

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**SIXTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: With heart and soul and voices we come to worship.  
All: **We seek to love and serve the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and strength and mind.**  
One: So come to give thanks and praise.  
All: **We come to rejoice in the goodness of the Lord our God.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "Lead On, O King Eternal!" GtG 269

One: Lead on, O King eternal!  
All: **The day of march has come;**  
One: henceforth in fields of conquest  
your tents shall be our home.  
All: **Through days of preparation  
your grace has made us strong,**  
One: and now, O King eternal,  
All: **we lift our battle song.**

One: Lead on, O King eternal,  
till sin's fierce war shall cease,  
All: **and holiness shall whisper  
the sweet amen of peace;**  
One: for not with swords' loud clashing,  
nor roll of stirring drums;  
All: **with deeds of love and mercy  
the heavenly kingdom comes.**

One: Lead on, O King eternal:  
All: **we follow, not with fears,**  
One: for gladness breaks like morning  
where'er your face appears;

**All: your cross is lifted o'er us;**  
**One: we journey in its light.**  
**All: The crown awaits the conquest;**  
**lead on, O God of might!**

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**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**We come to worship, O God, relishing your goodness and dependent upon your grace. We also come honestly to confess who we are. We give up all too easily when life becomes difficult. We fail to heed your instructions or follow in your way. We are easily distracted and run off after other “gods” and goals. Forgive us, merciful God. Restore us to you and reclaim us as your own. Renew us by your Spirit and remake us in the image of your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

**One:** We remind ourselves of the good news we have heard and in which we believe: that the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in constant love.

**All: If we confess our sins, God is quick to forgive and to restore us to new life.**

**One:** So let us rejoice and be glad, proclaiming once again the good news.

**All: That in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Amen! Alleluia!**

**\*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 I Corinthians 9:24-27**

**I CORINTHIANS 9:24-27 (New Revised Standard Version)**

*<sup>24</sup> Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it. <sup>25</sup> Athletes exercise self-control in all things; they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one. <sup>26</sup> So I do not run aimlessly, nor do I box as though beating the air; <sup>27</sup> but I punish my body and enslave it, so that after proclaiming to others I myself should not be disqualified.*

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

**SERMON** “Aiming for the Finish Line...Or a Perfect Quad Toe Loop” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Perhaps you’ve seen them: on ice, with skates or sleds; on snow, with skis or snowboards; sliding, jumping.

We’ve been watching the Winter Olympics. It’s amazing to think of the athletes with all their training and focus, their effort and exercise. All the work that goes into preparing bodies and minds to perform, to be of service to their particular goal, both individual goals and group goals. Working to be flexible, to have stamina, to condition their muscles. Some getting in 2-3 hours of practice before they go to school; with 2-3 hours of practice afterwards, followed by homework.

What commitment. What focus.

Richard B. Hays notes,

**one reason the Olympic Games remain perpetually fascinating for us: we are captivated by the dedication that these women and men devote to the pursuit of the gold medal. What about our own dedication to the gospel? Is it comparably rigorous, or are we flabby, armchair spectators? The question must be asked.** (Interpretation series, 1997, p.158)

Are we even half as committed as these athletes? about a goal, a prize that is infinitely more valuable?

Do we practice? Do we train ourselves? Do we prepare ourselves – mind, body, and soul – to "perform," to be of service to our particular goal? Both our own personal goals in life – our particular calling, ministry, service – and our goals as a community – our particular calling as a congregation, our ministry and service.

To begin with, it calls for commitment: a sense of dedication, drive, resolve.

A faithfulness. Based on God’s faithfulness and sustained by God's faithfulness. For remember: God doesn’t give up on us.

Like the Energizer Bunny: it keeps going and going and going. We keep plugging away. So the writer to Hebrews:

*Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.* (Hebrews 12:1 NRSV)

And do so for the short haul, and the long haul; in the sunny days and the stormy.

For as God has committed to us – in such a way as to touch our hearts and transform our lives – so we commit to God.

“OK, God. Let’s do this. You and me. Together.”

Will we commit?

Yet, even as I ask that question, it must also be acknowledged that all the commitment in the world still won't win the race all by itself.

There are skills and tools we need to focus our commitment toward the goal.

So Paul says,

*Athletes exercise self-control in all things; ... I punish my body and enslave it...*

But what does Paul mean by that "self-control"?

C.K. Barrett writes,

[The Greek word] **takes varying senses in different contexts, but its root meaning is `to exercise mastery over oneself'**. (Harper's N.T. Commentaries, 1968, p.217)

To control, direct, focus oneself.

And some of the best tools to help us in that self-control and focus are the spiritual disciplines, spiritual practices – teaching tools.

As one person writes,

**One grows in grace as one gives oneself to study, to meditation, to prayer, to fellowship, and to Christian service, until every aspect of life is governed and permeated by the indwelling Spirit of Jesus Christ.** (John Short, Interpreter's Bible, vol.10, 1953, p.106)

Will we engage the scriptures to develop the mind's muscle memory for mercy?

Will we take time for serious meditation to increase our flexibility of response and our depth of endurance?

Will we practice prayer to sharpen our sight for what's important and to refine our hearing for who's important to pay attention to in life?

Will we engage one another in fellowship and community to support and encourage one another in our efforts, to learn from one another's experience, and to work together toward our common goal?

Will we sprint toward opportunities for service and throw ourselves all into the cross-country marathon for justice and love, all for the sake of our coach, our mentor, our Lord, Jesus Christ?

Then Paul gives a specific example of what some of this self-control and spiritual discipline might look like.

In this case, it comes in the form of self-restriction (which we don't like). He has been talking about food sacrificed to idols, with the question as whether or not it is ok to eat such food. Some people are disturbed by the thought; others are not. And though Paul himself has no problem with it in and of itself, he advocates refraining if some are disturbed by the practice: in other words, a willingness to limit one's own freedom for the good of others.

As he writes,

*"All things are lawful," but not all things are beneficial. "All things are lawful," but not all things build up. Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other.* (I Corinthians 10:23-24 NRSV)

Hays notes,

**True Christian freedom is exercised in service.** (p.158)

And that, all for the glory of God.

All this with a focus on and guidance from the goal...

...with 2 notes: a correction and a reminder.

Note #1 - the correction:

The goal we strive for is not a goal simply for me; it's for others as well.

Yes, Paul says, "*only one receives the prize.*"

But as Barrett says,

**The metaphor creaks a little, for Paul does not mean that only one Christian, or one out of each group, or indeed any arbitrarily limited number, will achieve the prize appointed by God.** (p.217)

As someone else notes,

[Paul] **must have quickly realized that in the church all could win the prize.**

(Clarence Tucker Craig, *Interpreter's Bible*, vol.10, 1953, p.105)

You see, this race in which we are involved is not a competition against others, where some win and others lose. It's working for a win/win, where everyone wins, and everyone's in.

Note #2 - a reminder:

A reminder that comes to mind every time I see so much pressure put on Olympic athletes (or, for that matter, those for the Super Bowl) to win, win, win, the gold, gold, gold. And if they don't, then, "What happened? What's the matter? What's the problem? They obviously failed."

Reminder: God loves us – period. We don't have to earn God's love. In fact, we can't earn God's love. The race Paul is talking about is NOT a race to earn God's love. That's been taken care of...by the cross.

We are loved by God. Period.

What Paul is talking about is our life *after* we have heard and believed that good news. The race Paul is describing is our life *of response* to that love, our life *growing out of* that love. Not to prove ourselves worthy of God's love, but to prove that in reality we have heard and understood, that we know and believe God's love.

For if indeed we have heard and understood, if we do know and believe God's love; then this is how we will live, and this is how we will choose, and this is how we will respond, and this is how we will give ourselves to living life and engaging one another and serving our God.

A goal which may be best illustrated (surprise, surprise) by one of the parables of Jesus: the Parable of Talents (see Matthew 25:14-30). Before he goes away on a trip, the master calls some of his servants and gives 5 talents to one, and 2 talents to another, and 1 talent to a third. Today I want to focus on the 5 and the 2. These servants had to commit themselves, exercise self-control and discipline, and work with what they were given. So that when their master returned, they were able to show what they had done with what they had been given. And the master replied,

*"Well done, good and faithful servant."*

As William Barclay says simply,

**the goal is life** (Daily Study Bible Series, 1975, p.86)

But not just any life: abundant life; real, fulfilled – and fulfilling – life.

Our goal is to embrace the work God calls us to – this life as God intended – in obedience to God and God's ways, in love and service to our neighbor; so that we might hear God's "well done, good and faithful servant."

Will we commit to that goal?  
Will we persevere to attain that goal?  
Will we use the tools and develop the skills to reach and embrace that goal?  
-with faithfulness in worship and vigilance in prayer;  
-with openness in dialogue and diligence in study;  
-with generosity in service and graciousness in spirit.

*"Let us run in such a way that we may win it."*

**\*HYMN** "Fight the Good Fight" GtG 846 (*verses 1-3*)

- 1. Fight the good fight with all thy might.  
Christ is thy strength and Christ thy right.  
Lay hold on life, and it shall be  
thy joy and crown eternally.**
- 2. Run the straight race through God's good grace;  
lift up thine eyes, and seek Christ's face.  
Life with its way before us lies;  
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.**
- 3. Cast care aside; lean on thy guide.  
God's boundless mercy will provide.  
Trust, and thy trusting soul shall prove  
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.**

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**\*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.  
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:** Hear us, O God...  
**People:** ...your mercy is great.

## **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*

**Thank you, God, for leading us and walking with us along life's way.  
We offer our gifts in gratitude for your gracious presence and provision. Use  
them, and us, to share your abundance and proclaim your love. In Christ's  
name we pray. Amen.**

## SENDING

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “Guide My Feet” GtG 741 (*verses 1, 3, 4, 6*)

1. **Guide my feet while I run this race;  
guide my feet while I run this race;  
guide my feet while I run this race,  
for I don't want to run this race in vain!**
  
3. **Stand by me while I run this race;  
stand by me while I run this race;  
stand by me while I run this race,  
for I don't want to run this race in vain!**
  
4. **I'm your child while I run this race;  
I'm your child while I run this race;  
I'm your child while I run this race,  
for I don't want to run this race in vain!**
  
6. **Guide my feet while I run this race;  
guide my feet while I run this race;  
guide my feet while I run this race,  
for I don't want to run this race in vain!**

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*Guide My Feet, Music Harmony by Wendell P. Whalum.*

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## **\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**People:** ...Amen.

## **POSTLUDE**

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