

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 29, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come to give worship and praise.
All: We come as God's people to be nurtured and rejoice.
One: Come to share in songs and share in prayer.
All: We come to be challenged, to learn, and to grow.
One: Come to be refreshed and renewed by the power of God with us.
All: We come to worship our God.

***OPENING HYMN** "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" GtG 366 [Tune #761]

One: Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven,
**All: to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling;**
One: all thy faithful mercies crown.
All: Jesus, thou art all compassion;
One: pure, unbounded love thou art;
**All: visit us with thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.**

One: Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast;
**All: let us all in thee inherit;
let us find the promised rest.**

One: Take away the love of sinning;
All: Alpha and Omega be;
One: end of faith,
All: as its beginning,
One: set our hearts at liberty.

One: Come, Almighty to deliver;
All: let us all thy life receive;
One: suddenly return, and never,
nevermore thy temples leave.

All: Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
One: pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
All: glory in thy perfect love.

One: Finish then thy new creation;
All: pure and spotless let us be;
One: let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee:
All: changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION** *(based on Micah 6 & Psalm 51)*

Mighty and Merciful God,
you pardon all who truly repent and turn to you.
We humbly confess our sins and ask your mercy.
We have not loved you with a pure heart,
nor have we loved our neighbor as ourselves.
We have not done justice, loved kindness,
or walked humbly with you, our God.
Have mercy on us, O God, in your loving-kindness.
In your great compassion,
cleans us from our sin.
Create in us a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within us.
Do not cast us from your presence,
or take your Holy Spirit from us.
Restore to us the joy of your salvation
and sustain us with your bountiful Spirit.
In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: Our God is a God of grace, quick to forgive and ready to recreate in us
pure hearts and willing spirits. So rejoice in the good news; believe it, live
it.
All: For by the grace of God we are loved and accepted, forgiven and
restored through Jesus Christ our Lord. 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 II Samuel 11:26-12:13

II SAMUEL 11:26-12:13a (Common English Bible)

^{11:26} *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.

^{12:1} *So the LORD sent Nathan to David. When Nathan arrived he said, "There were two men in the same city, one rich, one poor. ² The rich man had a lot of sheep and cattle, ³ but the poor man had nothing—just one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised that lamb, and it grew up with him and his children. It would eat from his food and drink from his cup—even sleep in his arms! It was like a daughter to him.*

⁴ *"Now a traveler came to visit the rich man, but he was not willing to take anything from his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest who had arrived. Instead, he took the poor man's ewe lamb and prepared it for the visitor."*

⁵ *David got very angry at the man, and he said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the one who did this is as good as dead! ⁶ He must restore the ewe lamb fourfold because he did this and because he had no compassion."*

⁷ *"You are that man!" Nathan told David. "This is what the LORD God of Israel says: I anointed you king over Israel and delivered you from Saul's power. ⁸ I gave your master's house to you, and gave his wives into your embrace. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. If that was too little, I would have given even more. ⁹ Why have you despised the LORD's word by doing what is evil in the Lord's eyes? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and taken his wife as your own. You used the Ammonites to kill him. ¹⁰ Because of that, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite as your own, the sword will never leave your own house.*

¹¹ *"This is what the LORD says: I am making trouble come against you from inside your own family. Before your very eyes I will take your wives away and give them to your friend, and he will have sex with your wives in broad daylight. ¹² You did what you did secretly, but I will do what I am doing before all Israel in the light of day."*

¹³ *"I have sinned against the LORD!" David said to Nathan.*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "A Story for Us All" by Pastor Bill Vincent

A story – the right story – can draw us in, capture our imagination, engage us; and then, just at the crucial moment, shine a light and open our eyes; and we see ourselves more clearly, we see our lives more truly.

A man – or was it a woman? – had everything she could ever need, everything he could ever want. Imagine that, think of that: had it all, fulfilling everything. Makes life wonderful!
Then he threw it all away – blew it, lost it all. She threw it all away.
What a fool she was! What a fool he was!
No. What a fool we are.

We look about us at creation. The beauty of the world. The bounty it affords. We have it all.

But we ravish it. Impatient, we cut corners, without even wanting to understand the connections and consequences. We toss it aside. Abuse it. Misuse it. Trash it.
And throw it all away; we blow it.
What fools we are.

We have the capacity to love, to engage in relationships and nurture and be nurtured, to support and be supported; to know love and full life.

But, we push others away. We demand others do things our way, see things our way. We belittle some, denigrate others; use them.
And throw it all away.
What fools we are.

David had it all.

The blessings God had given him:

“This is what the Lord God of Israel says: I anointed you king over Israel and delivered you from Saul’s power. I gave your master’s house to you, and gave his wives into your embrace. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. If that was too little, I would have given even more.”

And David threw it all away, blew it.
What a fool.

And the prophet Nathan revealed that truth to David...with a story.

I remember another story of having it all: Adam and Eve, the Garden of Eden, paradise. Talk about having it all!

What more could you ask for?
And they threw it all away, blew it.
What fools!

As best we understand the process of the sharing, collecting, and writing down of the stories that became our scriptures – as best we understand that process...this story of Adam and Eve was probably known and circulating during the time of David.

It presents an intriguing picture.

Imagine people sharing that story of Adam and Eve – knowing that story, telling that story amongst themselves – all the while knowing (or at least suspecting) what happened with David and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.

Had it all and blew it.

What a fool.

And I wonder: did knowing that other story of Adam and Eve serve to illustrate and illuminate the truth of what was happening in their midst? Did people see that truth in their own lives?

Imagine further down the road of history.

The story of Adam and Eve (and David with Bathsheba) was still around, still circulating, maybe even more intentionally remembered and shared than before.

Like during the Exile.

The Exile: the people have been conquered, defeated; uprooted from the only place they have ever known as home and taken to live in a foreign, strange, alien land.

And those who served as their teachers, to instruct and to guide, would share the story.

Remember Adam and Eve. Remember David with Bathsheba. They had it all. They threw it all away. What fools they were.

No, people of God, people of Israel. What fools *we* are.

We – Israelites, God’s people – had it all: a God who freed us from slavery and gave us back our lives. A God who gave us a land flowing with milk and honey – a place to call home, a place that would provide all that we needed. A God who gave us each other and community, and then guidance and instructions for how best to live together...for full and abundant life. A God who gave us purpose: being a light to the nations.

We had it all.

And we threw it all away: we rebelled; we went after our own agenda; we depended upon our own strength; we ran after other gods, including gods of our own self-interest and power and prestige.

And we loved ourselves more than we loved our God.

And we threw it all away. And ended up in exile.

What fools we are.

A friend of mine once reminded me of St. Augustine and his perspective on sin: In an article, New York Times columnist David Brooks is quoted talking about Augustine:

“He said we sin when we have our loves out of order.”

...

“We all love a lot of things. We love family, we love money, we love a little affection, status, truth,” Brooks says. “And we all know that some loves are higher. We know that our love of family is higher than our love of money.”

However, when those ranks begin to shift, that’s when sin comes in. “Our love of truth should be higher than our love of money. [But] if we’re lying to get money, we’re putting our loves out of order,” Brooks explains.

...

“For example, if a friend tells you a secret and you blab it at a dinner party, you’re putting your love of popularity above your love of friendship,” he says. “And we know that’s wrong. That’s the wrong order.”

(“An Ancient Philosopher’s Brilliant Theory Explains Everything Bad You’ve Ever Done” by Lisa Capretto, 01/15/2016, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/augustine-sin-quote_us_56980d51e4b0778f46f8b931)

We love the wrong thing at the wrong time in the wrong way. We love something more than we should. We love God less than we should.

And when we mess up our love priorities, we end up throwing it all away.

What fools.

What fools we are.

I confess, from the beginning of working with this story of David with Bathsheba, I couldn’t help thinking of the parable of the prodigal son. You remember it.

The younger son had it all: a roof over his head; food on the table; family for support. And he cashed it all in and threw it all away.

Then, in a far-off, foreign land – like the people in exile? – he comes to his senses. He sees. And, no, he doesn’t get it exactly right (he thinks he’s not worth anything), but he does know enough to go back.

He had had it all. Then blew it. But it turned out one thing he still had was a father who loved him and welcomed him back, and always would. And that’s why he goes back: because he knows he can.

One person writes,

It reminds me of one of the truths about the relationship between confession and forgiveness, which is the opposite of what most people think. It is not our confession that allows God to forgive us. It is God’s promise of forgiveness that frees us to confess. (Dr. Luke bouman, Lectionary Homiletics, June/July 2015, p.66c)

Yes, we blow it, in any number of ways, on any number of days. But it is not exposing that truth that turns us around, that makes a difference.

It is God’s promise to forgive that opens the door, that offers us the opportunity, that encourages and empowers us to confess and be restored, to be reconciled and renewed ... and embraced once again (and again and again).

We can face the truth about our lives because we know the truth about God: about God’s love and life, promise and mercy, forgiveness, fidelity, and compassion.

In our own way, we had it all.

And we threw it all away.

But there’s a deeper truth: we didn’t really throw it ALL away.

For we can’t throw God away.

We can try. We can try to dismiss God and forget God and run away from God. We can pretend God doesn’t see or exist or care. But God remains.

God remains.

And therein lies our hope: the possibility – indeed, the invitation – to return, to confess; the opportunity to be restored, renewed; to be given another chance, given our life back.

“I have sinned against the Lord,” David said to Nathan. He didn’t do any real favors for Uriah or Uriah’s wife, either.

Sometimes that’s hard to see that for ourselves: the consequences. ‘It’s just a little lie.’ ‘Nobody got hurt’, we think.

But every time we blow it or throw it all away, we put the love of something else before our love for God.

“I have sinned against the Lord,” we need confess.

And then Nathan affirms for David – and for us? – *“The Lord has removed your sin,”* Nathan replied to David. *“You will not die.”* (v.13b)

We blow it. We throw it all away. We lose it all.

But God remains.

And recognizing that truth – about ourselves and about God – and responding to that truth is the beginning of renewal and restoration; the beginning of getting our life back, getting back our life in God: getting back to the life in God we are called and invited and created to live.

Thanks be to God!

***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*

Thank you, O God, for the rain which nourishes the earth and the sun which warms it. Thank you for the nourishment of friendships and the warmth of your love. Accept our offerings as the outpouring of our gratitude. May your purposes be served and your will be done through the use of our gifts and the giving of ourselves. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

*CLOSING HYMN "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" GtG 475

1. Come, thou Fount of every blessing;
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.

**Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above;
praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
mount of God's unchanging love!**

2. **Here I raise my Ebenezer;
hither by thy help I'm come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger,
interposed his precious blood.**

3. **O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart; O take and seal it;
seal it for thy courts above.**

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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 Vacation Sunday, September 5th. 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
Click on Livestream Worship Services – 10:00 am

Southminster Presbyterian Church, Crestwood MO

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/>