

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 15, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**FIFTH SUNDAY of EASTER**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: The Lord reigns!  
All: **The victory belongs to God!**  
One: The cross of Christ proclaims the depths of God's love.  
All: **The empty tomb announces God's power, even over death.**  
One: So rejoice, give thanks, and sing. For he has risen!  
All: **He has risen indeed!**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "Christ Is Alive!" GtG 246 (*Verses 1, 2, 4, & 5*)

1. **Christ is alive! Let Christians sing.  
The cross stands empty to the sky.  
Let streets and homes with praises ring.  
Love, drowned in death, shall never die.**
  
2. **Christ is alive! No longer bound  
to distant years in Palestine,  
but saving, healing, here and now,  
and touching every place and time.**
  
4. **Women and men, in age and youth,  
can feel the Spirit, hear the call,  
and find the way, the life, the truth,  
revealed in Jesus, freed for all.**
  
5. **Christ is alive, and comes to bring  
good news to this and every age,  
till earth and sky and ocean ring  
with joy, with justice, love, and praise.**

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**\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Even as we sing of your victory, O God, our lives bear poor witness. Our relationships are fractured. Our lives are fragmented. Our goals are short-sighted. Our commitments are self-serving. Have mercy upon us, Lord, have mercy upon us. By your grace, reclaim us. In your faithfulness, renew us. Through the work of your Spirit, restore us to faith and hope. For the sake of your Son, lead us in the way of love and life. For it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

**\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(based on II Corinthians 5)*

One: God is among us making all things new.

**All: We are a part of God's transformed creation.**

One: Know God's forgiveness. Rise with Christ to a life made new. Amen.

**All: In gratitude and thanksgiving, we claim this grace  
and commit to new life in Christ.**

**\*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** Acts 9:36-42

ACTS 9:36-42 (Common English Bible)

<sup>36</sup> *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas). Her life overflowed with good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need.*  
<sup>37</sup> *About that time, though, she became so ill that she died. After they washed her body, they laid her in an upstairs room.* <sup>38</sup> *Since Lydda was near Joppa, when the disciples heard that Peter was there, they sent two people to Peter. They urged, "Please come right away!"* <sup>39</sup> *Peter went with them. Upon his arrival, he was taken to the upstairs room. All the widows stood beside him, crying as they showed the tunics and other clothing Dorcas made when she was alive.*

<sup>40</sup> *Peter sent everyone out of the room, then knelt and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up!" She opened her eyes, saw Peter, and sat up.* <sup>41</sup> *He gave her his hand and raised her up. Then he called God's holy people, including the widows, and presented her alive to them.* <sup>42</sup> *The news spread throughout Joppa, and many put their faith in the Lord.*

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

### SERMON “Speaking Tabitha’s Language” by Pastor Bill Vincent

There's a certain language being spoken in this passage...or maybe actually more than one.

There is the spectacular miracle that Peter did – wow! – raising Tabitha from the dead. Now that’s a language that speaks about power and hope and life.

Theodore Ferris refers to

**The miracles...in...the N.T. [as] the signs of the tremendous surplus and overflow of divine energy that had come into the world through Jesus and was being communicated to [people] through channels chosen by him. It was a sign in the language of its own day. The language of our day may differ [from stories of the miraculous], but the sign is the same – new life as the result of resurrection power. (The Interpreter's Bible, vol.9, p. 131)**

We may hear different languages. But the sign is the same: “new life as the result of resurrection power.”

There is ‘the language of Peter’ with the miracle of raising Tabitha from the dead.

And then, there is ‘the language of Tabitha’ herself, *“with good works and compassionate acts on behalf of those in need.”*

And when it comes down to it, in many ways, those two languages are not all that different.

Peter's raising Tabitha from death is, in some ways, only a reminder: an outward – albeit flashier – sign of what Tabitha has been doing all along...giving hope, sharing life, releasing from death-dealing bondage.

This story highlights the work done with widows.

Remember, in that time and culture, a woman not connected with a man was pretty much powerless: she didn't inherit land; no recognition, no status; very vulnerable.

Life is different nowadays – I get that.

Still, it does raise the issue regarding the widows among us.

Are they too often forgotten, considered not important?

Do there remain to this day economic, political, and social factors that marginalize the widowed in our midst, that diminish their capacity for life, that deny them justice and full participation in the human community?

Who speaks Tabitha's language for them?

Who will offer them life?

Who will share hope with them?

How will they keep faith and experience the power of resurrection: new, true, full life?

**As much as she wanted to, Ellie just couldn't concentrate in school, especially at test time. Moving to the upper grades meant more homework and more feelings of inadequacy. Unfortunately, concentrating at home was not easy**

**for Ellie or her younger brother Sam. One night, her parents were especially loud. Her mother yelled many times for her father to stop hitting her. As usual, Ellie and Sam were upstairs hiding together. Then Ellie heard the sirens. The police knocked hard on the front door. Her father opened it and yelled, “What do you want?” The next thing Ellie knew, her mother was being rushed away in an ambulance and her father, still yelling, was being pushed into a police car. Ellie and Sam were guided into a waiting patrol car by a police officer.** (Pentecost Offering material, 2004; PCUSA)

How many times does that story happen, and we don't see, and we don't hear, because we don't want to?

How will we offer life?

How will we speak – legitimately, concretely – of hope?

For Sam. For Ellie. For so many others.

Will we continue to offer support for the Foster Closet? As it provides resources to those who are helping those children.

Will we offer support to the Pentecost Offering? Your insert shows some of the ministries this offering supports, including Young Adult Volunteers, Ministries with Youth...and Children at Risk, advocating for the very children we hear of: Sam, Ellie, and so many others that go unnamed.

What will we do that they may experience faith and resurrection – new life – which is what it's all about?

And where do we start? What is the starting point for us to speak Tabitha's language and to offer this sharing, this caring?

Where do we start?

We could do worse than start at a Presbytery meeting. No joke!

I was at our Presbytery meeting yesterday.

We began with worship where our new Presbytery Leader, Ryan Landino, shared a sermon on the Good Samaritan. He spoke about us opening our eyes – opening our lives – to see those beaten and left for dead along the side of the road to Jericho: the road of life. And he spoke about the importance of affirming the full humanity of those who are hurting.

It can be difficult. We don't like our own pain. We certainly don't like the pain of others. But will we see the full humanity of those who are hurting?

And right afterwards we had an educational time with Bruce Reyes-Chow: Presbyterian pastor, author, former moderator of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

His most recent work is a book entitled “In Defense of Kindness.” And in that book he defines kindness in this way:

**to be kind is to accept that each person is a created and complex being – and to treat them as if you believe this to be true.**

To see the person hurt alongside the road as a true human being. And to respond in kind.

It's hard. I realize that.

In fact, I had to catch myself on the way home from the Presbytery meeting: on one of those two-lane highways we have here in Missouri, stuck behind one of those drivers who had nowhere to go and was just taking their time as they made their way down the highway. Of course, I could not actually see their face. But was I willing to see them as an actual, true human being, and treat them like that? (I won't tell you how well I did.)

It's hard. I realize that.

But when I look at this story, quite honestly, I don't think I can speak Peter's language. I don't think that's me. I don't think I'm there. I don't think I have what it takes.

But Tabitha's language? I can speak that.

It may be difficult.

It may take a lot of work.

It may take putting my heart and mind into it.

And it may take the support of others, and the help of God's Spirit in my life.

But even so – with that support, with that help – it can seem overwhelming.

We see so much pain, we see so much hurt along the side of the road, and it is so overwhelming.

Yet William Barclay reminds us,

**We think too much of what we can do [or can't do!] and too little of what Christ can do through us.** (Daily Study Bible, p.77)

...if we will but say 'Yes'.

But we think, 'This was Peter, a big shot!'

Remember: this was the same one who had denied he even knew Jesus, not once, not twice, but three times. Peter had no special claim to status or power or ability. A simple fisherman was he.

Tabitha: had no special claim to status or power or ability.

And yet, they answered 'Yes'. And in doing so, spoke a language that rang true with their common Lord.

A language that says, I care.

But even more: I care enough to open my eyes to see things I didn't want to see, to open my ears to hear things I didn't want to hear, to open my mouth to speak things I dared not speak before.

I care enough to see you as a true, full human being.

I care enough to do something about it.

I care enough to be inconvenienced.

I care enough to do without.

I care enough to give up what is precious to me – my afternoon, that Tuesday lunch out to eat, my focus, my hard earned money – I care enough to give up what is precious to me that others might come to know what is most precious: compassion and community, justice and mercy; hope, love, life.

When we make that choice, that is resurrection power.

And that is the language, not only of Peter and his miracle, but also of Tabitha and her caring.

“For as often as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40), our Lord says.

With his help and our support, will we speak that language?

Will we act on it?

Will we live it?

**\*HYMN** “The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve” StF 2241

- 1. The Spirit sends us forth to serve; we go in Jesus' name  
to bring glad tidings to the poor, God's favor to proclaim.**
- 2. We go to comfort those who mourn and set the burdened free;  
where hope is dim, to share a dream and help the blind to see.**
- 3. We go to be the hands of Christ, to scatter joy like seed  
and, all our days, to cherish life, to do the loving deed.**
- 4. Then let us go to serve in peace, the gospel to proclaim.  
God's Spirit has empowered us; we go in Jesus' name.**

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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 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 of resurrection...

**People:** ...help us to see your life and share your life.

### **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*

**We offer ourselves to you, O God, in response to your offering of  
yourself to us in Jesus Christ. Accept our gifts as we joyfully give thanks for  
our life in you. Use our offering to further your will for the good of the world  
sharing the grace of your resurrection power. In Christ's name we pray.  
Amen.**

### **SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** "Today We All Are Called to Be Disciples" GtG 757 (*Verses 1, 3, & 4*)

- 1. Today we all are called to be  
disciples of the Lord,  
to help to set the captive free,  
make plowshare out of sword,  
to feed the hungry, quench their thirst,  
make love and peace our fast,  
to serve the poor and homeless first,  
our ease and comfort last.**

3. **Pray justice may come rolling down  
as in a mighty stream,  
with righteousness in field and town  
to cleanse us and redeem.**

**For God is longing to restore  
an earth where conflicts cease,  
a world that was created for  
a harmony of peace.**

4. **May we in service to our God  
act out the living word,  
and walk the road the saints have trod  
till all have seen and heard.**

**As stewards of the earth may we  
Give thanks in one accord  
to God who calls us all to be  
disciples of the Lord.**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**People:** ...Amen.

**\*RESPONSE** “May the God of Hope Go with Us” GtG 765

1. **May the God of hope go with us every day,  
filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.**

**May the God of justice speed us on our way,  
bringing light and hope to every land and race.**

**Praying, let us work for peace;**

**singing, share our joy with all;**

**working for a world that's new,**

**faithful when we hear Christ's call.**

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**POSTLUDE**

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