

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP** *(from Psalm 51)*

One: Come to listen for all God seeks to teach us.  
All: **God's Word transforms all who hear and heed it.**  
One: God's image is a part of each one of us.  
All: **God offers to each of us deep inner cleansing.**  
Unison: **"Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me."**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart" GtG 688 *[verses 1, 3, & 5]*

One: Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;  
All: **wean it from earth; through all its pulses move;**  
One: stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art,  
All: **and make me love thee as I ought to love.**

One: Hast thou not bid us love thee, God and King;  
all, all thine own, soul, heart, and strength, and mind?  
All: **I see thy cross; there teach my heart to cling.**  
One: O let me seek thee,  
All: **and O let me find!**

One: Teach me to love thee as thine angels love,  
All: **one holy passion filling all my frame;**  
One: the baptism of the heaven-descended Dove,  
All: **my heart an altar, and thy love the flame.**

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**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**O God, we admit that all is not well with us.  
We are easily angered and slow to forgive.**

**We speak without listening  
and pretend to listen without really hearing.  
Our tongues become weapons  
rather than instruments of healing.  
We are more critical than helpful  
toward the poor in our midst.  
Hidden in our hearts are the attitudes that produce  
avarice, deceit, and  
violation of our promises to you and to one another.  
Turn us around so we can accept your forgiveness  
and learn to love ourselves as you want us to be,  
through Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

**One:** Friends, do not despair:  
God renews us by the word of truth,  
that we might become the first fruits of God's creation,  
made new by the living Word,  
our hearts filled with God's love.

**All:** **We rejoice in a love stronger than our sin.**

**One:** In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

**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 7:1-23

MARK 7:1-23 (various)

<sup>1</sup> *The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus* <sup>2</sup> *and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were ritually unclean, defiled, that is, unwashed.* <sup>3</sup> *(For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands in the proper way, thus observing the tradition of the elders;* <sup>4</sup> *and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are many other rules which they have received that they observe, such as the washing of cups, jugs, pans, and sleeping mats.)* <sup>5</sup> *So the Pharisees and the scribes asked*

him, “Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but instead eat food with ritually unclean hands?”

<sup>6</sup> Jesus replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

*‘These people honor me with their lips,  
but their hearts are far from me.*

<sup>7</sup> *in vain do they worship me,  
since they teach instructions that are human words.’*

<sup>8</sup> You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

<sup>9</sup> And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to uphold your own traditions! <sup>10</sup> For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die.’ <sup>11</sup> But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)—<sup>12</sup> then you no longer permit doing anything for a father or mother. <sup>13</sup> Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

<sup>14</sup> Then he called the crowd again and said to them, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand. <sup>15</sup> Nothing outside a person can defile them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them.”

<sup>17</sup> After leaving the crowd, he entered a house where his disciples asked him about the parable. <sup>18</sup> He said to them, “Then do you also fail to understand? Do you not see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can defile them? <sup>19</sup> For it does not go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out into the sewer.” (Thus he declared all foods clean.) <sup>20</sup> He went on: “What comes out of a person is what defiles them. <sup>21</sup> For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come, which lead you to do immoral things, to rob, to kill, <sup>22</sup> commit adultery, be greedy, to do all sorts of evil things; deceit, indecency, envy, slander, arrogance, folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from inside and defile a person.”

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** by Pastor Bill Vincent

It is astonishingly simple.  
It is disturbingly difficult.

As we hear Jesus’ word and his interactions with those around him, there are two issues it appears he is dealing with.

One is the issue of being ritually unclean, being defiled, washing of hands, as Mark shares that part of the issue.

The other is human tradition: those rules that we set up to make sure we actually do God’s commands; all those things that ‘fence in’ God’s word so that we’re sure that we do it.

But I suggest to you that it is not really two issues, but one:

-That the way we manipulate our traditions, our sayings, those things that we say we have to do...

-That the way we interpret and understand God's word...

...are the things that lead us, in our lives, to do the things that defile us; that make us do things that go against God's will and God's purpose.

All too often we twist God's commands for our own convenience.

So that we twist the commandment of God to justify flying planes into buildings.

We twist the commandment of God to justify dehumanizing vast segments of the human population for our own gain or convenience.

We twist the commandment of God to demonize our opponents, so that I am right (which means I'm good) and you are wrong (which means you're evil).

But it is too easy to fall into the trap of pointing at others and seeing how they

*abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition,*

how they

*reject the commandment of God in order to keep their tradition!*

The problem with that path, you see, is that I fail to see my own self-righteousness.

This passage seems to lend itself to highlighting the hypocrisy of others: those who say one thing and do another; those who expect others to live up to one standard while they themselves adhere to another standard.

But then I overlook how I do that.

I overlook my own ways. I overlook my own heart.

And, if truth be told, the heart is the heart of the matter.

It's that simple.

Perhaps we'd best look into our own heart and seek to discern what comes from inside us: our intent and our focus and our commitment.

Of course, part of the struggle with this particular passage is that it is very clear about some of those negative things: what *not* to do, what to avoid; all that folly, arrogance, deceit, evil intentions.

What it's not so clear about is what we *are* to do, what we are to pursue.

So how do we discern from our passage that positive, and how it is to be expressed in our lives?

Well, Jesus shares a quote from Isaiah about honoring God with our hearts. That may be a good place to start.

Then, of course, he talks about those people who let go of God's commands in order to hold on to human traditions. So we can flip that around and speak of the importance of God's commands and upholding God's commands as opposed to what human tradition tells us to do.

But you know as well as I do that can be tricky as well. For there are plenty of people who say they are following God's commands, but it sure looks like all they are doing is following their own wants and wishes and desires.

But he does say this: that it is not what goes in that is important but what comes out that is important. That it is what comes out of a person that defiles them, that demonstrates that they are standing with God, or not.

So that the direction we need to pay attention to is not outside in but inside out.

In other words, pay attention to the heart.

There it is again.

If there is to be a change in my life, if there is to be a change in this world, it must be a change of the heart.

If there is to be a change in this world, it must involve a change of heart.

And that's where I got stuck.

How do you change a heart?

What makes a heart want to change?

In the midst of bombs flying and planes used as bombs...

In the midst of bullets aimed at innocent bystanders and hatred aimed at opponents...

...how do we focus on changing the heart?

When people are so afraid that they will cling to traditions and assumptions that have run out of their usefulness, and build fences that serve as walls against the rest of the world...

When people are so afraid of what will happen that they will strike out angrily at others...

When people are so afraid of losing what they hold so dear, that they will listen to anything that protects them, regardless of any connection to sense or rationality, and hold steadfastly to convenient lies come hell or high water or pandemic...

...how do we change a heart?

*And during supper, he got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around himself. ... After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, ... "If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ... I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another."* (from John 13 NRSV)

We change a heart by bringing it into contact with another that is so different and so alive that the heart wants to change.

And today we come to this table, remembering that heart of hearts. And how it touches us. And how we want to change.

You know, there are times when I don't know how our Lord puts up with us:

-Don't know how our Lord puts up with our selfish clinging to worn out assumptions and used up traditions that end up sucking the life out of us.

-Don't know how our Lord puts up with our needless fear that closes us off to one another and walls us off from the rest of the world.

-Don't know how our Lord puts up with our self-righteous arrogance that blinds us to anything but our own horizon and our own narrow-minded world-view.

I don't know how our Lord puts up with us.

I don't know how our Lord puts up with me.

But when I remember this night [--point to Communion table--],

and when I hear his "Do not be afraid,"

and when I sense his heart for mine,

then I know I want to be like him.

*Create in me a clean heart, my Lord, and put a new and right spirit within me...that my heart may be like yours.*

That's where it starts: that prayer, that yearning for a clean heart, a new heart, a changed heart.

Because I know the heart God has for me.

It needs to be a fervent prayer, an honest prayer; committed and willing to embrace what comes from it, even change.

And let us make no mistake. This is not advocating a merely internal response.

The evils listed manifest themselves in outward behavior.

Good, too, will manifest itself in outward life.

In the most recent issue of *Presbyterians Today*, in an article entitled, appropriately enough, "Anti-Racism Work Is Heart Work," one person noted,

**once a heart is open...action is an organic response.** (p.31)

Once a heart is open, good intentions will flow.

Once a heart is touched, love abides there and cannot help but make itself known.

Once a heart is changed, you and I will make sure that change is made known in our lives, for one another, for the world.

It's a matter of the heart.

God's heart for us.

Our heart for one another.

## **\*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.**

**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!"**

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

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**Pastor:** In your mercy, Lord...  
**People:** ...touch our hearts and hear our prayers.

## THE EUCHARIST

### OFFERING

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Living God, thank you for your gifts of life—  
fragrant flowers, fruitful vines, singing creatures,  
and our own lives, renewed in Christ.  
O God, receive our gifts for the work of your church.  
With them we dedicate ourselves  
to live in the truth of your word,  
and follow your commandments  
with sincere hearts.  
Let your grace infuse the gifts we offer  
with life-giving power for those in need;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

*Invitation to the Lord's Table*

*Prayer of Thanksgiving*

Leader: The Lord be with you.  
**People: And also with you.**  
Leader: Lift up your hearts.  
**People: We lift them to the Lord.**  
Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**  
*(The prayer continues...)*

*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.**



*Breaking of the Bread*

*Communion of the People*

*(Please hold the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)*

*Prayer*

**SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “Into My Heart” StF 2160

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“Change My Heart, O God” GtG 695

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**1. Into my heart, into my heart,  
come into my heart, Lord Jesus;  
come in today, come in to stay;  
come into my heart, Lord Jesus.**

**Change my heart, O God;  
make it ever true.**

**Change my heart, O God;  
may I be like you.**

**You are the Potter;**

**I am the clay.**

**Mold me and make me;  
this is what I pray.**

**Change my heart, O God;  
make it ever true.**

**Change my heart, O God;  
may I be like you.**

**2. Out of my heart, out of my heart,  
shine out of my heart, Lord Jesus;  
shine out today, shine out always;  
shine out of my heart, Lord Jesus.**

**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**People: ...Amen.**

**POSTLUDE**

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