

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 27, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FOURTH SUNDAY in LENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: God's saving acts were experienced by our ancestors,
and God continues to act in our own day.
- All: Bless the Lord, O my soul,
and all that is within me, bless God's holy name.**
- One: God is mighty in word and deed.
- All: God's mercy is everlasting.**
- One: Sing God's praise in the assembly of the faithful,
- All: for the Lord takes pleasure in the people.**
- One: Let the faithful sing for joy.

***OPENING HYMN** "Come Sing, O Church, in Joy!" GtG 305

1. **Come sing, O church, in joy!
Come join, O church, in song!
For Christ the Lord has led us through the ages long!
In bold accord, come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!**

2. **Long years have come and gone,
and still God reigns supreme,
empowering us to catch the vision, dream the dream!
In bold accord, come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!**

3. **Let courage be our friend;
let wisdom be our guide,
as we in mission magnify the Crucified!
In bold accord, come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!**

4. **Come sing, O church, in joy!
Come join, O church, in song!
For Christ the Lord has triumphed o'er the ages long!
In bold accord, come celebrate the journey now and praise the Lord!**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

God of our life's journey,
we confess that we have not been faithful pilgrims.
We have not served you with sincere hearts
nor trusted in your saving power.
We have pursued futile plans, without seeking your guidance.
We have resisted the way you would have us go.
We have forsaken you, the living God,
and have chosen to follow the lifeless idols
of worldly power and wealth.
Forgive us our sin, O God.
Lead us to heartfelt repentance
that we may honor you with our lips
and serve you faithfully with our lives;
through our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: Friends, hear the good news of the gospel:
God so loves us
in that while we were yet sinners
Jesus took up his cross for our salvation.
All: **God so loves us
as to bathe us with grace
and feed us with mercy
and forgive us our sins.**
One: Confident in the love of God,
know that you are forgiven and be at peace,
with God and with one another.

***THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you all.
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 Exodus 3:1-6
(various)
Ephesians 6:10-17

EXODUS 3:1-6 (NRSV)

¹ Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then God said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ God said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

from EXODUS 12:1-11 (NRSV)

This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the Lord.

from MARK 6:6b-13 (NRSV)

He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

from ACTS 12:6-11 (NRSV)

Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He tapped Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his wrists. The angel said to him, "Fasten your belt and put on your sandals." He did so. Then he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." Peter went out and followed him out of the prison and into the city.

EPHESIANS 6:10-17 (NRSV)

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Off? or On? How ‘bout Both!” by Pastor Bill Vincent

I think of shoes as imminently practical.

You see, I’m not a barefoot kind of guy. I need my shoes to protect my feet from the pain of sharp objects or stubbing my toes. I need my shoes to offer support in my walking and to keep my feet warm and dry.

Shoes are very practical.

And forgettable. I tend to put them on and forget about them. I mean, (without looking!) who here remembers exactly what the shoes they are wearing look like? how many eyelets? how many seams? the color of the thread? And does it really matter that much?

Forgettable. Right?

Except when they’re not doing their job. And there’s a crack in the sole and your feet get wet walking through a puddle. Or a pebble finds its way in, and it’s a painful reminder of the need for protection from such sharp, hard objects.

Shoes. Imminently practical, and forgettable. Until...well, you know.

As I reflected on shoes and pondered their role for us, especially in light of our various scripture passages, it was interesting to note that

-shoes are to be removed when we find ourselves in the presence of the divine.

-but shoes are to be put on when we discern the call and mission of the divine.

“Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground,” God says to Moses.

“Take nothing for your journey except a staff...and wear sandals,” Jesus instructs the disciples as he sends them out two by two to minister among the people.

“This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly,” the instructions say to the Hebrews as they prepare to flee Egypt and slavery, and begin a new chapter of their journey as the people of God.

“Put on your sandals,” the angel instructs Peter as they prepare to escape the prison in which Peter was confined.

“As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace,” Paul instructs the Ephesians in their preparation for the task and ministry and life at hand.

Shoes off in the presence of God.

Shoes on in the service of the Lord.

To take your shoes off in the presence of God is a show of respect and honor, and reverence. It is done by many even today. Muslims remove their shoes upon entering the mosque.

In some ways it recognizes something different than regular life: something special, something beyond the 'ordinary'. As shoes find themselves face down in the dirt and grime of life, to take them off is to signal a separating of ourselves (at least for the moment) from the down and dirty of life, to something holy, other, divine.

But I wonder, too, if perhaps there is also a sense in which, to take one's shoes off is to present oneself vulnerable before God.

You know, we mentioned the protection shoes provide, protecting our feet from rocks and pointy objects, from hot sand and freezing water.

But to come into the presence of God – *truly* to present oneself before the Almighty – is to strip away those sometimes artificial protections, and present ourselves as we are: open, honest, vulnerable. It is a recognition of our true status before God: before the divine, all-knowing One who knows us better than we know ourselves, from whom we cannot truly hide, before whom we are already laid bare, and so maybe it's time for us to acknowledge that for ourselves, and for God, and before God.

"God: this is who I am. You know it. You know me. So I take off the masks I wear before others; I lower the shield I use to protect myself from others; I take off the shoes of my scared, hidden self; and present myself before you, just as I am."

And God invites that honesty, knowing it's necessary for our own health and well-being.

And God embraces us in that nakedness, that unprotected mode, that vulnerability and honesty.

And here, with our shoes off and our vulnerability on, we discover that we don't have to hide from God. God accepts us and embraces us warts and all, fears and all, uncertainties and even presumed deficiencies and all.

That's the wonder we experience in the presence of the divine...with our shoes off.

And then this same God tells us to put our shoes on.

Different shoes, mind you, than the ones we took off. Not the shoes of self-protection and even *selfish*-protection; not the shoes of self-hiding and even self-loathing.

But the shoes of preparation, the shoes of readiness.

And the shoes of willingness: willingness to hear the call and embrace the journey and follow in the path of the one who goes before us and shows us the way, the one who walks beside us and accompanies us every step of the way.

-Remember: Jesus told the disciples not to take much at all in their mission. But they did need their shoes. They needed to be prepared for the road.

For sometimes they would be welcomed. And they needed to be prepared for that.

And sometimes they would be rejected. And they needed to be prepared for that.

-And the angel told Peter to put on his shoes before they up and left the prison. He needed to be ready for what was to come. He needed to be ready to step out of his confinement and step out in faith into a new day and a new journey, and even a new challenge.

-And Paul tells the Ephesians to put on the shoes of “*whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.*”

What will make us ready? What do we need to be prepared?

Do we need to learn from the Word of God?

Do we need assurance and support from the community of faith?

Do we need sustenance and encouragement of the Spirit?

Yes to all of that.

And perhaps deep down, even more so, what we really need is a willing heart and an open mind and a stalwart soul.

And open eyes. Yes, (oddly enough) open eyes are also a part of the footwear of our mission and ministry. For as Paul reminds us, the opponents of our task are not always those which are most obvious; but unseen forces and intentions, subconscious desires and plans (sometimes even our own). And we must be prepared with eyes that are open to the truth and minds that are steeled to the resistance we will face.

All the while remembering who it is who has sent us on this journey, this mission: the God before whom we have laid ourselves bare; the God who knows us better than we know ourselves.

Which means that, when we hear that call to engage in that ministry that is new and different – and beyond our comfort zone – we remember it is the God who knows our gifts and abilities better than we know ourselves who has sent us down this path.

And when we’re not sure we’re up to it, remember it is the God who knows our strength better than we know it ourselves who has placed this task before us.

The God who knows the calling for which we were created and intended from our beginning, for our fulfillment and purpose, and the fulfillment of God’s purpose.

And when we question and wonder – and we will, and we do – and even fear, our purpose and our mission, the journey in which we find ourselves; again, remember the one who sends us: it is Jesus, the Christ, “*the pioneer and perfecter of our faith*” (Hebrews 12:2) and of our life. The one who, as God in the flesh, is the ultimate example of “walking in someone else’s shoes”: you know, incarnation, in the flesh, in our flesh, in our life. So, he knows the way...and its obstacles; he is the way; and he walks this way with us.

So when we doubt that we can do this calling we discern for ourselves, when we question this ministry to which we as a congregation are called, when we wonder if we are up to it...

...know that he was been in our shoes; and he helps us put on the shoes we need for our journey and our task, for our calling and our mission; and he will walk with us down the path he has set before us.

The journey is ahead of us.

Are we ready?

So, let’s put on our shoes...and Go!

***HYMN** "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me" GtG 775

1. **I want Jesus to walk with me;
I want Jesus to walk with me;
all along my pilgrim journey,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.**

2. **In my trials, Lord, walk with me;
in my trials, Lord, walk with me;
when my heart is almost breaking,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.**

3. **When I'm in trouble, Lord, walk with me;
when I'm in trouble, Lord, walk with me;
when my head is bowed in sorrow,
Lord, I want Jesus to walk with me.**

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*Music: I Want Jesus to Walk with Me-WALK WITH ME,
Harmonization by Nolan Williams, Jr.*

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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.**

**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!"**

**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: Holy God...
People: ...guide us in your way,
grant us your peace.

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*

Almighty God,
we dedicate ourselves to serve you,
for you alone are our God.
Receive, O God, the gifts we offer,
and with these gifts accept the offering of our lives;
that we may express your steadfast love
and impart your sustaining strength to all those in need;
through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Come! Live in the Light!” GtG 749

1. Come! Live in the light!
Shine with the joy
and the love of the Lord!
We are called
to be light for the kingdom,
to live in the freedom
of the city of God.
We are called to act with justice;
we are called to love tenderly;
we are called to serve one another,
to walk humbly with God.

2. Come! Open your heart!
Show your mercy
to all those in fear!
We are called
to be hope for the hopeless
so hatred and violence
will be no more.
We are called to act with justice;
we are called to love tenderly;
we are called to serve one another,
to walk humbly with God.

3. Sing! Sing a new song!
Sing of that great day
when all will be one!
God will reign,
and we'll walk with each other
as sisters and brothers
united in love.
We are called to act with justice;
we are called to love tenderly;
we are called to serve one another,
to walk humbly with God.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: God's steadfast love is with us wherever we go.

All: The God our ancestors trusted has a mission for us.

One: God sees the misery of many in the midst of abundance.

All: God sends us to our sisters and brothers in need.

One: So, time to put on our shoes!

to live daily in God's realm, with confidence and hope.

All: to love and serve as God's people in the world.

One: And may the blessing of God, who delivers us,
the grace of Christ, who sustains us,
and the communion of the Spirit, who empowers us,
be with you always.

And let the gathered people of God say...

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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