

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**22<sup>nd</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: The Lord is coming! Are you ready?  
All: **We are ready for whatever comes; we are dressed for action.**  
One: There's a knock at the door. You answer and see it is a man who is hungry, a woman who is sick, a person who is lost.  
All: **We will open the door at once and let Christ come in!**  
One: Come, let us worship the Christ who is coming!

**\*OPENING HYMN** "Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun" GtG 663

1. **Awake, my soul, and with the sun  
your daily stage of duty run;  
shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise  
to pay your morning sacrifice.**
2. **Lord, I my vows to you renew.  
Disperse my sins as morning dew;  
guard my first springs of thought and will,  
and with yourself my spirit fill.**
3. **Direct, control, suggest, this day,  
all I design or do or say,  
that all my powers, with all their might,  
in your sole glory may unite.**

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**UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Merciful God: We are a complacent people. We put off till tomorrow what we could have done today. We fail to respond to people in need, thinking that someone else can take care of them. Forgive us for being insensitive to your**

presence in the lives of those around us. Forgive us for not following where you lead. Help us to hear your call to discipleship, and to heed your guidance in the ways of service. For it is in the name of the Servant Christ we pray. Amen.

## SILENT CONFESSION

### ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(based on Isaiah 1)*

One: God is merciful and kind;  
though our sins are like scarlet,  
they become like snow.

**All: For our sins are washed clean by the goodness of God.**

One: Refreshed, revived, and renewed,  
empowered by the Holy Spirit,  
let us live as those who are forgiven and freed,

**All: 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

### SCRIPTURE READINGS Luke 12:35-44

Luke 12:54-59

Luke 13:1-9

LUKE 12:35-44, 54-59 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>35</sup> “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; <sup>36</sup> be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. <sup>37</sup> Blessed are those servants whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. <sup>38</sup> If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those servants.

<sup>39</sup> “But know this: if the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, for the Son of Humankind is coming at an unexpected hour.”

<sup>41</sup> Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for everyone?” <sup>42</sup> And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time?”

<sup>43</sup> *Blessed is that servant whom his master will find at work when he arrives.* <sup>44</sup> *Truly I tell you, he will put that one in charge of all his possessions. ...*

...  
<sup>54</sup> *He also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, ‘It is going to rain’; and so it happens.* <sup>55</sup> *And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’; and it happens.* <sup>56</sup> *You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?*

<sup>57</sup> *“And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right?”* <sup>58</sup> *Thus, when you go with your accuser before a magistrate, on the way make an effort to settle the case, or you may be dragged before the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer throw you in prison.* <sup>59</sup> *I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the very last penny.”*

LUKE 13:1-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>1</sup> *At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.* <sup>2</sup> *He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?”* <sup>3</sup> *No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.* <sup>4</sup> *Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?”* <sup>5</sup> *No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.”*

<sup>6</sup> *Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none.* <sup>7</sup> *So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’* <sup>8</sup> *He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it.* <sup>9</sup> *If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.”*

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** “The Urgency of the Present” by Pastor Bill Vincent

We seem to have lost something of vital importance to the gospel. It has to do with time. Often we seem to end up living in the past. A mistake we have made haunts us. Maybe it really messed up our life or hurt a dear friend. But we can't get our mind off that past mistake. Or we concentrate on past accomplishments and successes, remembering the good ole days when we were on the top of the heap and the world looked good to us.

At other times, though, we end up living in the future, caught up in imagining what will happen in the days and weeks to come. Sometimes we dread the future. Caught between a rock and a hard place, we can only see the potential danger that awaits us. Or our thoughts of the future are full of the hopes and dreams, the visions we have of where we will go and what we will do: ‘Won't that be magnificent!?’

The irony is that we stand here in the middle of our thoughts of yesterday and our dreams – or nightmares – of tomorrow. We stand here, not really living where we are, which is the present. Whatever happened to living in the now?

Jesus speaks of servants waiting for their master to come home from a wedding feast.

*Blessed are those servants whom the master finds alert when he comes; ... You also must be ready, for the Son of Humankind is coming at an unexpected hour.*

The master is coming. We don't know when. So, we must be ready for his coming; we must prepare for him – now.

See that dark cloud to the west? A storm is coming. We must get ready for it – now. The wind is blowing. We must prepare – now.

We are being dragged by our accuser to the court. Let us work to settle with them – now.

This is not to preach a message of "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die." No. We need to think about and plan for our future, Yes: to have a vision of where we want to go as individuals, where we want to go together as a community of faith. We don't want to be like the sign that reads, "**Plan Ahead**," but does not leave adequate space for the final 'a' and 'd'.

And we must also not forget the past. The past is important to us: to know where it is we come from, how we have grown. As we are reminded by the quote from George Santayana, American writer and philosopher,

**Those who do not remember the past are condemned to relive it.**

No, we should not forget the past. Neither should we ignore the future. The point is that we need to reinvest the present with the importance it is due. We cannot go back and change the past – either its successes or its failures. We cannot jump ahead into the future to see what will be. But past and future come together in the present. Today opportunity knocks. And today we can right the wrongs of yesterday and make the dreams of tomorrow come true.

As someone has noted,

**I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it for I shall not pass this way again.** (attributed to Stephen Grellet, [1773-1855] Quaker missionary)

A sense of the significance of today. A sense of the immediacy – indeed, the urgency – of the present.

A man comes seeking fruit on his fig tree. Finding none, he says to the gardener, "This is ridiculous. This tree has borne no fruit for three years. Cut it down. Get rid of it. There's no reason for it to take up space any longer." But the gardener says, "Leave it alone for one more year. Let me dig around it and fertilize it. Give it one more chance. And next year, if it bears fruit, well and good; but if it bears no fruit, then you can cut it down." And the man says, "So be it."

Urgency: for the tree has but one more year.

Urgency: it's something we too often lack in our lives, and we are the poorer for it.

Now a point of clarification.

I'm not talking about the political angst of ads with which we are bombarded, where the world is falling apart and those who disagree with us are our enemies and the world is coming to an end.

I'm not trying to stoke the fire of worry and anxiety, where the worst that could happen will happen...and more!

Remember: This is the same one who also says, "*Do not worry...but seek first God's kingdom and righteousness*" (Matthew 6:25-33).

All too often we do not take seriously Jesus's own call:

*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.* (Mark 1:14-15 NRSV)

The concept of the kingdom of God permeates the gospel accounts. There is always a tension between the kingdom being a future reality and it being a present reality. But that tension is always maintained. The kingdom will be consummated in the future. But it is there on the horizon, so close that it impinges on the present and throws a new light on everything we do. Like seeing the storm clouds coming and being able to smell the rain even before it's falling here. "*The kingdom of God has come near*" – come near in the person of Jesus Christ. And the present becomes packed with importance and purpose.

Jesus speaks, in the Sermon on the Mount, of going to offer your sacrifice and remembering that you have a problem, an issue with your brother or sister:

*...go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister.* (Matthew 5:24 NRSV)

Go, now. That harsh word, that cold shoulder, that unseeing glance has driven a wedge between us and our sister. Let us go now and do all we can to be reconciled to her before the wedge is driven deeper and the split becomes too great.

As the saying goes,

**Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.**

All those things we've been meaning to say to people – how much they have meant to us, how much they have done for us, how grateful we are for them – let us say them now.

For the opportunity may not be there tomorrow.

Michael's oldest daughter had "**officially [become] a teen-ager**" several weeks ago. Two weeks later, "**a mentally ill employee walked into**" his place of work "**and fatally wounded eight colleagues before killing himself.**" Then a week later, a hurricane slammed into the coast, sending people and buildings flying. And he wondered about time.

**A daughter turning 13 when it seems like she was born only yesterday ... workers who left home one morning and never came back ... coastal residents whose lives in a matter of hours were violently disrupted by a hurricane. How quickly life can change.**

**It's almost midnight, and my girls have been in bed for hours, but I think I'll take a few moments to look in on them before I turn in. And maybe when they talk to me tomorrow, I'll pay more attention. I can take the time.** (Michael E. Jones, "Timing is Everything as Three Events Merge in the Mind," *The NEWS of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, October 1989)

Can we take the time? Will we take the time?

As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said,

**You cannot do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late.**

You and I must grasp the opportunity of the moment. For opportunity, if not recognized and acted upon, could slip out of reach forever.

Truly this sense of the importance of the present comes alive to us in another of Jesus's parables. The King is coming, and as the nations are divided up, both groups ask the Son of Humankind,

*when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison...?*

To which he answers,

*just as you did it to one of the least of these..., you did it to me.* (Matthew 25:31-46 NRSV)

The young child crying to us of her starvation; the close friend hurting deep within yet trying desperately to hide the hurt from the rest of the world – Christ comes to us in all these people. We must act now, else the unique opportunity offered to us in the present may slip out of our reach.

The man comes looking for the fig tree to bear fruit. Admittedly, the parable ends on an ominous note: the fig tree has only one more year. But the focus of the parable is actually one of grace...and invitation. By every standard imaginable, that tree should have been cut down then and there. But it wasn't. It has another year, another chance. And so God's grace breaks through to our lives.

No, the point is not a hell-fire and damnation warning. There is a cautionary aspect to the passage, yes. But the focus is less a warning against a threat and more an invitation to an opportunity. An invitation to recapture the radical call to repentance, the radical call to doing God's work and doing it today; for there is so much work to be done and so little time in which to do it.

*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.* (Luke 10:2 NRSV)

And the opportunity is now.

Ultimately, though, we speak not so much of past, present, and future; not so much of time itself, but of something else. Primarily we speak of the presence of God. "*The kingdom of God has come near*" – come near in the person of Jesus Christ, who is Immanuel, God with us. At root, our response to the urgency of the present is a response to the 'here-ness' of God, for it is the presence of God which invests the present with its full meaning. The crux of the call to respond to the kingdom, the crux of the call to accept the urgency of the present, is the call to be open and alive to the presence of God – now; to be open and alive to ministering in God's name – now; to be open and alive to partnering with what God is doing in our midst – now. For

*just as you did it to one of the least of these..., you did it to me.*

The time is now. Not tomorrow, not yesterday, but today – now – is the time to respond to God’s presence in our midst; now is the time to bear the fruit of compassion and kindness, grace and love. For we shall not pass this way again.

**\*HYMN “A Charge to Keep I Have”**

- 1. A charge to keep I have,  
A God to glorify,  
A never-dying soul to save,  
And fit it for the sky.**
  
- 2. To serve the present age,  
My calling to fulfill;  
O may it all my powers engage  
To do my Master’s will!**
  
- 3. Arm me with jealous care,  
As in Thy sight to live;  
And now Thy servant, Lord, prepare  
A strict account to give!**
  
- 4. Help me to watch and pray,  
And still on Thee rely,  
O let me not my trust betray,  
But press to realms on high.**

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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**

**One:** God of mercy...  
**All:** ...hear our prayer.

## **THE LORD'S PRAYER** *(Contemporary)*

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever. Amen.**

## **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**O Lord our God: We give ourselves to you, heart, mind, and soul. We dedicate our lives to you here and now. Use us as your instruments for the coming of your kingdom; that all may know of your love, and live in the light of your justice and peace. Amen.**



## SENDING

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “Take My Life” GtG 697 (*Verses 1-4*)

1. **Take my life and let it be  
consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
take my moments and my days;  
let them flow in ceaseless praise;  
let them flow in ceaseless praise.**
  
2. **Take my hands and let them move  
at the impulse of thy love;  
take my feet and let them be  
swift and beautiful for thee,  
swift and beautiful for thee.**
  
3. **Take my voice and let me sing  
always, only, for my King;  
take my lips and let them be  
filled with messages from thee,  
filled with messages from thee.**
  
4. **Take my silver and my gold;  
not a mite would I withhold;  
take my intellect and use  
every power as thou shalt choose,  
every power as thou shalt choose.**

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### **\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: Enter your everyday world dressed for action.  
**All: We are ready to meet God at home and at work.**  
One: God welcomes us as covenant partners in this world.  
**All: We are ready to serve wherever we are.**  
One: God promises.  
Christ saves.  
The Holy Spirit liberates us to love and serve.  
As we enter this new week  
may we go with the grace and blessings  
of God our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer.

**All:** And let the gathered people of God say...  
**...Amen.**

## **POSTLUDE**

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