

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SECOND SUNDAY of ADVENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Isaiah 40)*

One: "Prepare the way of the Lord."

All: "Make straight a highway for our God."

One: With expectancy we come to listen, to give, to invest ourselves in this time of worship.

All: In anticipation of God's coming to us, let us come to worship the Lord.

***OPENING HYMN** "Prepare the Way, O Zion" GtG 106

One: Prepare the way, O Zion,
your Christ is drawing near!

**All: Let every hill and valley
a level way appear.**

One: Greet One who comes in glory,
foretold in sacred story.

**All: O blest is Christ who came
in God's most holy name.**

One: He brings God's rule, O Zion;

All: he comes from heaven above.

One: His rule is peace and freedom,
and justice, truth, and love.

**All: Lift high your praise resounding,
for grace and joy abounding.**

One: Fling wide your gates, O Zion;

**All: your Savior's rule embrace,
and tidings of salvation
proclaim in every place.**

One: All lands will bow rejoicing,
their adoration voicing.

**All: O blest is Christ who came
in God's most holy name.**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

As we seek to prepare for you, hear our confession, O Lord. We sing of adoring you; but our lives focus on most everything else instead, from lists, to presents, to the hustle and bustle of life. We sing of justice and truth and love; but our choices support injustice, our words speak deceptively, and our lives are anything but loving when others get in our way. Forgive us, gracious God. By your Spirit, truly prepare within us hearts receptive to your presence and open to the coming of your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from Luke 2)*

One: In this is love, that God gives us the gift of Jesus Christ to remind us of the truth of Immanuel: that God is with us.

All: This is indeed “good news of great joy for all the people.”

One: So rejoice and be glad, for in Jesus Christ we are loved, in Jesus Christ we are embraced, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

All: “Glory to God in the highest heaven!”

***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 Joshua 2:1-14

Joshua 2:1-14 (NRSV)

¹ Then Joshua son of Nun sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies, saying, “Go, view the land, especially Jericho.” So they went, and entered the house of a prostitute whose name was Rahab, and spent the night there. ² The king of Jericho was

told, “Some Israelites have come here tonight to search out the land.” ³ Then the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab, “Bring out the men who have come to you, who entered your house, for they have come only to search out the whole land.” ⁴ But the woman took the two men and hid them. Then she said, “True, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from.” ⁵ And when it was time to close the gate at dark, the men went out. Where the men went I do not know. Pursue them quickly, for you can overtake them.” ⁶ She had, however, brought them up to the roof and hidden them with the stalks of flax that she had laid out on the roof. ⁷ So the men pursued them on the way to the Jordan as far as the fords. As soon as the pursuers had gone out, the gate was shut.

⁸ Before they went to sleep, she came up to them on the roof ⁹ and said to the men: “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that dread of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt in fear before you. ¹⁰ For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites that were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. ¹¹ As soon as we heard it, our hearts melted, and there was no courage left in any of us because of you. The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below. ¹² Now then, since I have dealt kindly with you, swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family. Give me a sign of good faith ¹³ that you will spare my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them, and deliver our lives from death.” ¹⁴ The men said to her, “Our life for yours! If you do not tell this business of ours, then we will deal kindly and faithfully with you when the Lord gives us the land.”

THE ADVENT WREATH (Mothers of Messiah): Rahab

God of the wom - en God of the men
 God of the chil - dren too
 How do your peo - ple hold on
 How do your peo - ple have faith

ROEDER (God of the Sparrow), Tune by Carl Schalk.
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PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Taught by the Prostitute” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Checking references to ‘Rahab’, she’s always “Rahab the prostitute” (or harlot). She can’t get away from it. Sting? No doubt.

In the New Testament, the Greek word used is the root from which we get the word ‘pornography’. Not a pretty picture. Not a good thing. Not to God’s liking.

Still, God is able to use Rahab, even “Rahab the prostitute/harlot.” Not that God condoned, or condones, prostitution. But God was able to use even the likes of “Rahab the prostitute” ... whether prostitution was a path chosen by her or one forced upon her by her circumstances.

Perhaps God can use even me, even in my situation, whether chosen by me or forced upon me.

The other thing to note: every time we read about Rahab, she’s listed as the one “who hid the spies.” She’s known by what she did.

She did *something*. You know, “Don’t just stand there. Do something!”

She is remembered for what she did.

I was reminded of a story from the building of the Panama Canal. There were problems and obstacles throughout the construction of the canal. Numerous people came and went in a search for those who could get the job done. Early on in the U.S.’s involvement in the project, John Stevens, head engineer, said this to one of his division heads:

You won't get fired if you do something, you will if you don't do anything. Do something if it is wrong, for you can correct that, but there is no way to correct nothing. (in The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1914, by David McCullough, p.469)

There are times in history when that is the biggest concern regarding the church. Faced with problems and obstacles, the biggest obstacle is paralysis: doing nothing. We are faced with unprecedented change and challenges. Are we frozen into inaction? Or will we do something: call up someone we haven’t seen in a while; get together to pray for each other or for Bible study; help out at the local food pantry.

One of the foundational principles of physics is the principle of inertia: the tendency of an object at rest to stay at rest; and the tendency of object in motion to stay in motion. And (I believe) it is easier to redirect an object that is already in motion than it is to move an object that is just sitting there.

Do something.

Of course, that can be scary in its own right.

To stand before a group of people and say, “Do something” – that’s asking for trouble, chaos, pandemonium. Like bumper cars.

However, that picture – and anxiety – can be tempered by two lessons learned from Rahab herself.

-#1-

First:

Rahab says to the spies she is hiding,

“Since I have dealt kindly with you [which reveals something of her character, of the person she really is], swear to me by the Lord that you in turn will deal kindly with my family.”

And they do.

“Deal kindly” is how it is translated in the text. The word can also be translated ‘kindness’, ‘loving-kindness’, ‘mercy’, ‘steadfast love’, ‘loyal love’. I.e., how we treat each other, especially knowing the bond that connects us.

Like God’s dealing with us: *“God’s steadfast love endures forever”* (Psalm 136).
Revealing something – a significant something – of God’s character, of who God really is.

We *will* “deal kindly” with each other – with loyal love and mercy, with steadfast love and gentleness, with grace and forgiveness – even in this seemingly mass chaos of ‘doing something’.

So when we bump into each other, we will say, “Excuse me.”

When we step on each other’s toes, we will say, “Pardon me.”

When we happen to do each other wrong, we will say, “Forgive me.”

And when we have an idea and begin to roll with it, we will not be so arrogant as to think that ours is the only idea or the only legitimate idea or the idea that everyone else just has to love as much as we do. We will be humble and work together with each other, and honor and respect and appreciate and celebrate other people’s ideas and plans as well as our own.

Remember those instructions with the Panama Canal? “Do something if it is wrong, for you can correct that.” Willing to believe that what I do may not be perfect and therefore may need to be corrected.

Do something...and “deal kindly” with each other in all of that mass chaos.

-#2-

For (second lesson) it’s not really “mass chaos,” certainly that’s not the intent. Even if we’re not sure exactly what everyone is doing or what direction we’re all going, it’s still not complete chaos.

And it’s not frenetic, random activity where anything goes.

For it makes a difference the hope that drives us, the One who motivates us.

Roy Howard is a pastor who wrote an article (*The Presbyterian Outlook*, December 2008) about Advent – you know, the season we’re in now, the season before Christmas. He acknowledges that the season tends toward a frenetic pace, with cards to write and presents to buy, parties to attend and people to see. But he also notes that Advent is intended as a season of waiting. We have a hard time waiting; we’re in such a hurry, we tend to be irritable and impatient. But much of what Advent is about is waiting. And what makes a difference is the motivation for our waiting.

As Rahab professes,

“The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below.”

The One for whom we're waiting gives some parameters to our waiting and our choices as we wait.

Again, the Panama Canal. When John Stevens instructed his division head to 'do something', that was not a blank check, where anything goes. Even if the work he did was wrong, it was still work for the canal: he still had some idea, some direction, some inkling of what he was working for; and that gave *some* direction to his work, even if at some later time that direction had to be adjusted...a course correction.

And maybe this is where faith comes in. It was the candle of faith we lit, after all, on the Advent Wreath.

One of the chapters in the New Testament where Rahab is mentioned is Hebrews 11, known as the 'chapter of faith', which defines faith as

the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (Hebrews 11:1 NRSV)

Faith becomes that assurance, that conviction that motivates us in our work. Working for something that is unseen, working for a goal, a purpose, a kingdom that we may never fully realize, but which we sense and have some notion about, and even a yearning for; and that guides our work and our decisions.

We may not always have the clearest picture of all we are called to do here and now. But we do have some inkling of the hope toward which we work: hope for better life for all God's people, hope for justice and peace for all, hope for the reality of God's reign in your life and in mine. We have some inkling that the promised land is out there, even though we may, and probably will, have to travel through a wilderness to get there.

And faith carries us through. For through it all, our assurance is strong and our conviction is sure because we know the One for whom we're working and waiting: the God who bolsters our hope, even from a cross; the God who speaks to us of things unseen, even from an empty tomb; the God who comes to us in a manger and promises to be with us every step of our journey.

We're working with the God who is with us when we gather around the manger and are deeply touched by the mystery and tenderness of the divine presence in the fragility of a newborn child; *and* the God who is with us when we wait helplessly in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit wondering if our child, or our grandchild, will make it through another night.

We're working with the God who is with us when we gather at the foot of the cross, with heart broken because we know we are the ones who nailed him there; *and* with the God who is with us when we know something of the violence and viciousness, the unfairness and injustice, the tragedy and brokenness of life, and we cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

We're working with the God who is with us when we are stunned before the gaping hole that is the empty tomb, *and* when we are overwhelmed by the vision of a sunset or the undeserved touch of love; because we realize we have caught a glimpse of the astounding power and grace of God and don't know what to do with it – or what it wants to do with us – and we're not sure whether to jump up and down for unimaginable joy or flee in holy terror.

We're working with the God who is with us everywhere and anywhere, every day and any day.

And so, we have the assurance of the hoped-for kingdom, the conviction of the not-yet-seen promised land.

We may not know all the ins and outs of what will happen next. We may not be precisely clear about the details of exactly what we are called to do and be here and now.

But we will put our trust in the God who is with us: who wants to – and will – work through us.

And we will hold on to that God of the manger, of the cross, of the empty tomb – and have faith that the God who was able, and willing, to work through “Rahab the prostitute,” can, and will, use even us.

Thanks be to God!
Amen.

***HYMN “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me”**

1. I'm gon-na live so God can use me

an - y - where, Lord, and an - y - time!

I'm gon-na live so God can use me

an - y - where, Lord, and an - y - time!

Chord symbols: F, Bb/F, F, Gm/F, F, F7, Bb, Eb/Bb, Bb, F, Bb/F, F, N.C., F, Bb/F, F, A7, Dm, Bb6, F/C, Dm7, G7, C7, F, Bb/F, F.

2. I'm gonna work so ...

3. I'm gonna pray so ...

4. I'm gonna sing so ...

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***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.**

**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: Hear us, O God...

People: ...your mercy is great.

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*

O God, as we bring these offerings for the work of your kingdom, we know that the gift without the giver is of little use. So we offer to you today not only these offerings, but ourselves as well, to be used to serve your purposes and to prepare the way for your coming into the hearts of people everywhere. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” GtG 82

- 1. Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us;
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.**
- 2. Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all-sufficient merit
raise us to thy glorious throne.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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