

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

26th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Call to mind the mighty acts of God.
Remember the wonders God has revealed in your life.
All: Let us praise God not only with our lips, but with our lives as well.
One: We have come to be equipped for our tasks.
We have gathered for renewal of our lives.
All: Come, let us worship God, the giver of new life.

***OPENING HYMN** “O God in Whom All Life Begins” GtG 308

**1. O God in whom all life begins,
who births the seed to fruit,
bestow your blessing on our lives;
here let your love find root.
Bring forth in us the Spirit’s gifts
of patience, joy, and peace;
deliver us from numbing fear,
and grant our faith increase.**

**2. Unite in mutual ministry
our minds and hands and hearts
that we may have the grace to seek
the power your peace imparts.
So let our varied gifts combine
to glorify your Name
that in all things by word and deed
we may your love proclaim.**

**3. Through tears and laughter, grief and joy,
enlarge our trust and care;
so bind us in community
that we may risk and dare. *(continued...)***

**Be with us when we gather here
to worship, sing, and pray;
then send us forth in power and faith
to live the words we say.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Merciful God,
we confess that we have not always been your faithful servants.
Sometimes we find it difficult to love as Jesus taught us.
We have been quick to judge others
while at the same time we overlook our own faults and shortcomings.
You ask us to help ease the burdens others carry,
but we add to them.
We bolster our own egos at others' expense.
We consume other people instead of loving them.
Forgive us, gracious God,
and renew us with your peace and with your mercy.
Free us from the destruction of sin
and restore us to a life lived in you.
Help us love our neighbors as ourselves;
in the name of life abundant, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Peace!
Peace is what you receive from God
when you know that your sins are forgiven.
Peace is what you have when you know
that the destruction of sin cannot harm you,
because you are not alone in your journey of life.

All: **The crucified Christ has set us free
to live in the Spirit of life
and to be made new.**

One: Therefore, peace, my sisters and brothers!
In Jesus we have received forgiveness,
and we have been restored!

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 Galatians 5 & 6 (selected verses)

GALATIANS 5 (various)

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

... ⁶ *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.*

...
¹³ *For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters. But do not let this freedom become an excuse to indulge your selfish impulses, but through love become slaves to one another. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in a single statement: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ¹⁵ But if you bite and devour each other, be careful that you do not get eaten up by each other!*

¹⁶ *What I say is this: be guided by the Spirit and you will not satisfy your selfish desires. ¹⁷ For a person's selfish desires are set against the Spirit, and the Spirit is set against one's selfish desires. They are opposed to each other, so you should not do whatever you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, then you are not subject to the Law. ¹⁹ Now the works that are produced by selfish motives are quite plain, since they include fornication, impurity, indecent actions; ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, quarrels, strife, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambitions, dissensions, factions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and other things like that. I warn you as I have already warned you, that those who do these kinds of things will not inherit God's kingdom.*

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the old self with its passions and its desires. ²⁵ If the Spirit is the source of our life, let the Spirit also direct its course. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, irritating one another, envying one another.*

GALATIANS 6 (various)

¹ *Brothers and sisters, if a person is caught doing something wrong, you who live by the Spirit should gently set them right. And keep an eye on yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. ...*

⁷ Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. ⁸ If you plant in the field of your own selfish desires, from it you will gather the harvest of destruction; if you plant in the field of the Spirit, from the Spirit you will gather the harvest of eternal life. ⁹ Let us never tire of doing good, for if we do not give up, we shall in due time reap our harvest. ¹⁰ So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the household of faith.

¹² Whoever wants to look good by human standards will try to get you to be circumcised, but only so they will not be harassed for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Those who are circumcised do not observe the Law themselves, but they want you to be circumcised, so they can boast about your physical body.

¹⁴ God forbid that I should boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world is crucified to me and I to the world! ¹⁵ Being circumcised or not being circumcised does not mean anything. What matters is a new creation. ¹⁶ All who take this principle for their guide – peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters.
Amen.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “. After the Period” by Pastor Bill Vincent

We begin with theological punctuation, specifically the period. You know: that round dot at the end of a sentence that brings a thought, idea, concept, point to a close; means it is complete.

You are forgiven. Period.

No ‘if’s, ‘and’s, or ‘but’s.

No trailing thought, no incomplete concept, no additional point.

You are loved. Period.

No ‘perhaps’, no ‘maybe’s, no ‘if only’s.

You are embraced and made right in your relationship with God. Period.

Yes, this message is incredible in a world where we jockey for position and barter for influence and seek to buy our way into any supposedly meaningful relationship.

All of which is why it was so important for Paul to establish his authority from the very beginning of the letter. Paul’s authority had to be credible for the Galatians to hear and accept and believe this incredible message.

What’s done is done.

And God has done it.

Period.

What happens before the period – that message of God’s grace – is in no way dependent upon what might happen after the period.

What happens before the period stands on its own, stands alone, even though it does not leave us alone.

At the same time, what happens after the period is related to what happens before the period.

Which is where we stand now.

So, we’ve heard what happens before the period: that message of God’s grace and God’s love and embrace of us.

Now what?

First, we need to believe this message: have faith, put our trust in this incredible news of God’s grace.

This is how we accept, how we receive the message – i.e., what happens before the period.

Our second response called for is love.

This is how we integrate the message of grace into our lives – how it impacts us, how it becomes real in our lives; how we demonstrate its truth in our lives and for others’ lives. For remember: the message is true for us; it is true for others as well.

“Now what?”

That question, at its simplest – and most profound – is answered this way:

As we know ourselves to be loved, so we ourselves are to love.

You see, the expectation – the assumption – is that we are so transformed by this experience of God’s grace, that we reflect, we embody – that we become – this very transformative experience...for others.

-by bearing one another’s burdens, and even sometimes gently admonishing one another;

-by serving one another, and *“loving your neighbor as yourself”*;

-by working for the good of all, and never tiring of doing that good.

But what must be clear: as we do all these things, we never do them in order to earn what comes before the period: in order to earn God’s grace – you know, looking over our shoulder to see if God notices how good we are.

We never do those good things in order to earn what comes before the period.

We do it because we are always grateful – we do it in gratitude – for what comes before the period.

When this incredible message becomes credible – i.e., when its truth truly dawns on us – we are awe-struck, stunned: “Wow!”

A story to share maybe a small taste of what I’m talking about:

It was Christmastime many years ago. We had our first computer...with two floppy disks. (I know: some people hearing this are wondering, “How old IS this guy?”) My sister, who worked with computers, was aghast that we had such a machine. So, for Christmas she

surprised us with a new computer...with a harddrive! I was stunned. The gift was totally unexpected, came out of nowhere. I never would have imagined it. I was dumb-struck, completely blown away. “No way!” “Way!” as they say nowadays.

Like I said, small in comparison to the “Wow!” of God’s grace. But you get the idea.

When this good news truly dawns upon us, we are blown away, struck dumb.
The truth we can’t believe becomes the truth we do believe.

And then sometimes life can become tricky.

For if we do not live grace-fully – if the evidence of our life demonstrates that we are not living by this grace, that we are not living out of this “Wow!” – then have we truly received this grace, have we truly known this grace, have we truly accepted this grace?

If we do not live gracefully, have we truly embraced this grace?

So, what does it mean to live in grace: to live by this grace – grace-fully – to live by this “Wow!”?

Paul paints a picture, with broad strokes. He does not specify an answer to all the questions we might ask.

And the picture he paints is “living by the Spirit.”

The Spirit as evidence of God’s grace in our lives, evidence of this new life to which we are called.

And as the Spirit is the source of our life, so the Spirit serves as guide for our life.

It is as if the Spirit plants the seed, and our lives bear the fruit of that “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*”

Self-control – because we are under God’s control...

...and not the control of our selfish ambitions and desires, our self-serving whims and wants and wishes; all of which leads to the biting and devouring of one another, to indecent actions and idolatry, to quarrels and strife, to envy and jealousy, to dissensions and factions, to fits of rage.

Self control – because we are under God’s control.

Ironic.

Paul speaks of freedom; but then speaks of “*becoming slaves to one another.*”

Paul says we are “*no longer subject to the Law*”; but then speaks about “*fulfilling the law of Christ*” and “*the entire law fulfilled in a single statement: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’*”

It seems as if Paul is at cross-purposes with himself.

Beverly Gaventa acknowledges,

The imagery of slavery startles and perhaps even offends, for it seems (in fact, it is!) incompatible with our notions of freedom. Here as elsewhere (see especially Rom.6), however, Paul understands that all human beings are free

in some sense and enslaved in some sense. The question is from what or whom they are free and to what or whom they are enslaved. (Texts, p.407)

We are freed from the requirements of the Law in order to be made right with God, in order to know God's grace and embrace.

But the freedom we experience is not a freedom to do whatever we darn well please.

We are now bound to Christ (the very one who liberated us). We are bound to Christ and his life: to **“live by the Spirit” ... the radical insight that those who “belong to Christ Jesus” belong to him completely and can no longer belong to the law or to sin.** (Text, p.408)

...or to the selfish ambitions and desires of our old self.

Christ – the Spirit – guides, directs, controls our life.

And that is true freedom.

For that is life as God intends.

You may remember at the start of our series I mentioned the difficulty of preaching on the epistles and their theological statements (as opposed to the gospels and their stories). But that sometimes it is helpful to consider what might be the story behind the theological discourse.

I wonder: Could it be Paul's own story?

At the beginning of Galatians, Paul speaks of the gospel's radical invasion of his own life, an invasion that resulted in the overthrow of the life he had regarded as exemplary (1:11-17). ... this radical invasion applies...to all believers. ... As the letter concludes, the final card is revealed: the gospel is nothing less than a cosmic change, a “new creation” indeed! (Beverly Gaventa, Texts, p.416)

Paul's own story and Paul's own experience with the incredible message of God's grace, and how that turned his life around and upside-down, transforming him and his life. The life he had known had been overturned. He had been given, been shown a new life: a life in Christ, a life lived by the Spirit, a life that knows God's grace and shows God's grace and blesses others with God's grace – a new creation, a new story, for us all. Not that we have to have the same 'Damascus Road' experience as Paul. But that we know God's presence and work in our lives that transforms who we are and how we live and how we see the world and how we see one another.

A new life, a new creation.

“So that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” (2:20-TEV)

The same Christ who gave himself for me...and you.

The same Christ whose life, death, and resurrection restored our right relationship with God.

The same Christ who is the vessel and instrument and embodiment of God's “Wow!” grace.

So of course this Christ should live in me.

God loves us. Period.
Now – out of gratitude
now – in Christ
now – by the working of the Spirit
now, let us live that love for God, and for one another.

***HYMN** “Holy Spirit, Truth Divine” [*tune: GtG 697*]

1. **Holy Spirit, truth divine,
Dawn upon this soul of mine;
Word of God, and inward light,
Wake my spirit, clear my sight,
Wake my spirit, clear my sight.**

2. **Holy Spirit, love divine,
Glow within this heart of mine;
Kindle every high desire;
Perish self in Thy pure fire,
Perish self in Thy pure fire.**

3. **Holy Spirit, power divine,
Fill and nerve this will of mine;
By Thee may I strongly live,
Bravely bear, and nobly strive,
Bravely bear, and nobly strive.**

4. **Holy Spirit, right divine,
Make my conscience wholly Thine;
Be my law, and I shall be
Firmly bound, forever free,
Firmly bound, forever free.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and binds us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.**

(continued...)

**The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.**

**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!"**

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Hear us, O God...
All: ...your mercy is great.

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*

**God our maker, our Savior, our source of life,
we thank you for your self-giving love.
As we give of ourselves,
receive our gifts, multiplying them and using them
as signs of your love and faithfulness,
and of your creative hand at work among us.
We give ourselves to you
and commit ourselves
to follow Jesus Christ,
love our neighbors,
and share the fruits of the Spirit,
giving you thanks and praise,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing” GtG 546 (*Verses 1-2*)

- 1. Lord, dismiss us with your blessing;
fill our hearts with joy and peace;
let us each, your love possessing,
triumph in redeeming grace.
O refresh us,
O refresh us,
traveling through this wilderness.**
- 2. Thanks we give and adoration
for your gospel's joyful sound;
may the fruits of your salvation
in our hearts and lives abound.
Ever faithful,
ever faithful
to your truth may we be found.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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