

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 20, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRD SUNDAY in LENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Praise the Lord; praise God, O my soul!
All: Let us praise God as long as we live.
One: God alone is worthy of our devotion;
All: we will sing praise to God all our life long.
One: Happy are those whose hope is in God,
All: who labor in steadfast faith and love.
One: Grace to you and peace, from God whose care we know.
All: We worship now, giving to God all that belongs to God.

***OPENING HYMN** “Great God of Every Blessing” GtG 694

**1. Great God of every blessing,
of faithful, loving care,
you are the fount of goodness,
the daily bread we share.
How can we hope to thank you?
Our praise is but a start:
sincerely and completely
I offer you my heart.**

**2. Your Word is our salvation,
the source of endless grace,
in death and life extending
your covenant embrace.
In Christ we are one body;
each member has a part:
sincerely and completely
I offer you my heart.**

**3. Your Spirit is our teacher,
the light that guides our search,
transforming broken people
into the holy church.
For feeding us with mercy,
for wisdom you impart:
sincerely and completely
I offer you my heart.**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Forgive us, Lord, when we think too highly of ourselves
and clamor after privilege and honor.
Forgive us, Lord, when we cannot lift our gaze
because we do not believe we have anything to give.
Forgive us, Lord, and by your grace
restore in us the image of your face.
Heal what we have broken,
nurture what we have neglected,
and lead us to your vision,
so that we may know the peace of wholeness in you;
in Jesus' name. Amen.**

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: By God's grace, we are empowered to recognize and live by new
priorities.
All: **We can set aside the distractions that rob life of its true purpose. God
lifts up those who are bowed down and redirects those who have
followed destructive paths.**
One: Receive God's forgiveness, and rejoice in God's love.
All: **Amen.**

***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 12:13-17
Mark 12:41-44
Matthew 26:14-16

MARK 12:13-17 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹³ Then they sent to Jesus some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. ¹⁴ And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality, but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay them, or should we not?" But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it." ¹⁶ And they brought one. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" They answered, "The emperor's." ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at him.

MARK 12:41-44 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on."

MATTHEW 26:14-16 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹⁴ Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "A Tale of Two Coins" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Fanciful? Yes.

But there is something here to be learned from this story I am about to tell you. A story that borrows its words at the beginning, and the end, from another tale you might find familiar.

But a story with something to say in its own right. A story to ponder. A story entitled "A Tale of Two Coins."

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. (Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities)

It was the height of the Roman Empire. A time when, due to the forceful unifying of the lands and peoples surrounding the Mediterranean, there was freedom to travel and trade, and to share in the exchange of goods and ideas.

And it was the height of the Roman Empire, when the Empire was the strongest and its grip was the tightest and lives – some lives – were the shortest.

And into this best, and worst, of times, dropped two small, copper coins.

The first coin was named Copper and the second, Coiny (of course!).

(--Fanciful, I know. But remember: with a story to tell.--)

Even for copper coins that all looked pretty much the same, Copper and Coiny looked more like each other than others, often getting mistaken for each other; but always somehow winding up together.

Both coins were created at the same place: the mint at Tyre.

And from that point, their existence was pretty typical: restless, as it was for every coin – bouncing from this town to that city, from this purse to that pouch, from this hand to that hand, from this purpose to that purpose.

It was an interesting experience, if not exploration.

Like the time when they were together in someone's purse and heard an interchange between one rabbi and others about the purpose and place of coins – for taxes, in this particular instance. Their relative, Denarius, had been used to illustrate the point: something about an image and "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and..."

The two coins had never thought about that before.

They looked at each other; they looked at themselves. And they saw that indeed they did have the image of a person stamped on them.

And they wondered together: Did they belong to this person? Did they belong to the person in whose purse they now found themselves? Did they belong to...?

Their mutual musings were cut short by the jostling of the purse and a hand reaching in to grab them, not harshly but gently. It was the poor widow in whose purse they resided at this time.

They weren't sure what she was up to. But they knew this: they were the last two coins she had.

When she pulled them out of her purse, Copper was excited to see that they were in the Temple complex: a hustling, bustling place, much like their own experience. He was even more excited when he saw that she was quietly making her way toward one of the receptacles for the Temple treasury. How wonderful! he thought. He could be part of something good, important, significant: part of the worship of God in service to faith.

Coiny, though, had a different response. He was sad to be leaving the woman behind – to leave her without anything. They were the last two coins she had, were they not? Would anyone be there to help her now? to work for her? to buy for her what she needed? Was there not a better way than for her to feel obligated to give her last two coins? Could not someone else

make up for her offering, that she might have something to live on, and not feel like she was somehow being used and abused – and even ignored – by the system she was supporting?

(--I know: deep thoughts for a pair of coins.--)

They did not have long to ponder their questions, or bask in their excitement, for they did not stay long in the treasury receptacle.

Dumped into a huge bin, many hands moved in their midst and pushed and pulled, picked up and tossed, sorting this coin and that coin in one direction or another.

And in the midst of this hustle and bustle, Copper and Coiny got separated.

Copper stayed within the Temple system, continuing his excitement: excited to feel he was important, making a difference, accomplishing vital work.

Until one day when he got mixed up with some of those stuck-up silver coins. (--You know the kind.--) And, in an otherwise quiet room, he overheard a conversation.

The conversation was about someone named...Jesus. Copper recognized that name. He had heard stories, and sometimes even been present when Jesus was around. And the mention of his name made Copper feel good inside: there was meaning and purpose in that name, caring and mercy in that presence. Copper smiled to himself.

But as he listened more carefully, it became obvious that the men who were talking about Jesus were not smiling. They were not happy. They were angry. They were mad. And now someone mentioned something about turning Jesus over – betraying him! – so that others could get rid of him, get him out of the way, see to it that he died.

The conversation continued for a while until there seemed to be a resolution.

Then, together with 30 of his silver ‘friends’ (--I use the term loosely--), Copper too is stuffed into a pouch and dropped into the hands of...‘the betrayer’!

Copper was stunned to find himself in this position. At the same time, he was astonished to think of the hold he and his silver friends had on ‘the betrayer’ – the pull to influence him to do this dastardly deed.

Copper was mortified as ‘the betrayer’ took him and the purse out into the streets to plot his wicked course. And if it had been that Copper could cry, he would have wept uncontrollably: “God, no! Not for such a purpose!”

Meanwhile, Coiny found himself carelessly dropped, winding up in a pile – a rubbish heap more accurately. Lost, worthless, he spent days exposed to the elements. Even those who might have seen him didn’t give him a second thought...or second look, for that matter.

Until one day someone found him, picked him up, and dropped him into a sack. The ‘someone’ seemed familiar – the hands? – though he couldn’t quite place her.

Down in the sack, Coiny found himself with some of his copper cousins, not all of whom were coins. He learned from them that the woman was taking them to have them made into a copper bowl: a useful item, yes, though not a coin, of course. But a tool – a simple one, actually – needed to help make life better for...

The widow! That’s who she was. The poor widow, who had given him and Copper away with such love and devotion to the Temple, to God.

But now, she needed him for something different. Something that could make her life better, richer, fuller...even in such a simple way.

And as he heard her mumble to herself, Coiny realized where she was taking him: to the place where he and Copper had first come into being – the mint. Only, it was not just a mint for coins, but a shop where various items were made and crafted, melted and formed.

Coiny knew her plans would be the end of him – the end of life as he knew it.

But somehow, Coiny was all right with that. That was all right with him, to know that he could help this poor woman, make her life better. That gave him a sense of purpose...and fulfillment. And that was something worthwhile.

And as he was placed into the forge to be melted and molded for a new and different purpose, you just might have heard him say,

It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known. (Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities)

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Just a story, yes, I know. But, fanciful as this story may be, I can still picture Jesus and imagine him saying,

“Those who have ears to hear, let them hear” (Mark 4:9).

***HYMN** “Take Thou Our Minds, Dear Lord” GtG 707

1. **Take thou our minds, dear Lord, we humbly pray;
give us the mind of Christ each passing day;
teach us to know the truth that sets us free;
grant us in all our thoughts to honor thee.**

2. **Take thou our hearts, O Christ; they are thine own;
come thou within our souls and claim thy throne;
help us to shed abroad thy deathless love;
use us to make the earth like heaven above.**

3. **Take thou our wills, Most High! Hold thou full sway;
have in our inmost souls thy perfect way;
guard thou each sacred hour from selfish ease;
guide thou our ordered lives as thou dost please.**

4. **Take thou ourselves, O Lord, heart, mind, and will;
through our surrendered souls thy plans fulfill.
We yield ourselves to thee: time, talents, all;
we hear, and henceforth heed, thy sovereign call.**

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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.**

**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: O Lord, hear our prayer...
People: ...in your mercy, by your grace.**

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, you give us life; you are the source of every blessing.
These offerings are but a token of our gratitude to you.
Increase our generosity,
expand the effectiveness of our giving,
and strengthen all who are reached by our caring.
In this world you love,
use our offerings, and us, to work your will.
And let all we say and do be to your glory.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

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.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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