

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: Come one and all to meet God here.  
**All: We have come that God might raise us up.**  
One: God hears our prayers and answers us.  
**All: God equips us to be helpful to one another.**  
One: God's presence and help are real.  
**All: So we come together to sing songs of praise to God.**  
One: Give thanks for God's wondrous deeds.  
**All: God's glory abides in this place of worship.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "God, You Spin the Whirling Planets" GtG 23

One: God, you spin the whirling planets,  
**All: fill the seas and spread the plain,**  
One: mold the mountains,  
**All: fashion blossoms,**  
One: call forth sunshine, wind, and rain.  
**All: We, created in your image,  
would a true reflection be  
of your justice, grace, and mercy  
and the truth that makes us free.**

One: You have called us to be faithful  
in our life and ministry.  
**All: We respond in grateful worship  
joined in one community.**  
One: When we blur your gracious image,  
**All: focus us and make us whole.**  
One: Healed and strengthened as your people,  
**All: we move onward toward your goal.**

One: God, your word is still creating,  
calling us to life made new.  
**All: Now reveal to us fresh vistas  
where there's work to dare and do.**  
One: Keep us clear of all distortion.  
Polish us with loving care.  
**All: Thus, new creatures in your image,  
we'll proclaim Christ everywhere.**

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### **\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**God, our strength and savior,  
you know our great transgressions,  
our hidden faults, our secret sins.  
We desire what we do not need  
and corrupt our relationships with envy.  
You urge us to gentleness,  
but we stir up conflict.  
With our hands we grasp at power;  
with our feet we stumble into evil;  
with our eyes we look out for ourselves.  
Deal with us not as we deserve, gracious God,  
but forgive us, cleanse us,  
and teach us your holy way  
of life and love and peace;  
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

### **\*SILENT CONFESSION**

### **\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: The prayer of the psalmist is our prayer: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."  
**All: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit."**  
One: The good news that the psalmist proclaims and that we know in Jesus Christ is that our God is a God of grace, quick to forgive and ready to recreate in us a heart of service and a spirit of faithfulness.  
So let us hear and believe that good news once again.  
**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** Mark 9:30-50

MARK 9:30-50 (New Revised Standard Version+)

<sup>30</sup> *They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; <sup>31</sup> for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, “The Son of Humankind is to be delivered into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.” <sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.*

<sup>33</sup> *Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” <sup>34</sup> But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup> He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” <sup>36</sup> Then he took and placed a child among them; and putting his arms around the child, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> “Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”*

<sup>38</sup> *John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” <sup>39</sup> But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to say evil things about me. <sup>40</sup> For whoever is not against us is for us. <sup>41</sup> For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name because you belong to Christ, truly I tell you that person will in no way lose their reward.*

<sup>42</sup> *“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. <sup>43</sup> If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to Gehenna to the unquenchable fire. <sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into Gehenna. <sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into Gehenna <sup>48</sup> where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.*

<sup>49</sup> *“For everyone will be salted with fire. <sup>50</sup> Salt is good; but if salt loses its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”*

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

Context is important.

The disciples and Jesus are on a journey whose ultimate destination is Jerusalem.

Jesus has now spoken twice about what will happen to him in Jerusalem – his Passion – and he is in the process of teaching and training and preparing his disciples.

And then there is this picture, this image: of Jesus “*putting his arms around the child*” (‘embracing’, as one translation puts it; ‘taking the child up in his arms’, as another translation puts it).

Now our first response to this image, is, “Oh, isn’t that sweet.”

But we’d be wrong (at least initially).

It’s not sweet.

It’s scandalous.

A child in Roman times meant little.

**children in that time were regarded as nonpersons, or not-yet-persons,**

(Martha L. Moore-Keish, *Feasting on the Word*)

A child was at the mercy of the head of the household; had no prestige, no position, no power.

Yet Jesus embraces that very child.

Jesus doesn’t seek to embrace the powerful. Jesus doesn’t try to snuggle up to those with status.

Jesus wraps his arms around...a child – the lowliest, on the fringes, helpless child.

And then has the audacity to say that it is through welcoming this child, that you welcome Jesus himself; and more than that, you actually welcome God.

Jesus has told the disciples about what is coming: his fate, his passion, his death.

Jesus has told them about the need to take up their own cross in order to follow him and be his disciples.

And just now, Jesus has told them that the real way to “get ahead in life” is actually to “fall behind” and be a servant of others.

**the Greek...meant someone who served meals. ...the lowest in rank of all of the servants—the one who would be allowed to eat only what was left after everyone else had eaten their fill.** (Sharon H. Ringe, *Feasting on the Word*)

To be not first but last; not the head, but the feet; and to serve.

And to show them what he means, he embraces a child: a no- name, no-nothing child. A helpless, vulnerable child.

It is, in a powerful way, a foreshadowing of exactly what he is going to do when he embraces powerlessness and vulnerability...on the cross.

And the disciples have the gall to argue about who’s the greatest.

They have the chutzpah to argue about who’s in and who’s out.

And in both cases they’ve missed the boat – completely.

Jesus is trying to teach them and train them and prepare them for what's ahead: for this life of discipleship, this journey of following him.

He seeks to impress upon them the seriousness of the calling: for it is not simply to follow him, but as leaders, how are they helping others to answer the call and follow? Or are they placing stumbling blocks in other people's way, causing others to falter by fighting to be first in line (who's the best?), bickering about who's in and who's out.

Are they even tripping themselves up in the process, getting themselves off track by their behavior and attitude?

Now a word of caution: all that talk about 'cutting off' a hand or foot is hyperbole, to illustrate the point. As Lamar Williamson writes,

**“Cut it off” is a command to be taken not literally, but seriously.**

(Interpretation, p.172)

Following Jesus is serious business; so, too, is helping others to follow Jesus. So, get rid of the impediments to following him on this path, even if it means getting rid of that which we consider to be the most precious thing we have.

Remember, at one point, Jesus will say,

*“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”* (Luke 14:26 NRSV)

Let nothing stand in the way of following him; and put nothing in the way of others.

For we are called to represent, to stand *“in his name.”*

In an odd sort of way, in an ironic twist, that's exactly what the unnamed exorcist was doing: lifting the banner of Christ, proclaiming the name of Christ, raising the visibility of Christ.

“But he's not one of us,” the disciples complained. “He's not doing it our way.”

And Jesus is astonishingly unconcerned about that.

Jesus seems to be far more concerned that somehow this person is releasing others from the grip of evil and setting them free to new life and abundant life; that this unnamed miracle worker is bringing to bear the power and grace and mercy and life of God. That's Jesus' focus. Even through the simple giving of *“a cup of water to drink in my name.”*

All “in the name of Christ.”

As the group NewSong sings it,

**We wear his name  
in a world that's lost in hopelessness  
we've been called to be the light**

(“We Wear His Name” - Arise My Love - 1999)

We wear his name when we are willing to give of ourselves and inconvenience ourselves in order to work for the good and the betterment and the welfare of others.

We wear his name when we service their needs (not their mere whims, but their needs), to work for their true good, as Christ knows it.

So what are we doing to ‘wear his name’ in order to bring honor and praise to his name – not ours, but his? What are we doing in order to bring life and mercy to others?

“Christian,” we are called; it means “Christ-like.”

Are we?

The body of Christ.

Are we?

And Jesus, in essence, says,

Embrace the child.

Embrace this way.

Not the first, but the last.

Not the top, but the bottom.

Not the powerful, but the powerless.

Not the prestigious, but the vulnerable.

Not to be served, but to serve.

And in this way we will actually savor life and flavor it.

We will preserve life and season it.

For we will do so with the very life and love of God, in the way of God.

We will be like salt: the enhancement and flavor, the preservative; and the seasoning that lends itself to God’s *shalom*.

“Have peace in yourselves,” he says. It could also be translated, “Have peace among yourselves.” Perhaps it’s both: have peace in yourselves and peace among yourselves.

Have peace in yourselves, not by arguing among yourselves, but by

**being humble in [your] relationships with each other.**

Have peace among yourselves, not by arguing with those outside the group, but by

**reaching out and accepting all the people around [you].** (Harry B. Adams, Feasting on the Word)

Have peace in yourselves; have peace among yourselves.

Because Christ has embraced the scandal of loving YOU!

We don’t have to earn our way into God’s love. We have it already, in Jesus’ scandalous embrace of us.

So we don’t have to climb our way to the top. We can make our way (humbly) to the bottom – right where Jesus is – and serve there – just like Jesus did.

And as he has welcomed us – powerless, vulnerable us –

so we should welcome others – even the powerless and vulnerable –

and, in so doing, we will experience the welcome and embrace of God.

**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**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.**

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

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**Pastor: Merciful God...**

**People: ...touch us with your love and guide us with your light.**

**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*

**We thank you for the wealth you shower on us daily, O Lord,  
and we witness the marvelous goodness that comes from you.  
May our gifts and offerings  
be a sign of your goodness and grace,  
and a sign of welcome  
for all who are touched by their use.  
Transform us into people who mirror your goodness  
and bless others throughout each day;  
in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

## SENDING

**\*CLOSING HYMN** "O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee" GtG 738

- 1. O Master, let me walk with thee  
in lowly paths of service free;  
tell me thy secret; help me bear  
the strain of toil, the fret of care.**
- 2. Help me the slow of heart to move  
by some clear, winning word of love;  
teach me the wayward feet to stay,  
and guide them in the homeward way.**
- 3. Teach me thy patience, still with thee  
in closer, dearer company,  
in work that keeps faith sweet and strong,  
in trust that triumphs over wrong.**
- 4. In hope that sends a shining ray  
far down the future's broadening way;  
in peace that only thou canst give,  
with thee, O Master, let me live.**

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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 next Sunday, September 26<sup>th</sup> (finally moving to the new house!). Please 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](http://www.discoverstmark.org)

Click on Livestream Worship Services B 10:00 am

Southminster Presbyterian Church, Crestwood MO

[www.southminsterstlouis.org](http://www.southminsterstlouis.org)

Scroll down to This Week=s Service B 10:00 am

John Knox Presbyterian Church, Florissant MO

Worship at 9:30 am - Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/JohnKnoxPresbyterianChurchFlorissantMO/>