

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FIFTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, people of God, to give thanks and sing!

All: We come in remembrance of all that God has done for us.

One: All around us the world shouts God's praises!

All: Let us join in the song of thanksgiving to God.

***OPENING HYMN "For the Beauty of the Earth" GtG 14**

One: For the beauty of the earth,
for the glory of the skies,

**All: for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:**

**Unison: Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.**

One: For the wonder of each hour
of the day and of the night,

All: hill and vale,

One: and tree and flower,

All: sun and moon,

One: and stars of light:

**Unison: Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.**

One: For the joy of ear and eye,

All: for the heart and mind's delight,

One: for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight:

**Unison: Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.**

One: For the joy of human love,
All: brother, sister, parent, child,
One: friends on earth, and friends above,
All: for all gentle thoughts and mild:
Unison: Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

One: For thyself,
All: best gift divine
to the world so freely given;
One: for that great, great love of thine,
All: peace on earth and joy in heaven:
Unison: Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

(Public Domain)

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Dear God, we give you thanks and sing ... sometimes. We pay attention to your word and your guidance ... sometimes. We seek to do your will ... sometimes. Not a good record for a people who are called to love you with all our heart and soul and strength and mind. Forgive us, merciful God, for half-way commitment and half-hearted faith. Touch us by your Spirit that we may be bound to you wholeheartedly, embodying in our lives the love and joy and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: God is merciful and calls on us to offer mercy to those who have wronged us.
All: God forgives and bids us to forgive others.
One: God's love is always available to us, and we are to pass it on.
All: God provides for us; and out of that bounty, we minister to our sisters and brothers.
One: Let us live as people who recognize and appreciate God's gifts, and who know 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 Luke 6:27-38

LUKE 6:27-38 (New Revised Standard Version)

²⁷ *“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.*

³² *“If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, who is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

³⁷ *“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; ³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Measured Giving? Or a Giving Measure?” by Pastor Bill Vincent

“For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Before he became a well-known motivational speaker, Les Brown worked as a disc jockey in Columbus, Ohio:

When I was working as a disc jockey in Columbus, Ohio, I used to go to University Hospital or Grant Hospital on my way home. I would walk down the corridors and just walk into different people’s rooms and read Scripture to them or talk to them. ... It made a difference in the lives of those I visited. One time it literally save my life.

I was very controversial in radio. I had offended someone in an editorial...

One night I was coming home at about two o’clock in the morning. I had just finished working at a night club where I was the emcee. As I began to open my door, a man came out from behind the side of my house and said, “Are you Les Brown?”

I said, “Yes, sir.”

He said, "I need to talk to you. I was sent here to carry out a contract on you."

"Me? Why?" I asked.

He said, "Well, there's a promoter that's very upset about the money you cost him when you said that the group that was coming to town was not the real group."

"Are you going to do something to me?" I asked.

He said, "No." ...

He continued, "My mother was in Grant Hospital and she wrote me about how you came in one day and sat down and talked to her and read Scripture to her. She was so impressed that this morning disc jockey, who didn't know her, came in and did that. She wrote me about you when I was in the Ohio Penitentiary. I was impressed with that and I've always wanted to meet you. When I heard the word out on the street that somebody wanted to knock you off," he said, "I accepted the contract and then told them to leave you alone."

("What Goes Around Comes Around" by Les Brown; found in A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, 1995)

"For the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Now, I realize our experience may not be as dramatic as Les Brown's story, but still we know the truth of this passage:

"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back." (verses 37-38)

The book mark was found in the woman's Bible as I talked with the family before her funeral. On that bookmark were found these words from a poem:

Start living your life for others; ...

It's certainly quite a tonic

And it will help to cure your ills,

When you attend to others' needs

You'll save on doctor bills.

The joy that comes through helping folks

Will make a change, no doubt;

It always seems to work that way

When you help others out.

So make a special effort,

It's rewarding when you do;

You'll find the love you give away

Will all come back to you.

("Live for others" by Arline Ratliff)

You know the saying: "What goes around, comes around."

Like Brian and Mr. Baker.

Mr. Baker is a grouch. Everybody in the neighborhood says so. ...

We've lived across the street from Mr. Baker ever since I can remember. ... Mr. Baker has always been a grouch. But my little brother Brian doesn't think so. Brian is three years old, and for some reason, Brian really likes Mr. Baker.

One day last summer Brian disappeared. My mom called and called, but he didn't come. Just when I was about to get on my bike and start riding the neighborhood, there came Brian around the corner of Mr. Baker's house. Brian had a hoe in one hand and had been helping Mr. Baker in his garden.

All summer long, whenever we couldn't find Brian, we could bet he'd be with Mr. Baker. They worked on the garden and they pulled the weeds in the Baker's yard, crawling around together and talking. And what surprised me is that Mr. Baker talked to him, too. Mr. Baker never talked to *us*. I ride by on my bike and say "hi", and he just grunts.

My mom says Mr. Baker hasn't said a word to her in seven years. ... he just doesn't like our family much.

One day, Brian told Mom that he wanted to take some Christmas cookies to Mr. Baker. Mom said, "Oh, honey, I'm sure Mr. Baker already has lots of cookies." But Brian wouldn't give up. He kept asking and asking. He kept after Mom until finally she said okay. They got out all the frosting, and Brian decorated. ... Then he put the cookies on a paper plate, wrapped it in foil, and stuck a bow on top.

Then Brian took the plate over to Mr. Baker. Mom stood at the door and watched him cross the street. I heard her say, "God bless"...

When Mom and Dad were talking later that night she said, "Mr. Baker actually wished me a Merry Christmas today."

"You're kidding! *The* Mr. Baker who lives across the street and only grunts? How did that happen?" Dad said.

"Brian took him some Christmas cookies, and he actually spoke. I guess the Bible's right about 'a little child shall lead them.'"

...Mr. Baker must not be all that bad, if Brian made friends with him. And now he and my folks are talking with each other. Mr. Baker even called today to tell us thanks for the cookies. I heard my mom say to him, "I hope we can be friends." And you know what Mr. Baker told her? "I'm sure we can." (from *Pockets*, by The Upper Room, 1986)

Brian's being a friend helped others become friends. His influence, his presence, his reaching out was the measure he gave.

"For the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Now, I realize we have to be cautious with these words, and our understanding of them.

We must not construe these words as a justification for "works righteousness." You know, trying to earn our way into heaven. If I do this, then I somehow build up credits with God. And if I build up enough credits, then God/life is obligated to give me...well, fill in the blank: a blessed life, a good life, a life without pain and trouble, an easy life ... you name it. Trying to earn God's love and acceptance. "If I do this, then..."

Nor should we hear these words as a kind of "tit for tat": "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine." For remember? As Jesus said,

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again." (verses 32-34)

Nor do these words serve as a manual for "How to Win Friends and Influence Enemies," or "How to Succeed in Business or Life." The way our culture tends to work, the way our society promotes.

The fact is, this passage of ours is very counter-cultural. It goes against the prevailing mood of our times, which says, "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine," and "I don't get mad, I get even."

Quite honestly, this principle puts us at odds with much of what the world around us teaches, thinking specifically about those words regarding forgiveness, and loving our enemies, and giving with no thought of return.

But if I use this passage as a *prescription* for how to get from others the measure that's supposed to come to me, then we're on the wrong track.

However, if I understand this passage as a *description* of life as God intends it, then we're on the right track, then I think we're pretty much on target to see the truth.

May be paradoxical, but the truth nonetheless.

Much like what Jesus said another time in regards to following him:

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake...will save it." (Mark 8:34-35 NRSV)

If we cling to our life, never giving any measure (so to speak), then we will lose our life: we will get back absolutely nothing, for we have given nothing. But if we give up our life, if we lose our life (in giving), then we will save our life: we will get back our life, and more, receive life abundant (John 10:10).

We just may not know exactly when or where we will get back that measure.

Sister Helen taught

third grade...in...Minnesota. All 34 of my students were dear to me, but Mark...was one in a million. ...he had that happy-to-be-alive attitude that made even his occasional mischievousness delightful.

...

At the end of the year I was asked to teach junior high math. The years flew by, and before I knew it Mark [and his classmates were] in my classroom again. ...

One Friday things just didn't feel right. We had worked hard on a new concept all week, and I sensed that the students were growing frustrated with themselves -- and edgy with one another. I had to stop this crankiness before it got out of hand. So I asked them to list the names of the other students in the room on two sheets of paper, leaving a space between each name. Then I told them to think of the nicest thing they could say about each of their classmates and write it down.

It took the remainder of the class period to finish the assignment, but as the students left the room, each one handed me their paper. ...

That Saturday, I wrote down the name of each student on a separate sheet of paper, and I listed what everyone else had said about that individual. On Monday I gave each student his or her list. Some of them ran two pages. Before long, the entire class was smiling. "Really?" I heard whispered. "I never knew that meant anything to anyone!" "I didn't know others liked me so much!"

No one ever mentioned those papers in class again. I never knew if they discussed them after class or with their parents, but it didn't matter. The exercise had accomplished its purpose. The students were happy with themselves and one another again.

Several years later, after I had returned from a vacation, my parents met me at the airport. As we were driving home, [they told me,] "Mark was killed in Vietnam ... The funeral is tomorrow, and his parents would like it if you could attend." ...

[A difficult time, to say the least. To know and love someone, to have taught them and seen them grow; and then to have to say goodbye to them before their time.]

After the funeral most of Mark's former classmates headed to [the] farmhouse... Mark's mother and father were there, obviously waiting for me. "We want to show you something, "his father said, taking a wallet out of his pocket. "They found this on Mark when he was killed. We thought you might recognize it."

Opening the billfold, he carefully removed two worn pieces of notebook paper that had obviously been taped, folded and refolded many times. I knew without looking that the papers were the ones on which I had listed all the good things each of Mark's classmates had said about him.

“Thank you so much for doing that,” Mark’s mother said. “As you can see, Mark treasured it.”

Mark’s classmates started to gather around us. Chuck smiled rather sheepishly and said, “I still have my list. It’s in the top drawer of my desk at home.” John’s wife said, “John asked me to put his in our wedding album.” “I have mine too,” Marilyn said. “It’s in my diary.” Then Vicki, another classmate, reached into her pocketbook, took out her wallet and showed her worn and frazzled list to the group. “I carry this with me at all times,” Vicki said without batting an eyelash. “I think we all saved our lists.”

That’s when I finally sat down and cried.

(“All the Good Things” by Helen P. Mroska; found in Chicken Soup for the Soul by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen, 1993)

And though surely many of the tears were for Mark and his death, I want to believe, too, that some of those tears were the result that, even in the midst of that trying and difficult time, Sister Helen finally knew the positive impact that exercise from long ago had had on them all.

It reminds me of the Parable of Sower.

You know the story: about the sower who sows seed that falls on a wide-variety of soils, many of which are not at all conducive to the fruitful growth of the seed; but some is.

And in this story we hear the promise that, regardless of all the other situations and soils about us, there will be a harvest. We may not know when or where, but there will be a harvest: 30-, 60-, 100-fold.

“For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Truth is – if experiences I have had are any indication – that oftentimes, the measure we get back is far greater than the measure we have given.

Scot was a counselor at a high school camp I helped direct. As you might expect, serving as a counselor for a week with 80-100 high schoolers can run you ragged and take a lot out of you.

But when Scot and I and the rest of the staff had gathered several weeks later to evaluate our time together, Scot said simply,

I took away with me more than I brought ... and didn't feel guilty.

It’s almost counter-intuitive to say that.

It says something about the ‘economics’ of the kingdom of God: of living a life of service to and love of others.

And living this way takes courage ... and trust.

Jesus elsewhere says,

“But strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and all these [other] things [that we need for life] will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33 NRSV)

It takes courage to embrace that way of living.

And even here in our passage, he says,

"Do to others as you would have them do to you."

Note what he does NOT say: it does NOT say 'Do to others as they do to you.' He says,

"Do to others AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO TO YOU!"

And do so with courage...and trust.

Trust in the One who says it is true. Trust in the One who tells the Parable of the Sower. Trust in the One who says, *"Lose your life to save it."* Trust in the One who says, *"Seek first God's kingdom and God's righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well."* Trust in the One who says, *"The measure you give will be the measure you get back."*

Trusting, because we already know – we have plenty of evidence that – it is true. For the measure we have received *already* is far greater than the measure we have given...or could ever give.

You see, in the end we must acknowledge that, regardless of how someone else responds – regardless of what another has done for me or done to me, regardless of what another has given to me or taken away from me – God has given to me immeasurably: the very breath of life, a love that knows no end, the offer of forgiveness and a second chance (and third, and fourth, and fifth), a helping hand time and time again.

As our first hymn noted,

...the beauty of the earth,

...the glory of the skies,

...the love which from our birth

Over and around us lies,

(*"For the Beauty of the Earth"* - Words by Folliot Sandford Pierpoint, 1864)

For all these, we give our thanks and praise.

So that whenever I hand out a measure of forgiveness or love, caring or kindness, I do so out of the immeasurable store of forgiveness, love, and kindness that I have been given by God already.

"Be merciful, just as your Father in heaven is merciful" ...and has been already to you!

"For the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

And, let's be honest, even before that: the measure we give is part and parcel of the measure we have been given by God.

So, let us give, in gratitude, out of the measure we have received.

***HYMN "Lord of All Good" GtG 711**

**1. Lord of all good, our gifts we bring to you;
use them your holy purpose to fulfill,
tokens of love and pledges brought anew,
that our whole life is offered to your will.**

2. **We give our minds to understand your ways;
hands, eyes, and voice to serve your great design;
heart with the flame of your own love ablaze,
till for your glory all our powers combine.**

3. **Father, whose bounty all creation shows;
Christ, by whose willing sacrifice we live;
Spirit, from whom all life in fullness flows:
to you with grateful hearts ourselves we give.**

Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and binds us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.**

**The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.**

**In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.**

**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: God, in your mercy...
People: ...hear our prayer.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

Loving God, we rejoice in your grace and giving to us. You have showered on us blessing upon blessing. Open our eyes to see your graciousness. And open our hearts to give as freely as you have given to us. Accept these offerings we bring today as signs of our response to your love. Use them and us to share your love and your grace with all people. In Christ's name we pray. 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

Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending” GtG 716

1. **God, whose giving knows no ending,
from your rich and endless store,
nature's wonder, Jesus' wisdom,
costly cross, grave's shattered door:
gifted by you, we turn to you,
offering up ourselves in praise;
thankful song shall rise forever,
gracious donor of our days.**

2. **Skills and time are ours for pressing
toward the goals of Christ, your Son:
all at peace in health and freedom,
races joined, the church made one.
Now direct our daily labor,
lest we strive for self alone.
Born with talents, make us servants
fit to answer at your throne.**

3. **Treasure, too, you have entrusted,
gain through powers your grace conferred:
ours to use for home and kindred,
and to spread the gospel word.
Open wide our hands in sharing,
as we heed Christ's ageless call,
healing, teaching, and reclaiming,
serving you by loving all.**

Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

The Assurance of Pardon is reprinted by permission of United Church Press from *Gathered by Love* by Lavon Bayler. Copyright 1994 by United Church Press.

The Prayers of the People and Prayer of Thanksgiving are used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2012/2013.

The Prayers of the People are written by Teri McDowell Ott and used by permission. © Presbyterian Outlook, 2022.