

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**25<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: The steadfast love of God surrounds us;  
**All: be glad and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.**  
One: Our hope is in God, who gives us life and identity.  
**All: Our help is from God, who is in covenant with us.**  
One: We celebrate the good things of life that God provides.  
**All: We give thanks for God's steadfast love.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art" GtG 624  
(Verses 1, 2, & 5)

1. **I greet thee, who my sure Redeemer art,  
my only trust and Savior of my heart,  
who pain didst undergo for my poor sake;  
I pray thee from our hearts all cares to take.**
  
2. **Thou art the King of mercy and of grace,  
reigning omnipotent in every place:  
so come, O King, and our whole being sway;  
shine on us with the light of thy pure day.**
  
5. **Our hope is in no other save in thee;  
our faith is built upon thy promise free;  
Lord, give us peace, and make us calm and sure,  
that in thy strength we evermore endure.**

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## UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty and merciful God,  
we confess that we have broken covenant with you.  
Our lives do not praise you,  
our actions deny you, and  
our work is carried out without reference to your will.  
We may seek to be delivered from deceitful and unjust people,  
yet we fail to examine ourselves to see if we are completely honest and just.  
We may sense demonic forces at work in our world,  
yet we fail to ask if there is any evil in us.  
We have coveted what belongs to others  
while wasting what we have.  
We seek to justify ourselves through good works  
rather than serving joyously and gratefully to honor you.  
Forgive us, gracious God,  
and deliver us from evil.  
Pour out your grace upon us, and  
help us to turn from our sins  
so that we may love you and walk in your way,  
by joyfully caring for others. Amen.

## SILENT CONFESSION

### ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: The cross of Christ stands as the sign  
that the love of God lives in us  
through faith in the grace of God.  
**All: God forgives and makes our way straight before us.**  
One: By the power of the Holy Spirit,  
in Jesus Christ our sins are forgiven.  
**All: Thanks be to God.**  
One: In awe and reverence,  
let us accept God's gift and allow our ways to be changed.  
**All: May we live by grace,  
recognizing and embracing the peace God offers.**

## 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 2:15-21  
Galatians 3:1-14, 23-29  
Galatians 4:8-9  
Galatians 5:1-6

GALATIANS 2:15-21 (various)

*<sup>2:15</sup> Indeed, we are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners,” as they are called. <sup>16</sup> Yet we know that a person is put right with God only through faith in Jesus Christ, never by doing what the Law requires. We, too, have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be put right with God through our faith in Christ, and not by doing what the Law requires. For no one is put right with God by doing what the Law requires. <sup>17</sup> If, then, as we try to be put right with God by our union with Christ, we are found to be sinners, as much as the Gentiles are – does this mean that Christ is serving the cause of sin? By no means! <sup>18</sup> If I start to rebuild the system of Law that I tore down, then I show myself to be someone who breaks the Law. <sup>19</sup> So far as the Law is concerned, however, I am dead – killed by the Law itself – in order that I might live for God. I have been put to death with Christ on his cross, <sup>20</sup> so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me. <sup>21</sup> I do not nullify the grace of God, for if a person is put right with God through the Law, it means that Christ died for nothing!*

GALATIANS 3:1-14, 23-29 (various)

*<sup>3:1</sup> You foolish Galatians! Who put a spell on you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was put on display as crucified. <sup>2</sup> Tell me this one thing: did you receive God's Spirit by doing what the Law requires or by hearing the gospel and believing it? <sup>3</sup> How can you be so foolish! After you started with the Spirit, are you now finishing up with your own human effort? <sup>4</sup> Did you experience so much for nothing? – if it really was for nothing. <sup>5</sup> So does the one providing you with the Spirit and working miracles among you do this by you doing the works of the Law or by you believing what you heard? <sup>6</sup> Understand that in the same way that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, <sup>7</sup> those who believe are the children of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> But when it saw ahead of time that God would put the Gentiles right with God on the basis of faith, scripture preached the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All the Gentiles will be blessed in you.” <sup>9</sup> Therefore, those who believe are blessed together with Abraham who believed. <sup>10</sup> On the other hand, those who depend on obedience to the law are under a curse; for scripture says, “Cursed is everyone who does not persevere in doing everything that is written in the book of the law.” <sup>11</sup> Now, it is clear that no one is put right with God by means of the Law, because the scripture says, “They shall gain life who are put right with God through faith.” <sup>12</sup> The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, “The person who does these things will live by them.” <sup>13</sup> But by becoming a curse for us Christ has delivered us from the curse that the Law brings; for the scripture says, “Anyone who is hanged on a tree is cursed.” <sup>14</sup> The purpose of this*

*was Christ delivered us so that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, and that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*

...  
<sup>23</sup> *But before the coming of this faith, we were held and confined under the law until this coming faith should be revealed. <sup>24</sup> And so the Law was in charge of us until Christ came, in order that we might then be put right with God through faith. <sup>25</sup> Now that the time for faith is here, the Law is no longer in charge of us.*

<sup>26</sup> *It is through faith that all of you are God's children in union with Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> You were baptized into union with Christ, and now you are clothed, so to speak, with the life of Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> Now if you belong to Christ, then indeed you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to the promise.*

**GALATIANS 4:8-9** (various)

<sup>4:8</sup> *Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those who by nature are not gods. <sup>9</sup> But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless world system? Do you wish to be enslaved by it all over again?*

**GALATIANS 5:1-6** (various)

<sup>5:1</sup> *For this freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, as free people, and do not allow yourselves to become enslaved again.*

<sup>2</sup> *Listen! I, Paul, tell you that if you allow yourselves to be circumcised, it means that Christ is of no use to you at all. <sup>3</sup> Once more I warn any who allow themselves to be circumcised that they are obliged to obey the whole Law. <sup>4</sup> Those of you who try to be put right with God by obeying the Law have cut yourselves off from Christ. You have fallen away from grace! <sup>5</sup> As for us, our hope is that God will put us right with God; and this is what we wait for by the power of God's Spirit working through our faith. <sup>6</sup> For when we are in union with Christ Jesus, being circumcised or not being circumcised does not matter; what matters is faith that works through love.*

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** by Pastor Bill Vincent

On the one hand, it's so simple.

On the other hand, Paul keeps repeating himself, saying the same thing over and over in different ways. Which suggests that the Galatians still don't get it; that they are having a hard time grasping the truth, let alone believing it.

And perhaps, so are we.

“If only you would do this or that: pray more often, pray more sincerely, pray for more people; come to church.”

“If only you were a Jew. If only you were a Gentile.” “If only you were white, not Hispanic; or Hispanic, or Black, or ...”

“If only you weren’t a slave. If only you were free.” “If only you were upper middle class, or upper class, or lower class, or...”

“If only you were a male. If only you were a female.” “If only you were straight; not something else that muddies the water.”

“And perhaps you could add such-n-such and another thing to your list of things to do: like the ‘right’ occupation, or an out-going personality.”

“But maybe some other things to do and be would be better to accomplish your goal.”

What goal? That’s key.

The goal, the end, the purpose of ‘being square’ with God. ‘Justified’ is the technical term: made righteous, reconciled to God. The relationship with God is made right again.

“What can I do to make that happen?”

In some ways, that may be the driving question of much – if not all – of life.

God: the creator of all, the giver of life; the provider and protector of all created ones, including us.

Yes, it seems appropriate – if not mandatory – to ‘be square’ with God, to be in a right relationship with God. Who wants to be on the ‘bad side’ of the Creator of the Universe?

And yes, we’ve heard all those words about how we’ve messed up life and messed up our relationship with God – and with each other. Sin, we call it.

“So, God, what can we do to make it up to you? What can we do to make things right? How can we restore a right relationship with you? ...and earn our way into your ‘good graces’?”

And the answer, quite honestly, is...nothing. We have screwed things up so badly; we are in such an awful position that we are in no position to make it up to God, to fix things, to rightly restore our relationship with God, to be made right with God.

Well, isn’t that a pickle.

Of course, as Paul acknowledges, there certainly were those who suggested that there was a way, and that way meant having to fulfill the obligation of the Law – or at least certain obligations of the Law, like circumcision. With something of a catch. “Well, I’ve done Law 1, 2, 5-7, and 9. Isn’t that good enough?” No: ‘good enough’ isn’t good enough. To gain access to God through the Law, to be made right with God through the Law requires us to fulfill the whole Law. And we don’t do that. We certainly haven’t done that, not ever. Fulfilling this obligation and that regulation, this requirement and that requirement.

Even though it sounds like we can. For something of that way sounds so familiar: so much like we live our life already.

The obligation to do this, that, and the other in order to ‘get ahead’.

The requirement to be like this and do like that and live a particular way in order to be accepted by and included with others.

The responsibility to fulfill certain obligations and meet certain requirements even to be considered as an ‘all right’ person.

And the list goes on and on and on.

“You must look like us and act like us and think like us and live like us to be included in this group.”

And Paul says No.

Because, as he tries and tries to make clear, God says No to that way of thinking: having to earn our acceptance.

Paul’s whole point is that God has taken the initiative, God has done what needed to be done, and God has restored our relationship with God: God has reconciled us with God, made us right with God.

God. Not us.

We can’t. We couldn’t. We didn’t.

God did. In Jesus Christ.

God did. And it’s done. Period. No ‘if’s, ‘and’s, or ‘but’s. No ‘perhaps’es, no ‘maybe’s, no ‘if only’s.

God has done it. Period.

We don’t have to earn it. We couldn’t if we tried – and, believe me, we’ve tried. We can’t earn it. We didn’t earn it. We didn’t do it.

But God did. For us.

And God, in Jesus Christ, says, “Here. Accept it. Receive it, like what it is: a gift.”

Accept it. Receive it. Grace.

And we find it so hard to believe.

For we live in a world – in fact, we live in a manner – where so much of our life is based on the assumption that you have to earn everything: your status, your position, your right to be heard, your right to live.

We live in a world – we live with so many people – that believes, in fact, that builds its life on the presumption that nothing is given, everything is earned – especially any and everything that is worth anything.

So from day one, that’s what we try to do. “How can I earn your love? How can I earn my position in the group? How can I buy your respect? How can I purchase your loyalty? How can I earn the ‘good life’?”

Charles Cousar speaks of our “**achievement-oriented society.**” And though we may not speak so much of “circumcision,” there are

**secular counterparts...in which we “supplement” God’s free gift...and prescribe for ourselves (or others) a particular accomplishment which becomes a “must.”** (Interpretation, p.10)

Those “agitators” in Galatia insisted on certain requirements, but Paul resisted...strongly: **not that Paul is stubborn and dogmatic, but that he perceives how completely his readers have misunderstood the heart of the Christian faith. They are working at the wrong end of the relationship with God – what *they* can do to assure inclusion in God’s family; what *they* can do to cope with the [“weak**

*and worthless world system,*” as our translation puts it]; **what they can do to fulfill the law. The answer lies at the other end – what God has done in Christ and how [God] has done it. “Grace”** [– a word that, in many ways, summarizes this act of God –] **is not a “thing,” even a “thing” God gives. Rather it describes the manner in which God gives [God’s own self], the personal relationship [God] establishes with [God’s] people. The word [– grace–] depicts the unmerited and unconditional way in which God has made and continues to make [God’s] move toward sinful humanity.** (Interpretation, p.9)

God moves toward us.

God has done it: made us right with God.

Not earned by us.

Not merited by us.

Not bought and paid for by us.

Not our doing.

Not about us at all.

But about God.

God’s doing.

What God has done. Freely. From grace. Out of love.

What God has given.

Will we receive it?

Will we accept it?

Will we believe it? especially when so much around us says it can’t be true.

Even if we were to believe it to be true, what difference might it make?

-Paul speaks of freedom.

Martin Luther experienced it as a relief, a release: freedom from a burden of guilt, shame, inadequacy, failure. He had known such a weight, knowing he couldn’t earn his way into God’s good graces; a sense of such inadequacy and failure. Until he realized that grace: what many have described as a ‘rediscovery’ of grace as the foundation of the Protestant Reformation.

Is that not a release, a freedom we would want to know?

-But as others have pointed out, this grace is not simply an experience of individual relief from guilt, but there is also a communal impact.

For God says this to us, Yes; but God also says this to others as well.

And that’s what makes the difference in the conversation about the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, Peter and the ‘circumcision faction’, and other groups.

God’s word, and God’s offer, is for all people. God restores God’s relationship with everyone: that includes you...and it also includes me...and all those other ‘you’s and ‘me’s that you and I don’t know, or do know but may not like.

And so the distinction between Jew and Gentile doesn’t make a real difference. Nor between white, non-Hispanic; and Hispanic, or Black, or... What makes a difference is God and Christ, and in Christ, there is no difference.

And the distinction between slave and free doesn't make a real difference. Or between middle class and upper class and lower class. What makes a difference is God and Christ, and in Christ, there is no difference.

And the distinction between male and female doesn't make a real difference. Or wherever you are on the spectrum. What makes a difference is God and Christ, and in Christ, there is no difference.

This does not eliminate all distinctions and differences between people; like we're all clones, exact replicas of one another. But it does put each and every distinction and each and every difference in its proper place. For the proper place for those distinctions and those differences is not to push us away from each other, or to determine who's in and who's out. For in Christ – in God's reconciliation with humanity – all are one, all are united, all are brought together.

It is so simple...

...yet so hard

-to hear

-to believe

-to embrace...and to live.

Yet it is true. Incredible as it may seem, it is true.

Hear that good news – believe it, live it:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven;

we are loved;

we are embraced;

we are restored;

we are God's.

**\*HYMN** “Just as I Am, without One Plea” GtG 442

- 1. Just as I am, without one plea  
but that thy blood was shed for me,  
and that thou biddest me come to thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**
  
- 2. Just as I am, though tossed about  
with many a conflict, many a doubt,  
fightings and fears within, without,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**
  
- 3. Just as I am, thou wilt receive,  
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;  
because thy promise I believe,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**

*(continued...)*



4. **Just as I am, thy love unknown  
has broken every barrier down;  
now to be thine, yea, thine alone,  
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**

*Just as I Am, Without One Plea, Music Harm. by John Ribble.  
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#### **\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in God,  
whom Jesus called Abba, Father.  
In sovereign love God created the world good  
and makes everyone equally in God's image,  
male and female, of every race and people,  
to live as one community.  
But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.  
Ignoring God's commandments,  
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,  
accept lies as truth,  
exploit neighbor and nature,  
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.  
We deserve God's condemnation.  
Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.  
In everlasting love,  
the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people  
to bless all families of the earth.  
Hearing their cry,  
God delivered the children of Israel  
from the house of bondage.  
Loving us still,  
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.  
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,  
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,  
God is faithful still.**

*(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)*

#### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**One:** God of grace and mercy...  
**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,  
and offer ourselves in response to your love.  
Make us grateful every day  
for the privilege of sharing this love with others,  
as a sign of your never-failing care  
for the well-being of all your world;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** "There Is Now a New Creation" GtG 774 *(Verses 1, 2, 3, & 5)*

- 1. There is now a new creation  
through the grace of Jesus Christ,  
peace and reconciliation  
with the God of endless life.**
- 2. Call the lost and found together;  
tell the news to everyone:  
now the past is gone forever  
and a new life has begun.**

*(continued...)*

**3. Wrap the prodigal in welcome;  
run to greet the wayward child.  
All is finished and forgiven;  
let us now be reconciled.**

**4. Come and join the celebration;  
come and join this happy feast;  
Jesus makes an invitation  
to the greatest and the least.**

**5. There is now a new creation  
through the grace of Jesus Christ.  
Sing, with thanks and adoration,  
to the God of endless life!**

*There is now a new creation, Text by David Gambrell.  
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#### **\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

#### **POSTLUDE**

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