

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

23rd SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: We come to give thanks to God, our Creator and Sustainer.
All: **We gather to join our voices in praise to Almighty God, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ.**
One: We open our minds and hearts to hear the Word of God, and to learn what is expected of present-day disciples of Jesus.
All: **God is here! Come, let us worship!**

***OPENING HYMN** “God Is Here!” GtG 409

1. **God is here! As we your people
meet to offer praise and prayer,
may we find in fuller measure
what it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us,
all our varied skills and arts
wait the coming of the Spirit
into open minds and hearts.**
2. **Here are symbols to remind us
of our lifelong need of grace;
here are table, font, and pulpit;
here the cross has central place.
Here in honesty of preaching,
here in silence, as in speech,
here, in newness and renewal,
God the Spirit comes to each.**
3. **Here our children find a welcome
in the Shepherd's flock and fold;
here as bread and wine are taken,
Christ sustains us as of old.** (continued...)

Here the servants of the Servant
seek in worship to explore
what it means in daily living
to believe and to adore.

4. Lord of all, of church and kingdom,
in an age of change and doubt
keep us faithful to the gospel;
help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication,
all we have to give, receive:
we, who cannot live without you,
we adore you! We believe!

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Wonderful God, we do indeed adore you and rejoice to sing your praises. In remembrance of your compassion, we come before you in confidence, begging your mercy. We have failed to follow in your footsteps. We have walked away from your way. The path of humility you choose for us we disdain. The life of service you would have us live we reject. Forgive us, most gracious God. Have mercy on our hard hearts and our stubborn wills. Surround us with your Spirit and fill us with your infinite love, that we may live and love as we were meant to: as your own dear children and servants of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

- One: We remind ourselves of the good news we have heard and in which we believe: that the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in constant love.
- All: **If we confess our sins, God is quick to forgive and to restore us to new life.**
- One: So let us rejoice and be glad, proclaiming once again 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 14:1,7-14

LUKE 14:1-14 (New Revised Standard Version - updated edition)

¹ *On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely. ...*

⁷ *When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸ “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, ⁹ and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”*

¹² *He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers and sisters or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Bumped from the Head Table to the Kitchen” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Jesus may not make the top ten list for Miss Manners, but he may have a point.

"Don't go up, lest you be sent down."

Good advice...to begin with.

I mean, he puts his finger on the problem. Our problem: thinking too much of ourselves, tooting our own horn. We assume, of course, that we belong at the head table, the place of honor and high esteem.

“Of course we should be chair of the committee. We’re right. People listen to us. We should have top billing. We should go first. That’s where we belong.”

Jesus suggests instead, "Go down; then you may go up."

Sounds all right to begin with.

But then...can't you just see the wheels turning? Your wheels and mine. Doesn't Jesus know the kind of people he's dealing with?

“Ah ha! The way to the head table is to go to the lowest seat!”

Then, like a game of musical chairs, there’s a mad dash for the lowest seat. Everyone rushing down with a glint in their eye, watching out of the corner of their eye; waiting for the host to invite them up so they can sit at their ‘rightful place’.

Ah! The lengths to which we will go to get to the head table, the place of honor. With false modesty, which is no modesty at all.

"Me? I'm not proud. No, I won't toot my own horn. I won't tell people about all the good things I've done." All the while thinking to ourselves, "I hope they notice what good things I'm doing and how 'humble' I am."

Perhaps we'd better forget about being one of the guests, let alone sitting at the head table.

Maybe we should think of ourselves being a host instead.

Yeh, that's the ticket. That's where we belong: serving others; receiving others as host, serving them as host.

That's actually a good example, a good lead, a good precedent.

"For the Son of Humankind came not to be served but to serve...." (Mark 10:45 NRSV)

The Greek word for 'serving' actually means "serving at table." If you've ever had that experience of serving table as a waiter or waitress, you know it's grunt work, thankless, dirty. And you can't be too full of yourself here in this role.

But even here this advice can be corrupted, twisted by us. We think: "If we serve others, they'll be in our debt; then maybe we can get them to serve us in return." 'Tit for tat.' 'I'll scratch your back; you scratch mine.' Actually a false sense of serving, with strings attached; expecting something in return.

Perhaps we'd better not try our hand at hosting either, for we are sure to mess that up, too.

You know, maybe we'd best relegate ourselves to the kitchen, with all those pots and pans, dirty sink, and all those things to cook.

Maybe in some ways we can keep out of trouble there, and stay focused on serving, which is what we're called to do anyway. Focus on serving, and avoid the temptation to barter our services for a place at someone else's head table.

Just as Jesus came and washed the disciples' feet: serving others.

Maybe, in our own way, here in the kitchen, we can put ourselves in position where the need is most evident, and we can focus our attention, our lives on serving others.

Maybe here, too, in the kitchen, we'll recognize the reality behind the story of our place in the whole scheme of things.

For in reality God is the host: the ultimate host.

And in being the host, God defines the menu, and the serving, and the guest list. So we'd best be willing to serve whom we are told to serve, which, yes, is everyone, no matter who they are, no matter the color of their skin or their place of origin or their high or low position in life.

Yes, God is the host.

And therefore God is the one who, in the end, gives us our due, hands out the final reward, be that as it may.

"And you will be blessed,...for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

God gives us our task; and God, then, gives the reward for (hopefully) a job well done. Remember last week?

"Blessed are those servants whom the master finds alert –i.e., attentive to what we're supposed to be doing– 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." (Luke 12:37 NRSV)

How good will that be! Massaging tired muscles, soaking aching feet, feeding an empty belly.

Won't that be something, that reward? We can look forward to that, and the satisfaction of a job well done...and having someone spread a table before us where we can sit and sup, relax and rest, sigh and be satisfied.

And you know what?

Someone already has [–pointing to communion table–]: spread the table before us and invited us to come and eat, and be refreshed and revived, sustained and satisfied.

So we come here, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, where he is the host. The Lord's Supper as a sample of that heavenly banquet to which we are all invited.

This table is a reminder of what is to come: a foretaste, in order to help us keep going with all that work we have to do in the kitchen.

A place where we all are invited, and sit with those from North and South and East and West, not only to be served but to serve each other across the table and side to side, and rejoice that we have been invited at all. For we have, not from our own deserving, but simply by the grace of God.

A place where we come to eat and drink, be refreshed and revived, fed and sustained...for the very service to which he calls us.

Ironic, don't you think? It seems he was right after all.

I mean, in a way, we end up at the head table after all. Not by gunning for it, but by giving it up. Not by eyeing it, but by serving it, and those around it.

Just like he did.

***HYMN** "Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love" GtG 203

Refrain:

**Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love;
show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.**

- 1. Kneels at the feet of his friends,
silently washes their feet,
Master who acts as a slave to them.**
(Refrain)

(continued...)

2. **Neighbors are wealthy and poor,
varied in color and race;
neighbors are near us and far away.**
(Refrain)
3. **These are the ones we should serve;
these are the ones we should love;
all these are neighbors to us and you.**
(Refrain)
4. **Loving puts us on our knees,
willing to wash others' feet;
this is the way we should live like you.**
(Refrain)

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a servant,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death--
even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.**

(Philippians 2:5-11 NRSV)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

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

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**God of grace,
we give thanks for your faithfulness to us,
we give thanks for your hope in us,
we rejoice in the knowledge of your unending grace.
In the light of your mercy,
and confident in your love,
we dedicate ourselves to you.
Accept now our offerings,
that through them your will might be done
for us and for your world.
In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.
People: And also with you.
Leader: Lift up your hearts.
People: We lift them to the Lord.
Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

(The prayer continues...)

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.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please hold the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “An Upper Room Did Our Lord Prepare” GtG 202

- 1. An upper room did our Lord prepare
for those he loved until the end:
and his disciples still gather there
to celebrate their risen friend.**
- 2. A lasting gift Jesus gave his own:
to share his bread, his loving cup.
Whatever burdens may bow us down,
he by his cross shall lift us up.**
- 3. And after supper he washed their feet,
for service, too, is sacrament.
In Christ our joy shall be made complete:
sent out to serve, as he was sent.**
- 4. No end there is! We depart in peace.
He loves beyond our uttermost:
in every room in our Father's house
Christ will be there, as Lord and Host.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

***RESPONSE** “Make Me a Servant” StF 2176

**Make me a servant,
humble and meek,
Lord, let me lift up
those who are weak.
And may the prayer of my heart always be:
Make me a servant,
make me a servant,
make me a servant today.**

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POSTLUDE

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