

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 22, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 103)*

One: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless God's holy name."

All: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all God's benefits —"

One: "who forgives all your iniquity,"

All: "who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy."

Unison: So come, let us worship the Lord our God!

OPENING HYMN "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!" GtG 1

One: Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All: Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee.

One: Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!

All: God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

One: Holy, holy, holy!

**All: all the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;**

One: cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

One: Holy, holy, holy!

**All: though the darkness hide thee,
though the eye of sinfulness thy glory may not see,**

One: only thou art holy;

**All: there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love and purity.**

One: Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All: All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea.

One: Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!

All: God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**God of holiness and wonder,
we confess our sins and pray for your help
so that we can truly repent and turn from evil.
Forgive us
for the times when we have failed
to follow your guidance,
submit to your rule,
or glory in your majesty.
Deliver us from the temptation
to hide from you, to lie to you, or to excuse ourselves
because of the harm we have done to others.
Grow in us a deeper desire
to love Christ with the fullness of your love,
and to glorify him, along with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and forever. 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 God remove our transgressions from us."**
One: Rejoice in God's greatness and grace toward us!
All: **For 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 II Samuel 11

II SAMUEL 11 (Common English Bible +)

¹ *In the spring, when kings go off to war, David sent Joab, along with his servants and all the Israelites, and they destroyed the Ammonites, attacking the city of Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.*

² *One evening, David got up from his couch and was pacing back and forth on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful.* ³ *David sent someone and inquired about the woman. The report came back: "Is this not Eliam's daughter Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"* ⁴ *So David sent messengers to get her. When she came to him, he had sex with her. (Now she had been purifying herself after her monthly period.) Then she returned home.* ⁵ *The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying,*

"I am pregnant."

⁶ *Then David sent a message to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." So Joab sent Uriah to David.* ⁷ *When Uriah came to him, David asked about the welfare of Joab and the army and how the battle was going.* ⁸ *Then David told Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet."*

Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹ *However, Uriah slept at the palace entrance with all his master's servants. He did not go down to his own house.* ¹⁰ *David was told, "Uriah did not go down to his own house," so David asked Uriah, "Have you not just returned from a journey? Why did you not go home?"*

¹¹ *"The chest and Israel and Judah are all living in tents," Uriah told David. "And my master Joab and my master's troops are camping in the open field. How could I go home and eat, drink, and have sex with my wife? I swear on your very life, I will not do that!"*

¹² *Then David told Uriah, "Stay here one more day. Tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day. The next day* ¹³ *David called for him, and he ate and drank, and David got him drunk. In the evening Uriah went out to sleep in the same place, alongside his master's servants, but he did not go down to his own home.*

¹⁴ *The next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah.* ¹⁵ *He wrote in the letter, "Place Uriah at the front of the fiercest battle, and then pull back from him so that he will be struck down and die."*

¹⁶ *So as Joab was attacking the city, he put Uriah in the place where he knew there were strong warriors.* ¹⁷ *When the city's soldiers came out and attacked Joab, some of the people from David's army fell. Uriah the Hittite was also killed.* ¹⁸ *Joab sent a complete report of the battle to David.*

¹⁹ *"When you have finished reporting all the news of the battle to the king," Joab instructed the messenger,* ²⁰ *"if the king gets angry and asks you, 'Why did you go so close to the city to fight? did you not know they would shoot from the wall?'* ²¹ *Who killed Jerubbaal's son Abimelech? did not a woman throw an upper millstone on top of him from the wall so that he died in Thebez? Why did you go so close to the wall?' then say: 'Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too.'"*

²² *So the messenger set off, and when he arrived he reported to David everything Joab sent him to say.*

²³ *"The men overpowered us," the messenger told David. "They came out against us in the open field, but we fought against them up to the entrance of the city*

gate. ²⁴ Archers shot down on your servants from the wall. Some of the king's servants died. And your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too."

²⁵ David said to the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Do not feel guilty about this because it is the way of war*: taking the life of this person or that person. Continue attacking the city and destroy it!' Encourage Joab!"

²⁶ When Uriah's wife heard that her husband Uriah was dead, she mourned for her husband. ²⁷ After the time of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her back to his house. She became his wife and bore him a son.

But what David had done was evil in the Lord's eyes.

(* Walter Brueggemann, Interpretation, p.278)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Truth, Consequences...and Pandora's Box" by Pastor Bill Vincent

This story sits somewhere between Sir Walter Scott:

O what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive.

and the Apostle Paul:

Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24 NRSV)

We may be tempted to view this passage as only a story about those in power: leaders who fall to the temptation of power.

And we cry for justice and remind the world, "Honesty is the best policy!"

We become jaded regarding those in power: "How the mighty have fallen!"

But the truth is, this story is more about us than we want to admit.

As Walter Brueggemann notes,

We are so prone to self-deception. (Interpretation, p.266)

We say "honesty is the best policy." Then don't follow our own advice.

We get caught in a tangled web of lies and deceit – about what we do, about who we really are – and we can't extricate ourselves (and may not want to) as we desperately try to remember the details of the last re-telling of the lie of our life.

Oh, the instance may not be a matter of life and death. But it may mean death of a part of ourselves, or death of trust in a community, or death of a relationship.

And so this story is not only about truth, but also about consequences.

The consequences of lies and deceit, deceiving ourselves, plotting and scheming, and hiding.

The harm we do to ourselves when we become too familiar with the scheming and numb to the deception and the truth is not found in us.

And the harm we do to those who are innocent of our fault: the Bathsheba's and Uriah's of life. The unintended (or were they intended?) consequences; the collateral damage of our self-destruction.

We wonder about the viciousness of our society.

But how have we participated (or not) in a national dialogue? How have we ridiculed someone different from us so that others hear that, and think it's ok to speak about someone else like that.

How are we complicit?

-when we turn a blind eye to evidence of abuse right before our eyes.

-when we turn a deaf ear to creation groaning under the weight of our uncaring and apathetic ways.

Apathy and greed, arrogance and prejudice run rampant. Hatred and violence.

Reminds me of the Greek myth of Pandora.

Given a gift from the gods, she was told she must never open it. But she was curious, and eventually her curiosity got the better of her, and she opened the box. When she did,

all the illnesses and hardships the gods had hidden in the box started coming out. (www.greekmyths-greekmythology.com).

Disease, war, hatred, jealousy were let loose upon the world to spread their mischief and havoc. But there in the corner of the box is...hope.

Hope. We might say (or add) grace.

Not cheap grace nor a flimsy hope.

For the consequences of all the ugliness remain real and leave a mark, a wound.

Like the ravishing of Bathsheba. Some want to portray her as an alluring temptress. But all indications in the passage are that she – a woman, considered property (sorry to say) – had no choice before the power of the king.

There is the death of Uriah. Did he know what was going on? Or did he know enough in the presence of the power of the king to keep his mouth shut...and it cost him his life.

The complicity of Joab: "My king: right or wrong!"

And the eventual death of the newly born child.

Yes, the child born dies. And the death is considered to be the consequence of David's wrong-doing.

But even then there is hope and grace, even in the midst of the rubble of consequences (intended or otherwise).

For Bathsheba will give birth to another child: Solomon, whose name means 'peace'.

And though his reign will not mean peace for everyone, his birth is a reminder of the promise God made to David earlier. The promise of a dynasty – an everlasting line – that will lead to the birth of a child to Mary and Joseph: one Jesus of Nazareth, the Prince of Peace, the son of David.

There is a certain irony, even distaste, to Jesus being called "son of David" (and he is, numerous times in the gospels).

Yes, David did much good.

But then, in light of this story (and we're not allowed to forget it) Jesus, son of David: son of the ravisher of Bathsheba, son of the murderer of Uriah.

How reconcile that picture?

Thomas Troeger wrestles with that picture:

in a society that suffers the scourge of date rape and sexual abuse, what are the theological implications of designating Christ as “the son of David,” as the son of a king who raped a man’s wife and then devised a scheme to have the innocent husband killed?

For me the answer lies in the character and nature of Christ. His acceptance of women who minister to him and his appearing to them on the first Easter honors and empowers women. Christ acts in exactly the opposite manner from King David at his worst. Christ transforms the meaning of “son of David,” not by filling the title with his predecessor’s lust and abuse of power, but by extending David’s compassion and justice to all women and men alike. Being called the son of a highly imperfect ancient king while redefining the meaning of that title is an act of revelation, a disclosure that the past does not control the new moment that is at hand in Christ. Christ is historically related to King David, fulfilling God’s promise of a permanent covenant with the house of David, but Christ brings the wholeness and health of God’s reign, a realm in which there is no more rape and murder. To call Christ “son of David,” while remembering the evil as well as the good that King David did, is to affirm that God enters the mess of human history in order to redeem the world. (Feasting on the Word, Homiletical Perspective)

“God enters the mess of human history in order to redeem the world” ... even if that means suffering the consequences of our sin.

“God enters the mess of human history” ... even the tangled web we weave.

“God enters the mess of human history.” Not in order to excuse the tangled web or gloss over the suffering. But

- to teach and to heal, to redirect and to renew;
- to spread grace in the ungracious consequences of our tangled web;
- to bring hope to our desperate yet ineffective attempts to untangle ourselves by our own effort;
- and to show us a better way:
 - to encourage us in a better way,
 - to invite us to a better way,
 - to shape us and mold us and love us into a better people.

The pain and consequences of the story remain. Just as his death on the cross remains. And there are still consequences to our deception and misdeeds and hiding.

But, make no mistake about it: hope has been let loose in the world, in the form of the crucified one who walks alive from the tomb.

Hope has been let loose in the world. And so has grace, and that to save.

So that the tangled web we continue to weave is not the ultimate reality of our life, nor the final answer.

But truth and forgiveness, love and life are.

And the presence of God, even in the mess of our lives.

***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

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 rejoice with thanksgiving for all we have received, O God.
Bless what we offer
so that we can follow where Christ leads.
Multiply the gifts we give
for the service of the kingdom,
so that the world may more deeply know
fullness of life in you. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Just as I Am, without One Plea” GtG 442

1. **Just as I am, without one plea
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou biddest me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come; I come!**
2. **Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings and fears within, without,
O Lamb of God, I come; I come!**
3. **Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come; I come!**
4. **Just as I am, thy love unknown
has broken every barrier down;
now to be thine, yea, thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come; I come!**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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