

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 10, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

15th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on Psalm 96)*

One: Let us give thanks to God throughout our days, with heart and hands and voices.

All: God is doing marvelous works among us.

One: Let us give praise to God with our lives.

All: God is with us and will answer our prayers.

One: For the Lord is gracious and merciful, abounding in steadfast love.

All: Let us worship together as God's people.

***OPENING HYMN** "Now Thank We All Our God" GtG 643

1. **Now thank we all our God
with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things hath done,
in whom this world rejoices;
who, from our mothers' arms,
hath blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love,
and still is ours today.**

2. **O may this bounteous God
through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts
and blessed peace to cheer us;
and keep us in God's grace,
and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.**

3. **All praise and thanks to God,
who reigns in highest heaven,
to Father and to Son
and Spirit now be given:** *(continued...)*

**the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore,
the God who was, and is,
and shall be evermore.**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Gracious God,
forgive us for claiming a faith we do not live.
We have not dared to trust you fully.
We have not expected your promises to be fulfilled among us.
We have guarded our own interests,
relied on limited understandings and lingering doubts,
and settled for a lukewarm relationship that we do little to cultivate.
O God, forgive us and draw us closer to you.
Set us free from a past that we cannot change;
open to us a future where we can be changed;
and grant us grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image. Amen**

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from 1 John 1)*

One: If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
All: **But if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**
One: In humility and faith, let us claim and proclaim the good news we know:
All: **In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven. Thanks be to 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

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION “Thy Word Is a Lamp unto My Feet” GtG 458

**Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.**

(continued...)

**When I feel afraid,
and I think I've lost my way,
still you're there right beside me.
Nothing will I fear
as long as you are near.
Please be near me to the end.**

**Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.
Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.**

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SCRIPTURE READING Luke 7:1-10

LUKE 7:1-10 (various)

¹ When Jesus had finished saying all these things to the people, he entered Capernaum. ² A centurion had a servant who was very important to him, but the servant was ill and about to die. ³ When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵ for he loves our people and he built our synagogue for us." ⁶ And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷ That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." ⁹ When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." ¹⁰ When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant in good health.

SERMON "Say the Word..." by Pastor Bill Vincent

What impresses me most about this story is the confidence of the centurion.

Having heard about Jesus, and obviously impressed with his person and work, the centurion decides to bring to Jesus a deep concern of his. One of his servants, one whom he values highly, is sick. So sick as to be close to death. And so he sends to Jesus for help.

He sends elders of the Jews to take his message, and they do a good job for him.

"This man deserves to have you do this,"

they say. Then they spout off their reasons, citing his good community work and love for their own down-and-out ethnic group, the Jews.

They plead the centurion's case and they plead it well. For Jesus was going with them when another message comes from the centurion:

“Lord, do not trouble yourself, [the officer says through his friends] for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you.”

Now note the difference between what the Jewish elders said and what the centurion says through his friends. The elders say that the man is worthy (*“This man deserves to have you do this”*); the centurion says that he is not worthy. The elders spout off all the man's good works and community service; the centurion simply says,

“I am not worthy to have you come under my roof.”

Nevertheless, in spite of the officer's humility and down-playing himself, he still repeats his initial appeal: “Heal my servant.” But he makes this request in a most unusual manner.

“Say the word,” [he implores.] “Say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

Normally in a case like this, one would expect that the request to heal someone and the request to come to the person to be healed would be one and the same. (Except in this century when you can see your doctor via video chat.) Typically I have to go to the doctor to have the doctor look at me and help me get better. For Jesus to heal the servant then, one would expect that it would be only natural, and necessary, for Jesus to go to where the servant is, which is at the centurion's house. Sort of a 1st Century house call.

But the centurion turns that sort of logic up-side-down. “Lord, don't trouble yourself,” he says to Jesus. “I am not fit for you to enter my house. Nevertheless, say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

Now, from what we know, the centurion had simply ‘heard’ about Jesus. Still he acts on such second-hand knowledge.

He also acts out of need, for someone who was precious to him, was nearing death.

Yet the centurion does not act out of desperation.

“Say the word, and my servant will be healed.”

Those are not the words of one acting out of desperation. Those are the words of one acting out of a profound trust in the one to whom the request is made.

And so what impresses me the most in this story is the confidence, the trust shown by this man – a trust hard to come by, a trust not often seen, a trust that is even enviable. He believes – truly believes – that if Jesus will but say the word, his servant will be healed. What faith in the power and word and authority of Jesus! And this man knew all about authority, living his life in the structure of authority, knowing that when his superiors told him to jump he jumped, and when he told those under him to jump they jumped. Confident in Jesus's authority to have command over illness and disease. Faith in Jesus's power to accomplish what he sets out to accomplish. Trust in Jesus's word to do what it says: *“Say the word.”*

Wouldn't it be nice to have such firm conviction of belief. To live life like that, filled with the inner assurance that what God says, “I will do,” God will do.

Living life without concern and worry, our hearts peaceful and calm, and living by the conviction, that we abide in the hands of the Almighty, who will care for us, protect us, provide for us, comfort us, and give us new life.

Oh, to live such a life. Oh, to have such a faith.

But we don't.

We stamp on our coins ‘**In God We Trust**’, yet hardly give God a nod of recognition, let alone ask God for guidance, all the while hoarding that very coin in our hands. We look to our own strength and our own arms, and the guidance of our own computers and surveys, rather than relying on the wisdom and word of God.

We worry about life, having ulcers and heart attacks in the process. Our lives are shortened by the stress we put on ourselves as we place undue importance on things that are not the end-all and be-all of life: did we dress appropriately this morning? did we say the right thing? how low has our stock fallen now?

The worry and lack of calm of our lives betray the fact that we do not live by the same confidence and trust as did this centurion when he brought his request to Jesus.

Of course, we must also add a word of clarification at this point. For it is important to acknowledge that, even with a confidence in the power and authority of God to accomplish great things, that does not mean God will necessarily do what it is we want. God does not always say the word we want to hear. In this case, Yes. But that doesn't always happen.

Imagine what Abraham must have felt. The word he would have liked to have heard would probably have been no word at all. He could have lived just fine and dandy if God would have been silent and left him to live out a normal, comfortable life in his hometown. But instead, God said, “Go! And I will be with you.” So Abraham went; and God was indeed with him. (see Genesis 11:27-32; 12:1-5)

The prophet Jeremiah had a hard time. He had a hard word to bring to the people, and that caused him a lot of trouble. There were times when he was so mad at God he sought to resist doing God's work:

*If I say, “I will not mention God,
or speak any more in God's name,”
there is in my heart as it were a burning fire
shut up in my bones,
and I am weary with holding it in,
and I cannot.*

(Jeremiah 20:9 RSV)

So Jeremiah did not hold it in, and he continued to speak God's word to the people, even though they didn't want to hear it, even though they punished him for speaking it. But through it all, God was with Jeremiah, and gave him the strength and the courage to carry on.

And think of the Jews as they lived under the tyranny of Rome. The word many of them wished to hear was that of revolution, to sweep away all their foes and reestablish themselves as a great nation. But instead the word they heard was the cry of a baby in the night, the parables of an itinerant preacher, and the prayer of a man from a cross, saying,

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34 RSV)

When we ask God for a word and do not hear the particular word we long to hear, we can often torment ourselves with questions and self-doubt: “If only I had enough faith!” Punishing ourselves, thinking we do not have confidence in God. But perhaps at times like these, instead of punishing ourselves over the word God has not spoken, we need to listen for the word God has spoken.

For part of our confidence in God needs to be the confidence that when God does not say the word we would like, there is a reason – somewhere – though we may never know it or understand it. I mean, sometimes the demands we make of God ask for things God would never do; so that in those times maybe the word God speaks is a word of reproach, of discipline: a word that corrects our misguided approach and shows us another way.

But even more important, we need to have confidence that even when God does not say the word we would like, God does say, “I am with you.” We are not forsaken. God has not abandoned us. And though God may not open up for us the path we would like to take, we will be shown another. Like the saying goes, “**Whenever one door shuts, another one opens**”... somewhere.

This may mean that, instead of a loved one being healed, God will give us the strength to be with that person in their illness. This may mean that instead of being assigned the task you want, you will learn patience and maybe be given a task that stretches you and teaches you things about yourself that you never knew.

God may not always keep us from the bad things that can happen in life. But God will always keep us.

So we can have confidence, even in the absence of the word we may long to hear. For God will always speak a word of presence – of that we can be absolutely confident.

Like the Apostle Paul, who is absolutely certain that nothing in all the world – neither death nor life, neither things present nor things to come, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation – that **NOTHING** in all the world can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (see Romans 8:38-39)

Like the confidence of the Psalmist, who says that no matter where I go, I cannot flee from God's Spirit. “Even though I go to the depths of Sheol, there God will find me. Whither can I flee from thy Spirit?” Nowhere. (see Psalm 139) So have confidence that nothing can take you from God's Spirit.

“*Say the word,*” the centurion asks. And Jesus turns to the crowd and says,
“*I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.*”

A final word that serves as a challenge to us all – a challenge to seek and to have faith like that. A challenge to place our trust in God in all aspects of life: from our health to the health of others; from the spiritual realm to the financial; from the personal and family, to the social and international. A challenge to reflect the confidence the hymn writer so eloquently describes when he hears God say,

**“The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake.”**
(“How Firm a Foundation”)

Amen.

***HYMN** "How Firm a Foundation" GtG 463

1. **How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in God's excellent Word!
What more can be said than to you God hath said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?**
2. **"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
for I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.**
3. **"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
for I will be near thee, thy troubles to bless,
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.**
4. **"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
the flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.**
5. **"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."**

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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,**

(continued...)

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.

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: God of grace and healing.

People: ...hear our prayer.

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 Lord our God, there is no one like you
in heaven above or on the earth below.
You are faithful to your promises,
showing steadfast love to your people.
We rely on you for guidance along faith's journey.
You have sent Jesus to demonstrate
your healing love for all people;
and we seek to respond
in gratitude and faith
as disciples.
Receive the offering of our lives
to further the work
of your promises and presence
in our midst. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" GtG 829

1. **My faith looks up to thee,
thou Lamb of Calvary,
Savior divine!
Now hear me while I pray;
take all my guilt away;
O let me from this day
be wholly thine!**

2. **May thy rich grace impart
strength to my fainting heart,
my zeal inspire;
as thou hast died for me,
O may my love to thee
pure, warm, and changeless be,
a living fire!**

3. **While life's dark maze I tread
and griefs around me spread,
be thou my guide;
bid darkness turn to day;
wipe sorrow's tears away;
nor let me ever stray
from thee aside.** *(continued...)*

4. **When ends life's transient dream,
when death's cold, sullen stream
shall o'er me roll;
blest Savior, then, in love,
fear and distrust remove;
O bear me safe above,
a ransomed soul!**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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