sabbath.”

<sup>3:1</sup> Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. <sup>2</sup> They were watching Jesus closely to see if he would heal him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. <sup>3</sup> And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Stand up where people can see you.” <sup>4</sup> Then he said to them, “Is it permitted on the sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent. <sup>5</sup> He looked around at them with anger, deeply grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. <sup>6</sup> And the Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** by Pastor Bill Vincent

Isn't the question something of a no-brainer?

*“Is it permitted on the sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”*

Of course the choice is for doing good. Of course the choice is to save life.

And, quite honestly, even the Pharisees would agree.

But what does this question have to do with the sabbath, that supposed holy day of rest?

We must remember that the sabbath was central to the identity of the people and their distinctiveness among others. So proper sabbath observance was crucial to who they were.

We tend to have a restrictive notion (or memory) of the sabbath and sabbath rules: blue laws and all that. “You can't do this.” “You can't do that.” What? You can't have any fun? That will kill the mood and choke the life out of anyone.

But maybe the problem the Pharisees have is instead with Jesus himself. They tend to focus on him. They are watching him closely: ‘keeping an eye on him’, as one translation has it.

I wonder if it was especially after he said that thing about being ‘lord of the sabbath’:

*“So the Son of Humankind is lord even of the sabbath.”*

Jesus, as the Son on Humankind, being Lord of the sabbath. No one had ever claimed that before. A claim that he has authority over the sabbath: authority to interpret its intention and guide its course in human life.

And further, it makes sense that, if Jesus is Lord of the sabbath, and the sabbath is made for humankind (not humankind for the sabbath), then Jesus appears to be Lord of humankind...of us.

And that may very well be what the Pharisees object to.

And, quite honestly, we do too.

Yeh, it's all well and good to talk about doing good and not evil, to talk about saving life (especially mine) and not killing.

But we'd like to set the parameters and determine the shape and scope of what that looks like all by ourselves, without any help from you-know-who or anyone else for that matter.

So thank you very much, Jesus, for helping us free ourselves from the strictures of blue laws and a confined view of the sabbath. But we'll take it from here, thank you very much.

Except that's not what he said.

Lord of the sabbath. Sabbath made for humans. Therefore the Son of Humankind is Lord even of us.

And if so, then having authority over us. And what he says goes. And we're supposed to follow and obey.

And part of what he says is 'do good' and 'save life'. But not only do good to others (which is vitally important), but also save life...of us: our own life. Not in a selfish, self-centered manner. But...

Well, remember we're talking about the sabbath here: sabbath - *shabath* - rest.

We need rest.

*For the Lord rested on the seventh day. (Exodus 20:11)*

And if God rested...

We need rest.

Jesus knows it.

We know it...sometimes.

But we don't do it.

We think we need to keep going, all the time. We think we can't stop...ever.

Because we have to secure our own future. We have to make our own way. We have to save ourselves. We have to lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We have to rely upon ourselves, and no one else.

But we're wrong. Dead wrong. Dead-tired wrong.

One of the mistakes people make with this passage is to presume that, in his words and in his actions, Jesus wants to eliminate the concept of the sabbath.

But he doesn't.

He wants to lift up the true intent of the sabbath, restore its original purpose.

For its purpose is to enhance life: doing good and saving life.

And that's all tied in with sabbath rest.

For God knows we need rest. And the Lord of the sabbath knows that too.

But driving to the deeper point: God knows we need God. And the Lord of the sabbath knows that too.

We cannot secure our own future. We cannot make our own way. We cannot save ourselves. We have to rely on someone else.

And the sabbath serves as a 'painful' reminder of that truth.

For us to stop doing (even for a moment), for us to stop the frantic pace, is to acknowledge that I have to rely on Another to secure my future, to make my way, to save my life.

And that's a difficult acknowledgment to make. That's a hard choice to make.

But it's a good choice to make. Because it feeds our deepest hunger and feeds our soul; it restores what is withered in our life, it restores our soul.

If we would but stop.

*Be still, and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10)

the psalmist says. And rest. And do good. And save life (as best we can). And rely on the God of the sabbath and the Lord of the sabbath to nurture, to restore, to save us.

But that's a hard choice to make: to put ourselves in God's hands, to entrust our lives and our security and our future to God.

And the Pharisees don't make that choice. They're convinced that Jesus is a threat to their way of life. They fail to see God at work in Jesus. So they do not embrace him and his work and his way. In fact, they oppose him and his work and his way.

They don't make the hard choice.

And, all too often, neither do we. When we're frantic and desperate to hold our life together and feel like the whole world depends upon us.

And yes, that angers Jesus, and deeply grieves him.

For in that choice we fail to choose God, and instead choose ourselves. And that is the hardness of our heart: when the evidence of God's goodness and restoration and life is staring us in the face, and we side with our way over God's way and the one who is the way.

But the good news is that, even in the face of the obstinacy of our heart, even in the face of our turning from God and God's way, even in the face of our rejecting the offer of life-giving rest...Jesus chooses to do the good anyway.

Even in the face of the threat of others 'doing evil' and even 'killing', which we know will inevitably come to fruition.

Jesus chooses to do good anyway. Jesus chooses to save life anyway.

And perhaps that should give us pause.

For he does that for us. So maybe he knows what he's talking about after all.

And then he invites us to embrace that life and that way, and then to do that for others, too. Even at the risk of some 'doing evil' and even 'killing' in response to our 'doing good' and 'saving life'.

It is a choice for a particular way of life: resting in God, relying upon God, partnering with God for the good and for life – full life.

*“Is it permitted on the sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”*

What do you think?

And what will we choose?

**\*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.**

**We trust in Jesus Christ,  
fully human, fully God.  
Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:  
preaching good news to the poor  
and release to the captives,  
teaching by word and deed  
and blessing the children,  
healing the sick  
and binding up the brokenhearted,  
eating with outcasts,  
forgiving sinners,  
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.  
Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,  
Jesus was crucified,  
suffering the depths of human pain  
and giving his life for the sins of the world.  
God raised this Jesus from the dead,  
vindicating his sinless life,  
breaking the power of sin and evil,  
delivering us from death to life eternal.**

**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 of life...  
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*

**For Sabbath rest, and all other gifts that sustain us in life, we thank you, O God. We offer our lives and the fruit of our labors to you. Enhance all our efforts, and multiply their effectiveness, that we may proclaim the life of Jesus Christ, and make his work visible in the world. We dedicate our gifts, and ourselves, in response to your goodness. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

## **SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind" GtG 169

- 1. Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
forgive our foolish ways;  
re clothe us in our rightful mind,  
in purer lives thy service find,  
in deeper reverence, praise.**
- 2. In simple trust like theirs who heard  
beside the Syrian sea  
the gracious calling of the Lord,  
let us, like them, without a word  
rise up and follow thee.**
- 3. O Sabbath rest by Galilee,  
O calm of hills above,  
where Jesus knelt to share with thee  
the silence of eternity,  
interpreted by love!**

4. **Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
till all our strivings cease;  
take from our souls the strain and stress,  
and let our ordered lives confess  
the beauty of thy peace.**
  
5. **Breathe through the heats of our desire  
thy coolness and thy balm;  
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still, small voice of calm!**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**People:** ...Amen.

**POSTLUDE**

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