

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SECOND SUNDAY in LENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: The message of the cross
sounds foolish to the world;
All: But to us it is the power of God!
One: We proclaim the scandal of Christ crucified.
**All: The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom,
and the weakness of God is stronger than our strength.**
One: Christ died for our trespasses
but was raised for our justification.
All: Thanks be to God.

***OPENING HYMN** “Lift High the Cross” GtG 826

Refrain:

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.**

**1. Come, Christians, follow where our Savior trod,
the Lamb victorious, Christ, the Son of God. (Refrain)**

**2. All newborn servants of the Crucified
bear on their brow the seal of Christ who died. (Refrain)**

**3. O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
your death has brought us life eternally. (Refrain)**

**4. So shall our song of triumph ever be:
praise to the Crucified for victory. (Refrain)**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned.
We claim to follow Jesus
but have not taken his path of sacrificial love.
We profess to be disciples,
but we are not willing to bear the cost of discipleship.
We affirm the virtue of self-denial,
but we indulge our selfish desires and seek earthly gain.
We act foolishly;
we are weak;
and we are horrified by the suffering we cause—
to you, ourselves, and the world you have created.
Open the gates of your forgiveness
and restore us in your love.
For in the cross of Christ,
we find forgiveness and grace,
that we might trust in God's wisdom and strength
rather than our own.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: Brothers and sisters,
our God is a gracious God,
abounding in steadfast love.
Know that in Jesus Christ,
crucified, risen, and coming again,
our sins are forgiven,
and we are set free to live in faithfulness
with God and with one another!
So be at peace and
know the love and life of 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 READINGS Mark 15:22-32 Philippians 2:5-8

MARK 15:22-32 (New Revised Standard Version)

²² Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). ²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

²⁵ It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. ²⁶ The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷ And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹ Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³¹ In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death –
even death on a cross.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Intersection" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Sometimes the oddness of Christianity cannot be denied. (*Lent in Plain Sight, Monday-Look to the Cross*)

writes Jill Duffield.

I could not agree more: the central symbol of our faith is an instrument of torture and execution.

I wonder how common it actually was – a cross, that is. You know, common, “*in Plain Sight*”, as Duffield puts it.

Did Jesus, as he traveled about the countryside, preaching and healing and teaching – did Jesus see a cross every day? every week? every other week?

Actually, I doubt it. There’s certainly no indication of such common, as in ‘everyday’, experiences with the cross – there is no such indication in the gospel accounts, for sure.

And from the broader accounts and record, there is no suggestion that the cross, as an instrument of execution, torture, and deterrence, was an everyday sort of thing, even in other contexts, or through other accounts, or other eyes.

But it was known – the cross, that is.

The fact that Jesus uses it as an image of discipleship and following him indicates quite clearly that the cross as a means of death (and oddly, as a matter of life) was known.

It may not have been a common, everyday occurrence.

But it was known. It was common knowledge that there were times and places and circumstances where the cross was used to execute judgment and indicate power and demonstrate the painful reality of life in the Roman Empire.

So, though Jesus and even his disciples may not have seen a cross every day or even every other week, its presence loomed over every day and every week and every life, even if only in the back of the mind.

The cross cast a shadow over all of life.

Much like one of the truths it represents.

It is a truth we have heard and know; yet a truth we do not like and do not want to talk about or acknowledge, let alone claim and admit its effect on life – its effect on *our* life.

The truth I am talking about is sin.

Yes, I know we know the word. But we don’t like the word.

Sin: not simply an abstract concept for the human condition in general. But the raw, up close reality that you and I are sinners: that we engage in behavior that dismisses others and their needs; that our underlying and primary tendency is not for justice but for our own privilege; and in all of this, we give God only a second glance, a cursory nod. We do not live faithfully before God, we do not live caringly before our neighbor, we do not even live acceptingly of ourselves; but we screw up: we live only for ourselves, we deny the gifts and the life we have and so do not use them to make life better and more compassionate and more faithful to God and others and all creation.

We “*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory (and intention) of God*” (Romans 3:23). And that is not simply ‘no big deal’, or ‘only a matter of your opinion’, or ‘no skin off my back’. But it is real and raw, and it does take the skin off my back, and others’. And it defaces the earth and dehumanizes ‘the other’ and destroys community and degrades life and divides families and demoralizes any desire for goodness and grace, compassion and peace, and life, let alone that abundant.

And we, together with all humanity, bear responsibility for that prevalent, pervasive sinful aspect of life.

“Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” the song asks. Yes, we were. Because it was our sinful ways that nailed him to the cross: our inability to hear his truth, our reluctance to let go of what little power we think we have, our refusal to give up our self-absorbed ways.

“Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?”

Yes, we were there.

And so, the torture and the execution, the laughter and derision (as the Mark passage portrays it), the rejection and abandonment are our responsibility.

But there are two pieces to a cross.

So, there is another truth to be seen here, and heard, and known, and acknowledged, and even embraced.

For, you see, Jesus didn't go to the cross because he had to.

He went to the cross, because he chose to.

For it was his embodiment of the height and length, the depth and breadth of God's embrace.

And that is the other truth of the cross: God's love.

In the cross of Christ, we see the intersection of our sin and God's love.

And guess which of the two truths wins out.

Yes, our sin is laid bare for all to see, for those who will actually look – our sin is made clear there on the cross.

The only truly innocent person killed on a cross. Why? How?

Our sin. Our rebellion against God. Our turning from God's ways. Our failure to live the way God intended, and indeed created, us to live.

But our sin does not have the final word. Our sin is not the final verdict about our life and human life and the human condition; or the human predicament or human destiny or the final human outcome.

No. Our sin is not the final word.

God's love is.

And *“God proves God's love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8), Paul writes.

The cross is the ultimate revelation of the essence of life and the essence of our life, and the intention for our life and the end of our life.

And God says the defining reality of life is love.

But all around us, and so much within us, says otherwise.

Especially that particular Friday, when the cross had done its job and his body was lifeless. And even that Saturday, when all hope was gone, and the life was knocked out of the disciples and seemingly the world.

Until Sunday morning, when the women found no body to anoint; and the men found no lock could keep him from them, and no door could prevent the stir of fresh air and new life from breathing into them something new and different, fresh and alive as no death and no dying and no sin could extinguish.

The cross – that instrument of torture and execution, that symbol of the worst that humanity has to offer – is transformed into that supreme affirmation of God’s love, all by God’s power and grace.

God says, “No, your rebellion will not win the day. I love you too much. I love you from here to eternity” (literally).

God says, “I choose to love you. Period. That is who I am. And that is who you are.”

Now we are invited to live that truth.

To hear that truth. To know that truth. To embrace that truth.

The truth about God. The truth about ourselves.

And yes, to live that truth in the midst of a world that denies that very truth.

For therein lies the ‘bearing of our cross’. As Paul puts it, “*having the mind of Christ.*”

For the one whose mind we are to emulate, the one who embodies and embraces us in this truth of love and grace, is the one who bears the marks of the nails in his hands and the spear in his side.

Yes, he knows the pain and travesty and tragedy of that truth of the cross: of the power and effect of sin.

But he also knows the joy and the spirit, and the life-giving and life-affirming essence of that other truth of the cross: God’s love.

And so he invites us to follow him and walk in his way, and embrace his take on life and way of life and walk of life, and embrace the way and walk of love. And as that way took him to the pain and impact, the wounds and brokenness of the cross, so too we will know the pain and impact, the wounds and brokenness of our own cross.

It cannot be otherwise.

For to embrace the way of God’s love is to know the pain and impact of our sin...and, with God’s help, seek to redeem it.

But we never do that alone.

For the one who died alone on his cross will not leave us alone in bearing ours.

And that is crucial to the love of God: that we are not left alone to our sin...that we are not left alone.

The cross is the intersection of our sin, yes...AND God’s love.

And God’s love will win. In that ultimate finale of history, yes; but also even now.

Will we embrace, and live, that truth? God’s truth. God’s love. The love of the cross.

***HYMN** “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” GtG 223

1. **When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.**

2. **Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.**

3. **See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?**

4. **Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.**

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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.**

**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: Hear us, O Lord...
People: ...for 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*

**God of grace, you provide for us in amazing ways. May our offerings
provide for others and be used to further Christ's ministry and mission.
And, with the dedication of our lives, may we be for the world a sign of your
abiding love. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” GtG 216

1. **Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand,
the shadow of a mighty rock
within a weary land;
a home within the wilderness,
a rest upon the way,
from the burning of the noon-tide heat,
and the burden of the day.**

2. **Upon the cross of Jesus
mine eye at times can see
the very dying form of One
who suffered there for me;
and from my stricken heart with tears
two wonders I confess:
the wonders of redeeming love
and my unworthiness.**

3. **I take, O cross, thy shadow
for my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than
the sunshine of his face;
content to let the world go by,
to know no gain or loss,
my sinful self my only shame,
my glory all the cross.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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