

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 17, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

16th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, people of God, to seek and to serve.
All: **We come at God's bidding.
We come at God's invitation.**
One: We come to remember all that God has done for us.
All: **We come to celebrate all that God is doing among us.**
One: We come to commit to all that God intends to do through us.
All: **We come to give our worship and praise.**

***OPENING HYMN** "God of Compassion, in Mercy Befriend Us" GtG 436

**1. God of compassion, in mercy befriend us,
giver of grace for our needs all-availing.
Wisdom and strength for each day ever send us,
patience untiring and courage unfailing.**

**2. Though we are lost, you have sought us and found us,
stilled our rude hearts with your word of consoling.
Wrap now your peace, like a mantle, around us,
guarding our thoughts and our passions controlling.**

**3. How shall we stray, with your hand to direct us,
you who the stars in their courses are guiding?
What shall we fear, with your power to protect us,
we who walk forth in your greatness confiding?**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**In your mercy, O Lord, you come to us and you claim us.
In your mercy, forgive us.
Forgive us for ignoring you.
Forgive us for dismissing you.
Forgive us for turning from you
and going our own direction.
By your grace,
return us to you and turn us to your way.
Renew within us our commitment
to claiming you and
following in your way of life and love.
For it is in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.**

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: Our hope is in the Lord our God,
who keeps faith with us forever.
All: **God's mercy is everlasting!
And through Christ our sins are forgiven,
and we are given new life.**
One: So let us awaken to the assurance of our pardon,
and arise to the promise of Christ's redeeming grace.

***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 Luke 7:11-17

LUKE 7:11-17 (Common English Bible+)

¹¹ A little later Jesus went to a city called Nain. His disciples and a great crowd traveled with him. ¹² As he approached the city gate, a dead man was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow. A large crowd from the city was with her. ¹³ When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, "Do not cry." ¹⁴ He stepped forward and touched the stretcher on which the dead man was being

carried. Those carrying him stood still. Jesus said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."
¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.
¹⁶ Awestruck, everyone praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us,"
they said. "God has come to help God's people." ¹⁷ This news about Jesus spread
throughout Judea and the surrounding region.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Life-Giving, from the Heart" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Is it not enough that Jesus raised someone from the dead?
I mean, it is a wondrous story, thrilling in its way: Jesus restores life to the son.

But there is actually more to the story than that.

In fact, the focus of the story may not be so much on restoring life to the son who had died, as it is restoring life to his mother.

Yes, there is deep pain, and agony, in the loss of a child. It is a swift, terrible kick in the gut.

And the restoration of the son restores that life.

But there is more.

Remember: the passage says not only that she was his mother and that he was her only son, but also that she was a widow. "Only son" and "widow" highlight the pathos of her situation: as a woman in that society, she now had nothing.

She was now unprotected, and unsupported in her community. ...

Being a widow, she was excluded from the inheritance laws; any valuables owned by her extended family could not pass on to her. So...the death of her son...left her with no means of support..., the rest of her life was liable to be desperate and brief. (Lectionary Homiletics, June/July 2010, p.12&16)

It is to this "death," this impending loss of life, this tragedy that Jesus responds.

And he responds with...compassion.

"Jesus saw her" in this terrifying, life-threatening situation, and "his heart went out to her." A response of the gut, the "inward parts," as the Greek says.

Now, there are two things to note when it comes to compassion.

First, compassion always occurs in the context of community: compassion involves a relationship. Compassion in and of itself, all by itself, standing alone, is unheard of. But you do hear of compassion for another, compassion toward someone.

Compassion is, by its very nature, relational. It extends from one person to another; it connects one person to another. And in doing so, it engages, it creates, it sustains, it nurtures community.

And as such, connects to life.

The second thing to note about compassion: Luke always speaks of compassion in the context of death.

In the first part of the gospel, as Zechariah sings his song following the birth of his son, John, he speaks of

“the tender compassion of our God...giving light to those who sit...in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:78-79).

In our passage for this morning, Jesus *“has compassion”* for the woman whose son has died.

Then later we hear of a good Samaritan who is *“moved with compassion”* for the man left half-dead (Luke 10:33).

Then finally we read of a father who is *“filled with compassion”* for his lost son who returns home, and the father explains to his other son, *“This your brother was dead, but is now alive”* (Luke 15:20,32).

Death: the ultimate dis-connect.

But through compassion, seeking to reconnect – relational – drawing into community.

So, you see what Jesus was doing: Jesus was connecting – re-connecting – this woman with her son and with those around her – with the community – and in this way drawing her back from the brink of death, and so restoring her to life.

Connecting. Community. Life.

We have experienced this ourselves, have we not: every time we feel like we are falling by the wayside, losing touch; when the weight of life seems to push all else aside, and all others; and we are in danger of shriveling up and dying...alone.

And someone reaches out to us, connects with us, and re-connects us with others. And gives us a lift: revives us.

And we know – we have seen – the opposite.

With someone who is disconnected, who has fallen off everyone’s radar. An outcast, who has either been cast out by the community or who has cut themselves off from the community. The loner, isolated.

How many times – maybe not every time, but – how many times have we heard that the perpetrator of another mass shooting was a loner, not connected to community, not engaged with others? And I cannot help but wonder if the death they have dealt out is a tragic reflection of the death they felt within.

We are made for community, for each other, for relationships.

Yes, some people are more social than others. Yet, even the least social person needs relationships, needs community.

And if someone is experiencing that disconnect from community, is it not safe to say that they are at least on the path to a kind of death?

Connecting to community with life: that's what compassion does. It connects us to community, giving us life.

It is what Jesus does.

And though we may not be able to give life in the same way or to the exact same extent as Jesus does, it is what we are to do, too.

Roger Gustafson says this:

The whole point of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection is the resurrection from death of all humanity. ...

In our Gospel story, Jesus intrudes on business-as-usual, halts the march of death, speaks grace, and brings forth life. So we too, as the living, breathing body of Christ in this time and place, are to have a tangible impact on our world, to be living reminders that God's desire for all of humanity, in addition to living eternally with [God], is for abundance of life *now*. One of [the] early Lutheran theologians, Philip Jacob Spener, said it [this way]: "We are to be different because Christ is in us. The world is to be different because we are in it." (Lectionary Homiletics, June/July 2010, p.16-17)

Remember what the people said in response to the wondrous miracle: "*God has come to help God's people.*"

Yes.

And God has come to help God's people, all of God's people, wherever they may be found, in whatever situation they may be found.

And God invites us to do the same: to be willing – out of the compassion we ourselves not only feel for another, but also out of the compassion we have known and know from God – to be willing to touch another in the death-experiencing corner of their life and at least be the presence of life for them, the hope of life, the touch of life, the connection to life.

So what will we do to connect people to community, to life?

Will we hold a hammer to drive in a nail to erect a wall so that someone can have an affordable house in which to live?

Will we pick up a phone to make a call to someone we haven't seen in a while to let them know we miss them and they are not alone?

Will we speak out for a decent minimum wage so that those who work at that minimum wage can actually afford a decent life?

Will we ring the doorbell to visit the person who hasn't left their home in years because they can't leave their home, and sit down to visit with them as a valued human being and not a discardable entity of society?

Will we walk with a child as a CASA volunteer through the overwhelming court system to let them know that somebody cares and that they are not alone in the big, confusing world in which they find themselves?

What does it mean for us to reach out in compassion for those nearby that we know, and for those we do not know and all too often do not see: those on the outskirts of society, the outcasts, the nobodies? For so often that's what Jesus was doing.

Reaching out in response to genuine human need, being moved in our gut ("inward parts") and taking action.

And it can be as simple as reaching out a hand to say "Hi!" to say "Welcome!"

At a recent church assembly, a band played for worship and during the breaks between sessions. Various members of the band would occasionally say a few words by way of introduction. Except one, the rhythm guitarist. She simply played, never said a word. Until the last morning.

That morning, as the assembly members were sitting and chatting with each other at their tables, she stepped up to her mic and said, "I just wanted to say thanks." The conversation died down as everyone turned their attention to the stage.

"A few years ago," she began, "my life was pretty messed up. I was on the outside, looking in. Didn't care about much. Church? Couldn't care less. God? Couldn't care less."

"But then," she told the assembly, "something happened. You came out. You were on the inside, and you came out. You welcomed me. You told me that the tattoos didn't matter. You told me that the body piercing didn't matter. You meant it! You were real. After a while I started to get to know this Jesus, and I got to know him through you.

"So, I just wanted to say thanks." (Lectionary Homiletics, June/July 2010, p.17)

We need it ourselves: this connection, this compassion, this life.

Will we share it with others?: this connection, this compassion, this life.

***HYMN "Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service" *Tune* GtG 490**

- 1. Lord, whose love through humble service
bore the weight of human need,
who upon the cross, forsaken,
offered mercy's perfect deed,
we, your servants, bring the worship
not of voice alone, but heart,
consecrating to your purpose
every gift that you impart.**

2. **Still your children wander homeless;
still the hungry cry for bread;
still the captives long for freedom;
still in grief we mourn our dead.
As, O Lord, your deep compassion
healed the sick and freed the soul,
use the love your Spirit kindles
still to save and make us whole.**

3. **As we worship, grant us vision,
till your love's revealing light,
in its height and depth and greatness,
dawns upon our quickened sight,
making known the needs and burdens
your compassion bids us bear,
stirring us to tireless striving,
your abundant life to share.**

4. **Called from worship to your service,
forth in your dear name we go,
to the child, the youth, the aged,
love in living deeds to show;
hope and health, goodwill and comfort,
counsel, aid, and peace we give,
that your servants, Lord, in freedom
may your mercy know and live.**

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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!"**

**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 "O Christ, the Healer" GtG 793

1. *O Christ, the healer, we have come
to pray for health, to plead for friends.
How can we fail to be restored,
when reached by love that never ends?*
2. *From every ailment flesh endures
our bodies clamor to be freed;
yet in our hearts we would confess
that wholeness is our deepest need.*
3. *How strong, O Lord, are our desires,
how weak our knowledge of ourselves!
Release in us those healing truths
unconscious pride resists or shelves.*
4. *In conflicts that destroy our health
we recognize the world's disease;
our common life declares our ills.
Is there no cure, O Christ, for these?*
5. *Grant that we all, made one in faith,
in your community may find
the wholeness that, enriching us,
shall reach the whole of humankind.*

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Pastor: Lord, in your mercy...
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*

**Accept our offerings we bring to you, O God.
Bless those who give them,
and so follow them with your blessing
that they may be used to do more than we could believe or imagine,
building a world of justice and healing,
peace and compassion,
and advancing your kingdom here on earth.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING 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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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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