

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 23, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRD SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, people of God, to the one in whom we trust.
All: **Praise God who delivers and rescues us.**
One: Hope in God, who has created you.
All: **God accepts us, even when people do not.**
God affirms us, even when we fail.
One: God's Word of love is ours to proclaim.
All: **We are here to worship the God who empowers us.**

***OPENING HYMN** "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy" GtG 435

One: There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.
All: **There's a kindness in God's justice,**
which is more than liberty.
One: There is no place where earth's sorrows
are more felt than up in heaven.
All: **There is no place where earth's failings**
have such kindly judgment given.

One: For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind.
All: **And the heart of the Eternal**
is most wonderfully kind.
One: If our love were but more faithful,
All: **we would gladly trust God's Word,**
and our lives reflect thanksgiving
for the goodness of our Lord.

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Merciful God,
we confess that we are fickle followers of your way.
We praise you when your words comfort us
and deny that your good news means
we need to sacrifice something.
We grow comfortable with the way things are,
passively condoning injustice.
We see ourselves as “insiders,”
excluding those we consider “outsiders.”
We find it easier to pluck up and pull down,
to destroy and overthrow,
than to build and to plant.
Forgive us, O God,
for being wayward and fleeting disciples.
Focus us on you,
and fill us with your love
that is humble and patient and kind.
We pray this in the name of the One
who humbled himself,
Jesus the Christ. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: God has loved us since the beginning,
and God’s love for us will never end.
Do not fear, therefore,
but have faith in God’s steadfast love,
God’s healing power,
and God’s ability to make all things new.
All: **For by the grace of Christ, God forgives us in love,
and calls us to abide in faith, in hope, and in love.
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 Luke 4:14-30

LUKE 4:14-30 (various)

¹⁴ Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him spread throughout the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all.

¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
The Lord has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

²² All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. They said, “This is Joseph’s son, isn’t it?”

²³ He said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’” ²⁴ And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. ²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ There were also many persons with skin diseases in Israel during the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.”

²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹ They rose up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Ruffled Feathers” by Pastor Bill Vincent

What if I were to tell you I had here a letter from the latter half of the First Century – a revealing letter.

Well, see for yourself:

Dear Jesus:

My parents have told me the story about your visit long ago to Nazareth.

Where you read from the scroll of Isaiah and preached that sermon that almost got you killed.

To get the people all excited about the coming of God's Messiah and the establishing of God's transformative grace in our lives in real and concrete ways – so that the poor do have goodness in their lives, and those shackled by all sorts of things (or all sorts of people) really are set free, and those who are blind to all your goodness and love and life have their eyes opened to see and to embrace that life – to get the people excited by all that...and then suggest (no, throw it in their face) that this wonder and grace is not just for them but for everyone – Gentiles, outsiders, the not-chosen ones – for everyone.

Wow! That was a gutsy move.

But as my mom now would say, at that time, you were “too local to be heard” (Howard K. Gregory, Feasting, p.310). You were too familiar for us to really hear you and understand the radical – and exceptionally good – impact of what you were trying to say.

Not like we hadn't heard this before, though.

I was reading the story of Jonah recently. He was so determined to avoid your call to preach to the hated city of Nineveh. And when he finally did, he did so reluctantly – and SO reluctantly – because, as he said,

“I knew you were a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.” (Jonah 4:2 NRSV)

Amazing, that he could take that news of your wonder and grace, and make it sound so disagreeable...all because you also wanted to share it with others.

I guess the people that day in the synagogue were a lot like Jonah: they too didn't want to share that good news. They too didn't want to share that grace. They too didn't want to share you...or what you represented.

I'd like to think I would have responded differently than they did, that I would not have participated in driving you out of town and trying to throw you off a cliff. I'd like to think I might even have protested and tried to defend you.

But, I think I know myself well enough to know that's not the case.

I have my own group of friends: those I like and hang around with because, you know, we think alike and act alike and we're 'more alike than different', so we get along pretty well. And I tend to be protective of them, and exclusive with them. And I want the best for them.

We have a saying that “Birds of a feather flock together.”

Only now I realize that feathers are ruffled when birds of different feathers discover their Creator wants to be gracious toward the other flock.

How ironic that you, who came “to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,” were yourself not accepted.

That you, who came to announce the coming of God’s time of jubilee, heard no jubilation from your own people.

And probably would have heard none from me, either.

So I write, asking for your forgiveness: that you would forgive my hardness of heart; that you would forgive my self-centered, me-and-my-kind small-world ways.

And that you would help me truly to hear you and your good news – news for me...and for others.

Sometimes I wonder if I am so tunnel-vision focused on me and me only, that I overlook or forget or ignore or even deny that you are not simply and solely my Savior; you are the Savior of the world.

That definitely includes me, yes.

But that definitely includes a whole lot more people than just me.

For the good news you preach is good news for me: for my release from bondage, for recovering my sight so that I may truly see, for my freedom from oppression and imprisonment of all different sorts.

But, as you made perfectly clear, that good news is also good news for others, too, for all: from those foreigners (the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian), to me and my friends, to all those others I don’t know or don’t like or don’t want to know. To everyone.

And so, the good news you preached is the good news I receive...and the good news I, too, am to preach...and to live.

So that I get to hear of good news to my poverty: material and spiritual.

-That is also good news to the poverty of others: their real, material, “don’t-have-enough-to-eat, don’t-have-a-place-to-rest-their-head” poverty; and their “I-don’t-matter, who-cares-for-me” poverty.

-That also calls me, invites me, even obligates me to proclaim and work for the easing of the poverty of all, in all ways.

And I get to hear the good news of recovering my sight: of learning truly to see the goodness and the grace you shower on me, the forgiveness you offer, the love you freely give, your provision for me and protection of me, your presence with me always.

-That is also good news of recovering of sight for others: of opening their eyes and hearts and minds and souls to you and your gracious, merciful, wondrous presence and working in their lives.

-That also calls me, invites me, even obligates me to proclaim and work for the opening of eyes and the broadening of minds and the warming of hearts of others...no matter how difficult that might be.

And I get to hear the good news of freedom and release from all that shackles me and imprisons me and holds me captive and keeps me from the fullness and goodness of life as you intend.

-That is also good news for release and freedom for all people from the inner shackles that hobble people and the outer, even institutional, chains that bind and confine others.

-That also calls me, invites me, even obligates me to proclaim and work for the real, concrete loosing of those bounds and breaking of those chains and freeing of people – friend and foe alike – from all that hinders the experience and embracing of real, true, full life and love...and you.

So, I guess I have my work cut out for me.

Which means I have your calling to hear...and to embrace.

Which means I need – desperately – your help to embrace your call and follow your way and be your disciple: to know and love you.

Just like the people in the synagogue that day – though they didn't see it at the time – and I all too often don't see it, either.

More irony: that the very one they were enraged by was the very one they needed.

Yes, Lord Jesus, your unconditional love for all is sometimes frustrating as hell! (Sorry about that.)

But it is also the best thing in life that we can ever know.

Thank you for sharing it – for sharing you – with me.

And help me to share it – and you – with others...or at least not to be quite so resentful of your love for others. Sorry, Jesus; sometimes that's the best I can do. Baby steps, you know.

Obviously I'm still a work in progress.

Thank you for your patience with me.

Thank you for your grace toward me.

Thank you for your love for me...and, yes, for all others, too.

With all the love I can muster,

I am yours – always yours –

Signed....

***HYMN “Live into Hope” GtG 772**

- 1. Live into hope of captives freed,
of sight regained, the end of greed.
The oppressed shall be the first to see
the year of God's own jubilee!**
- 2. Live into hope! The blind shall see
with insight and with clarity,
removing shades of pride and fear,
a vision of our God brought near.**
- 3. Live into hope of liberty,
the right to speak, the right to be,
the right to have one's daily bread,
to hear God's word and thus be fed.**
- 4. Live into hope of captives freed
from chains of fear or want or greed.
God now proclaims our full release
to faith and hope and joy and peace.**

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***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.**

**With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Merciful God...

People: ...be our strength and our hope.

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*

**With awe and wonder before you, O God, we dare to enlist all our
efforts toward the realization of your realm. Bless these gifts that we offer
that they may further your reign in this world. In all we do, we will seek to
serve you by sharing your love. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve” StF 2241

1. The Spirit sends us forth to serve;
we go in Jesus' name
to bring glad tidings to the poor,
God's favor to proclaim.

2. We go to comfort those who mourn
and set the burdened free;
where hope is dim, to share a dream
and help the blind to see.

3. We go to be the hands of Christ,
to scatter joy like seed
and, all our days, to cherish life,
to do the loving deed.

4. Then let us go to serve in peace,
the gospel to proclaim.
God's Spirit has empowered us;
we go in Jesus' name.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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