

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

24th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Sing a new song to God, all the earth.
All: **Bless God's name from day to day.**
One: God is doing marvelous works among us.
All: **Let all nations declare the glory of God.**

***OPENING HYMN** "To God Be the Glory" GtG 634

1. **To God be the glory; great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in.**

Refrain:

**Praise the Lord, praise the Lord;
let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord;
let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father through Jesus the Son,
and give him the glory: great things he has done!**

2. **Great things he has taught us; great things he has done,
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
but purer and higher and greater will be
our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.**

(Refrain)

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**“You shall have no other gods before me,” says the Lord.
But we do have other gods that claim
our adoration, our time, our energy, our resources, our hearts.
Many voices call out for our attention
as they proclaim their own version of the gospel.
O Lord, forgive our sin,
our unfaithfulness,
our divided loyalties.
Turn our hearts back to you.
Send your Holy Spirit upon us
that we may resist all claims
that are divisive,
that are self-righteous, and
that do not proclaim your love and your mercy.
Make us disciples of the one gospel
taught by word and deed by our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from Galatians 1)*

One: This is the good news we have received:
that our Lord Jesus Christ loves us
and gave his life to set us free from our sins.
Hear the good news!
All: **In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.**
One: Accept your forgiveness and sing a new song to God.

Sing: “Hear the Good News of Salvation” GtG 441 *(Verse 1)*

1. **Hear the good news of salvation:
Jesus died to show God's love.
Such great kindness! Such great mercy!
Come to us from heaven above.
Jesus Christ, how much I love you!
Jesus Christ, you save from sin!
How I love you! Look upon me.
Love me still and cleanse within.**

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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 Galatians 1:6-24
Galatians 2:1-14

GALATIANS 1:6-24 (various)

⁶ *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – ⁷ not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ However, even if we ourselves or a heavenly angel should ever preach anything different from what we preached to you, they should be under a curse. ⁹ I'm repeating what we've said before: if anyone preaches something different from what you received, they should be under a curse!*

¹⁰ *Am I trying to win over human beings or God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be Christ's servant. ¹¹ Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that the gospel I preached is not human in origin. ¹² I did not receive it or learn it from a human. It came through a revelation from Jesus Christ.*

¹³ *You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. ¹⁴ I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by God's grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal God's Son in and through me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. ¹⁷ I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.*

¹⁸ *Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas [i.e., Peter] and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ Before God, I am not lying about the things that I am writing to you! ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia, ²² but I was not known personally by the Christian churches in Judea. ²³ They only heard a report about me: "The man who used to harass us now preaches the faith that he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ So they were glorifying God because of me.*

GALATIANS 2:1-4 (various)

¹ Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. ² I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. ³ However, not even Titus, who was with me and who was a Greek, was required to be circumcised. ⁴ But false brothers and sisters, who were brought in secretly, slipped in to spy on our freedom, which we have in Christ Jesus, and to make us slaves. ⁵ We did not give in and submit to them for a single moment, so that the truth of the gospel would continue to be with you.

⁶ As for those who were held in high esteem – whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism – they added nothing to my message. ⁷ But on the contrary, they saw that I had been given the responsibility to preach the gospel to the people who are not circumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. ⁸ The one who empowered Peter to become an apostle to the circumcised empowered me also to be one to the Gentiles. ⁹ And when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood self-condemned, ¹² for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction. ¹³ And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct did not square with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of the whole congregation, “If you, a Jew born and bred, live like a Gentile, and not like a Jew, how can you insist that Gentiles must live like Jews?”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “By Whose Authority?” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Can you believe it? Paul is challenging the founding ‘rock’ of the church. Remember Jesus once said, “*On this rock, I will build my church*” (Matthew 16:18 NRSV). Rock = Peter = the original Rock. Paul – this late-comer to the faith, this former persecutor of the church – challenging one of the twelve original members of the church.

He is either got guts of steel.

Or he’s a fool.

How do you know?

That’s a question for Paul, for the Galatians...and for us.

There are plenty of voices and sources, individuals and groups, that seek to be heard and to assert their authority. Many shouting as loud as they can, believing that makes their claim all the more believable. Some making their claim very forcefully, with brutal force even.

The anniversary we mark today – where planes were used as bombs in an attempt to make a point – serves as an example of an instance of seeking to assert one’s authority, to push one’s way, to proclaim one’s own truth.

And the force does not have to be that of bombs or bullets. It can be the insidious force of public opinion or societal ‘isms’.

Paul wants to make a point.

But why should the Galatians listen to him?

Paul needs to establish (or re-establish) his authority, demonstrate his authority, legitimize it.

And so he tells a story. In essence, he shares his testimony (or *a* testimony).

Now part of that testimony is that time in Jerusalem and his conferring with Peter, and others, about the appropriateness of the message he is proclaiming: the gospel he is sharing. And his testimony about that incident demonstrates that Peter himself (and others) agreed with Paul about his message and confirmed it and approved it. So that, when Paul later confronts Peter in Antioch, Paul is only saying what Peter himself would have said by virtue of the previous conversation they had had.

Not even Peter – the rock – is immune to backsliding. Does that surprise us?

But all these words about Paul’s backstory – all this testimony – is intended to demonstrate that the message that Paul preaches – the message that presumably the Galatians themselves had received – is a message that comes, not from Paul or Peter or any other human, but from God: that the gospel – good news – that Paul proclaims is God’s good news, not just any ole good news originating with or concocted by any mortal source.

So the authority Paul has in speaking is not, properly, his own authority or any human-based authority, but divine authority: God’s authority.

And, quite honestly, that’s where we get into trouble. That’s the “danger zone,” as some might term it.

For, as you and I well know, there are plenty of people who claim to be speaking God’s story, God’s good news. And they can’t all be speaking the truth, for they too often contradict, and even condemn, each other.

So how do we discern someone’s authority, or some message’s authority?

I am reminded of an answer – *one* answer – according to the biblical account. It’s not all that clear, and probably not particularly to our liking.

Moses is addressing the people as they stand on the cusp of entering the promised land. At one point, the question comes up of prophets who presume to speak in the name of the Lord. How do you know if they really do? Here’s the answer:

If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. (Deuteronomy 18:22 NRSV)

That's real 'helpful'...maybe. I have to 'wait and see' before I know? How does that help me now? How would that help the Galatians as they heard and read Paul's words then, in that moment?

As I said, there are plenty of people who claim to speak the truth and know the truth, so follow them and all will be well.

Until it's not. And time demonstrates they were wrong and did not know the truth, and following them was a big mistake.

So, now what?

Let me suggest (briefly) three guides, or 'tests', for authority that we can glean from this passage as Paul speaks to the Galatians...and to us.

-1- First there is the "test of time," sometimes referred to as the test of history. But history tends to look primarily backward, whereas the test of time looks both forward and back.

-Forward, like that discussion about true prophecy: if it comes to pass, if it is demonstrated as true.

-Back, which includes our time and our story, and a sense of integrity and authenticity.

You see, part of the authority – the weight and the ring of truth – of the gospel message, lies squarely in the story of our lives. (Scary, isn't it?)

Are we reflecting the truth of the gospel? Are we confirming the truth of what we proclaim by our lives: by the words we speak, by the deeds we do, by our manner of living?

Even changes in life – like Paul's, from persecuting to encouraging; like Peter's, from denying to proclaiming – can, and need to, reflect the truth of the gospel we proclaim.

The 'test' of time.

-2- Second there is the test of community: you and me...and a whole lot of other 'you's and 'me's.

Remember even as Paul confronts Peter, Peter himself, as well as others, had affirmed and confirmed the gospel as proclaimed by Paul – the gospel with which Paul now confronts Peter. It was an affirmation by the community.

I continually appreciate one of the marks of the Presbyterian tradition: that there is no such thing as self-ordination. A person cannot stand up and say, "I feel the call to be a pastor; I am a pastor." No. The individual may sense the call. But that call must be confirmed by the community.

So too, in discussions and dialogues and conversations, we wrestle together with issues and concerns; not all alone, in isolation, where it is all too easy for me to dupe myself.

The community helps keep us honest: with ourselves, with each other, with God's address – word – to us.

-3- Third, I want to suggest another ‘test’: the test of life. In other words, does the authority (whatever authority it might be) affirm, does the message proclaimed build up and nurture...life. Rich life – not speaking monetarily – but rich, as in full, full-fledged life as God intended.

Does it promote ‘real’ life?

The horrific events of September 11, 2001, did not promote ‘life’ – that seems rather obvious, from our perspective.

But speaking of this ‘test’ of life is not an easy fix or a simple blueprint.

It continues to be a struggle, a wrestling.

For how this ‘authority’ – this voice or teaching or style of living – promotes life matters, too.

-Does it promote life by lifting up the dignity of all life before God?

-Does it promote life by working for the fulfillment of each life before God?

-Does it promote life by embracing the bearing of God’s life – the image of God – in each one of us?

The test of time.

The test of community.

The test of life.

A template of a sorts.

This ‘template’ does not solve all our problems or answer all our questions or fix all that’s broken when it comes to the issue of authority.

Even affirming, lifting up, agreeing with a particular authority is no guarantee to sway the next political debate or the next societal crisis.

But it does provide guidance.

The test of time. The test of community. The test of life.

-Will they serve us as Paul continues to speak to us through the rest of the letter to the Galatians?

-Will they serve us as we discern other voices to heed? (or not) ...and how to listen to them? ...and what to take from them?

But also:

-Will they serve others as others discern what to heed from us and our lives?

I wonder: is there any greater authority than a life well-lived by the grace of God, with the love of God, for the glory of God?

Maybe the big question is: By whose authority do you speak? And will your life speak it clearly?

***HYMN** “God of Grace and God of Glory” GtG 307

1. **God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power;
crown thine ancient church's story;
bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.**

2. **Lo! the hosts of evil round us
scorn thy Christ, assail his ways!
From the fears that long have bound us
free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days,
for the living of these days.**

3. **Cure thy children's warring madness;
bend our pride to thy control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.**

4. **Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore.
Let the gift of thy salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving thee whom we adore,
serving thee whom we adore.**

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***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,**

(continued...)

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.

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: O Lord our God...
All: ...in your mercy, 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*

With our offerings, O Lord, we reaffirm our faith in you, and we commit ourselves and our gifts to the sharing of life-giving good news. Equip us to proclaim your good news in word and deed, to further Christ's mission and ministry in a hurting world. May others glorify you, O God, because of the offering of our lives. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "May the God of Hope Go with Us" GtG 765

**May the God of hope go with us every day,
filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.
May the God of justice speed us on our way,
bringing light and hope to every land and race.
Praying, let us work for peace;
singing, share our joy with all;
working for a world that's new,
faithful when we hear Christ's call.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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