

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 24, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

17th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We celebrate the good things of life that God provides.
All: **We give thanks for God's steadfast love.**
One: God comes to sustain and renew.
All: **We come to acknowledge our dependence upon God and to give our thanks and praise.**
One: The Lord is good to us.
All: **Let us give thanks and sing.**

***OPENING HYMN** "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" GtG 366

1. **Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling;
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion;
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.**
2. **Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast;
let us all in thee inherit;
let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.**

3. **Come, Almighty, to deliver;
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
nevermore thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.**

4. **Finish then thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.**

(Public Domain)

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

You are wondrous, O God; you are great. Yet we are small. We are small-minded, thinking only of ourselves and failing to think of others. We are small-sighted, seeing only what we want to see and failing to see your work in the world. We are small-hearted, feeling only our pain and failing to sense the pain and loneliness of others. Forgive us, great and gracious God. Free us from the restrictions we place upon ourselves, and open us up to your power and possibilities. Grant us the courage to go where you would have us go and the faith to do what you would have us do. And in all things, may we rely upon you, trusting in your love and mercy. For it is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

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

- One: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us."
All: "But if we confess our sins, God who keeps promises and does what is right, will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing."
One: By confessing our sins we speak the truth, trusting in God's grace and mercy.
The grace of God is a free gift;
there is nothing we can do to earn it.

All: We receive it through faith,
trusting in Christ's mercy.
One: So let us hear and proclaim the good news...
All: ...For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Amen. Alleluia!

***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 7:36-50

LUKE 7:36-50 (Today's English Version+)

³⁶ A Pharisee invited Jesus to have dinner with him, and Jesus went to his house and reclined at the table. ³⁷ In that town was a woman who lived a sinful life. She heard that Jesus was eating in the Pharisee's house, so she brought an alabaster jar full of perfume ³⁸ and stood behind Jesus, by his feet, crying and wetting his feet with her tears. Then she dried his feet with her hair, kissed them, and poured the perfume on them. ³⁹ When the Pharisee saw this, he said to himself, "If this man really were a prophet, he would know who this woman is who is touching him; he would know what kind of sinful life she lives!"

⁴⁰ Jesus spoke up and said to him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Yes, Teacher," he said, "tell me."

⁴¹ "There were two men who owed money to a moneylender," Jesus began. "One owed him five hundred silver coins, and the other owed him fifty. ⁴² Neither of them could pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Which one, then, will love him more?"

⁴³ "I suppose," answered Simon, "that it would be the one who was forgiven more."

"You are right," said Jesus. ⁴⁴ Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your home, and you gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. ⁴⁵ You did not welcome me with a kiss, but she has not stopped kissing my feet since I came. ⁴⁶ You provided no olive oil for my head, but she has covered my feet with perfume. ⁴⁷ I tell you, then, the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven. But whoever has been forgiven little shows only a little love."

⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven."

⁴⁹ The others sitting at the table began to say to themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?"

⁵⁰ But Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Do You Need God?” by Pastor Bill Vincent

It seems such a silly question: "Do you need God?"

“Of course we need God. Do we not come to church? Do we not pray to God for guidance, and look to God for assistance? Of course we need God. Let's move on. Next question, please.”

But maybe we should not be so glib and quick to dismiss the question. Not so quickly.

"By their fruits you shall know them," Jesus once said (see Matthew 7:20). And though we say we need God, what do our words and actions – and our attitudes – demonstrate?

No doubt Simon would have said he, too, needed God. But in the end, he was shown to think otherwise. And in the end, since he did not know his need for God, he asked for nothing, and received nothing, and remained empty.

Maybe like we are?

Yes, we may say we need God. But too often we need God only like we need a fire extinguisher: in case of an emergency. We turn our attention to God and look for help only when we're in dire straits, only when life burns us and seeks to consume us.

And so, too often – using the image of the story – we don't think of ourselves as in debt to God. We don't think of ourselves as owing God anything.

If anything, God owes us. Like we said, “Hey, we come to church, don't we? We say our prayers, right? And every now and then, we even show an interest in reading the Bible. We're pretty good people, aren't we? If anything, God owes us for these things we do for God. God owes us: God owes us protection from an accident or the threat of a debilitating disease. I'm OK, you're OK; God should treat us OK.”

Makes sense. We keep our noses clean; we stay out of trouble. Surely that's good for something.

Only trouble is, as you and I both know, life doesn't work like that. And so we are affected by an accident, or some tragedy. We, or those we love, are struck by some debilitating disease. And we become bitter. “Why come to church if it doesn't do any good?” So we stop coming to church. “Take that, God!”

And we wind up much like Mrs. Turpin of Flannery O'Connor's story, "Revelation." According to the story, she was a good woman, like us.

... proud of her good disposition, proud of her goodness and sense of decency.

Then she got slapped in the face by life, and turned bitter. She was disappointed that all her acts of contrition didn't gain her anything; disappointed that her prayers and worship didn't earn her any special treatment in life. And she rails at God in anger and bitterness.

“Who do you think you are?”

she cries.

She feels so alone, so vulnerable, in a universe too vast to be controlled by her self-serving piety. ... She has loved a God fashioned in her own image to satisfy her needs. This image can no longer be sustained. She must admit her fearful littleness, acknowledge her dependence on a God who is infinitely more than she is, who cannot be coerced by the cleanliness and grudging charities of [God's] creatures. She is ready for her revelation. (Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., Still Proclaiming Your Wonders: Homilies for the Eighties; found in Lectionary Homiletics, June 1995)

And perhaps so are we: ready for the revelation of our deep, insistent need for God.

Yes, we do need God – desperately. To **“Take away the love of sinning,”** as Charles Wesley puts it (“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” 1747). To guide us and protect us. To hold on to us when we cannot hold onto ourselves, or life. To fill our emptiness. And to forgive us: to forgive us our arrogance and pride, and our misguided notions that we are fine just as we are.

You see, Simon, too, would have said he needed God. And he, too, no doubt, worshiped God and said his prayers and kept his Pharisaic nose clean.

But his true self was revealed in relationship to another. In relationship to this woman who *“lived a sinful life”* his true relationship to God, was revealed.

And maybe we might see in him a mirror of ourselves.

With that assumption we have about ourselves, that we are better than another. Looking out of the corner of our eye: “I know what that person has done; they should be ashamed to show their face in church; they don't belong in church, we do.” Disgust and disdain we have for that kind of person who goes to another church. Giving the cold shoulder to the person we deem undeserving of our attention...or the help of the church.

Obviously, of course, we are more deserving of God's love.

All of which suggests that somehow that we can earn God's love – and therein lies the flaw, revealing our blindness to the truth.

And only someone who knows the truth – the truth that deep down we are undeserving of God's love and attention, and that we cannot, could not, and never would earn God's love – only someone who knows that truth is open to the wondrous, joyous, astounding news of God's grace and forgiveness, where God loves us anyway, sinners, undeserving though we are. Such a person is this woman, who proves that she knows she is forgiven, proves how desperately in need of God she is, precisely by the love that she shows.

“I tell you, then, the great love she has shown proves that her many sins have been forgiven. But whoever has been forgiven little shows only a little love.”

Love is the posture that demonstrates our awareness of our need for God.

Lee Pattison notes,

The text pictures two great sinners. (the woman) has accepted forgiveness for her sin and responds with much love (v.47). (Simon) has no real awareness of the nature of the evil in his life. He sees himself with few spiritual debts and therefore little need of grace. Consequently, having received little grace, he shows little love (v.47). (Lectionary Homiletics, June 1995)

If we acknowledge no sin, no wrong-doing, there is no need for forgiveness. And grace is meaningless. Nothing has been freely given (which is what grace is all about, after all) because nothing was needed. And there is no love.

Only those who know themselves to be lost know they need to be found...and rejoice when they are.

Only those who know themselves to be blind rejoice at being given their sight.

Only those who know themselves to be sinners – eternally, immeasurably in debt to God and in need of God – only they can understand and sing about God's truly "amazing grace" and love.

And with the experience of forgiveness – with the acknowledgment of need and having that need met in Jesus Christ – there follows adoration, worship, and love: the proper relationship, the proper response to the one in whom the kingdom of God comes.

Then Levi [the tax collector and, obviously, a sinner] had a big feast in his house for Jesus, and among the guests was a large number of tax collectors and other people. Some Pharisees and some teachers of the Law who belonged to their group complained to Jesus' disciples. "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and other outcasts?" they asked.

Jesus answered them, "People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick." (Luke 5:29-32 TEV)

Someone puts it plainly:

The religious people were really just as much in need of Jesus' forgiveness as those they called 'sinners'. But Jesus was able to help only those who were willing to admit that they had broken God's laws and ask for forgiveness and help. (The Children's Bible in 365 Stories)

Simon needed Jesus just as much as the woman did. But she knew it, and Simon did not. So Simon asked for nothing, and received nothing, and remained empty.

What about us?

Remember, Jesus once said,

"Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you." (Luke 11:9 TEV)

But we have to knock for the door to be opened. We have to seek in order to find. We have to ask in order to receive.

And when we do – admitting our need, and then having our need so wondrously met – our response will be like that of the woman: adoration, humility, an outpouring of self – an outpouring of love.

So, blessed are those who know of their need for God, for they shall receive grace and mercy, they shall know forgiveness and love. And they shall show it, one to another.

***HYMN** "I Need Thee Every Hour" GtG 735

**1. I need thee every hour, most gracious Lord;
no tender voice like thine can peace afford.**

Refrain:

**I need thee, O I need thee, every hour I need thee!
O bless me now, my Savior – I come to thee!**

**2. I need thee every hour; stay thou near by;
temptations lose their power when thou art nigh.** *Refrain*

**3. I need thee every hour; teach me thy will,
and thy rich promises in me fulfill.** *Refrain*

**4. I need thee every hour, Most Holy One;
O make me thine indeed, thy blessed Son.** *Refrain*

(Public Domain)

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *(The Apostles' Creed)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.**

**On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

(Today's version of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission from Book of Common Worship, copyright 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: God of goodness and grace...
All: ...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*

We give you thanks, O God, for the great love that you have lavished upon us in Christ Jesus. You have blessed us and helped us far beyond our imagining or deserving. Help us to see more of the ways you touch us and guide us. Open our hearts in gratitude and our mouths in praise. Accept now our gifts of tithe and life. May they serve as a reminder to us that all

that we have comes from you; may they serve as a heart-felt response of lives rededicated to you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound" GtG 649 (*Verses 1-4*)

1. **Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.**

2. **'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!**

3. **Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come.
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.**

4. **The Lord has promised good to me;
his word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.**

(Public Domain)

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

The Call to Worship is reprinted by permission of United Church Press from *Gathered by Love* by Lavon Bayler. Copyright 1994 by United Church Press.

The Assurance of Pardon, Prayers of the People (adapted), and Prayer of Dedication are used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2012/2013.

The Prayers of the People (adapted) are written by Brian Christopher Coulter and used by permission. © Presbyterian Outlook, 2022.