

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Luke 13)*

One: "People will come from east and west and north and south and sit at table
in the kingdom of God."
All: God invites us all to the kin-dom's banquet.
One: Honored by God's welcome, we gather by grace.
All: We come to offer ourselves in service and worship to the Lord.
One: So come, let us worship the Lord our God.

***OPENING HYMN** "Where Charity and Love Prevail" GtG 316 *(Verses 1, 2, 4, & 5)*

**1. Where charity and love prevail,
there God is ever found;
brought here together by Christ's love,
by love we thus are bound.**

**2. Let us recall that in our midst
dwells Christ, God's holy Son.
As members of each body joined,
in him we are made one.**

**4. Let us forgive each other's faults
as we our own confess,
that we may love each other well
in Christian gentleness.**

**5. Love can exclude no race or creed
if honored be God's name;
our common life embraces all
whose Maker is the same.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God,
we confess that we have strayed from your ways
and, like the Prodigal Son, have wasted our inheritance.
You gave us the earth for our home,
but we squander earth's resources and hoard its bounty.
You gave us neighbors to love,
but we pursue selfish ambitions.
You gave us the commandments that lead to human flourishing,
but we break your law and forsake your love.
Forgive us our sin and
gather us again to your table.
Draw our wandering hearts back to you
that we may find freedom in obedience to your love.
Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: The Lord is indeed a God of mercy and compassion. We know this for certain because of Jesus Christ.
All: **In Christ, God seeks the lost and forgives the sinner and loves the world.**
One: So let us hear and believe that good news once again.
All: **For by the grace of God we are loved and accepted, forgiven and restored through Jesus Christ our Lord. Alleluia! Amen.**

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 15:1-3,11-32

LUKE 15:1-3,11-32 (various)

¹ Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³ So he told them this parable: ...

¹¹ Jesus said, “A certain man had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to him, ‘Father, give me my share of the property now.’ So the man divided his property between his two sons. ¹³ After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth through extravagant living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in, but his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you’ve never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours comes home, who has squandered your property with prostitutes, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

There are those who would say that the greatest disservice you can do to this passage is to comment on it.

I’m in trouble, because I’m going to comment on it.

It seems to me that all of us, at one time or another, have been the younger son.

We really blew it: we blew our chance, we blew our inheritance, we blew our life; through poor choices and wrong turns in life; we have sunk so low.

And notice with this younger son, his plight is not totally due to his own work and his own actions. For after he has blown his inheritance and blown it all, a severe famine sweeps throughout the country. That was not in his control.

So sometimes famines sweep over us, or hurricane winds sweep over our lives. And life blows us away, even as we may have blown our chances.

But then it says that the younger son “*comes to his senses.*” The Greeks says, “he came to himself.”

“Ah ha! Now I understand. The light goes off. Now I see!”

And this son realizes things are so much better at his father’s house, so why shouldn’t he go back there?

But he also sees himself in these eyes, for he thinks that he has stooped so low that he is nothing. I mean, he’s feeding pigs; and, as a Jew, that was the lowest of the low.

So he goes back home.

And surprise of surprises, it’s almost as if his father sweeps aside his comment that “*I am no longer worthy to be called your son.*” And his father embraces him and welcomes him back, not as a hired servant, but as the son that he is.

I’m also convinced that at one time or another, we have all been the older son.

You know, we’ve all said this to ourselves, “Doesn’t it just get your goat, get caught in your throat, these people who receive this grace and this wonder and this generosity. They hand it out to just anybody! Even the riffraff.” There are no consequences for irresponsible actions, whatever those actions were – in this case, was it with a harlot or not, we don’t know.

The older son says in essence, “I know he had plenty when he left; now he has nothing, and he is nothing to me.”

And surprise of all surprises, the father comes out to him and pleads for him to come back in. The father wants to embrace him too...even though he won’t embrace his own brother.

You know, one of the interesting things to note about what the father says, is that he first talks about the younger son being dead and coming back to life, then he mentions having been lost, but now found. Almost as if to say that there is something worse than death.

What is worse than death is being lost. Losing your way, your direction. Losing everything you had, losing your sense of self. Losing your sense of worth. Losing who you are.

Which is, in essence, what the younger son does when he says, “*I am no longer worthy to be called your son.*” “I am worthless. I am a nobody. I am lost.”

To which the father says, “That ain’t so!”

I mean, the father runs to his son, which would never have been done in that day and age: the elder father wouldn’t run to anyone; he would have lost his dignity in the sight of others. But he runs nonetheless because of his great joy. And when the younger son says, “*I am no longer worthy to be called your son,*” everything that the father does says “No!” to that statement. The robe, the ring, the sandals – all of them affirm quite clearly, without a doubt, that this is his son.

And so they celebrate.

But the older son is not quite of the same mind for celebrating.

And notice what the father says to the older son.

When the older son refuses to come in, the father goes out, pleads with him, and even hears the older son's impassioned plea about his righteousness and how he is right in doing what he does.

And the father says, "*Son.*" Not 'hired servant', not 'worthless person', but "Son." (This too is a son of his.) "*Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.*"

And yet the older son is acting as if that is not true.

Could it be that the older son has squandered his own inheritance by being totally blind to what was right there in front of him?

"You are always with me, and all that is mine is yours."

Is the older son lost, too?

There is something worse than death.

I couldn't help but think, as I was reading this passage and pondering it – remembering another one of Jesus' parables that he told. And at the very end, the master of that story says, "Come and enter into the joy of my presence." (see Matthew 25:21,23)

I hear that sentiment in the words that the father of this story is saying. Enter into the joy, the life, the aliveness of your father's house. Enter into the found-ness of relationship with him. Enter into the joy of your father.

And at the end of the story, the father offers the exact same thing to the older son, too. Enter. Come on inside. Be a part of the party of grace.

But perhaps the older son has not yet "*come to his senses.*"

So, at the end of the story, we are left with this older son who, by his own choice, stands outside the life, outside the found-ness, outside the joy of his father.

Where will he end up?

Where do you see yourself in this story?

How will you enter the story?

And what will you see and hear and learn wherever you are in this story?

Remembering always the context: the story is told because the Pharisees and scribes are muttering about Jesus associating with the tax collectors and sinners: accepting and welcoming "those other people."

But even more important, remember the context of who it is that tells this story: Jesus himself – Jesus in his life and ministry, Jesus even in his coming death and resurrection. Jesus tells this story.

So I invite you to hear it again:

[-- re-read Luke 15:11-32 --]

And at the very end of this story, I see a father, with arms open wide, embracing his sons – both of his sons, both of his children.

And by way of this story, I see another Father, who has more than two sons – in fact, has more than just sons, but daughters, too – children aplenty that this Father seeks to embrace and welcome and bid enter into this amazing, even confounding, certainly wondrous joy.

And, oh, by the way, the Father would be tickled pink if we would enter into the joy of one another.

And perhaps by remembering our own welcome by the Father, indeed we can enter into the joy of one another.

***HYMN** “For Everyone Born” GtG 769

**1. For everyone born, a place at the table,
for everyone born, clean water and bread,
a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,
for everyone born, a star overhead,**

Refrain: **and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!**

**2. For woman and man, a place at the table,
revising the roles, deciding the share,
with wisdom and grace, dividing the power,
for woman and man, a system that's fair,** *Refrain*

**3. For young and for old, a place at the table,
a voice to be heard, a part in the song,
the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled,
for young and for old, the right to belong,** *Refrain*

**4. For just and unjust, a place at the table,
abuser, abused, with need to forgive,
in anger, in hurt, a mindset of mercy,
for just and unjust, a new way to live,** *Refrain*

**5. For everyone born, a place at the table,
to live without fear, and simply to be,
to work, to speak out, to witness and worship,
for everyone born, the right to be free,** *Refrain*

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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: This we pray...
All: ...Lord, have mercy.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

Thank you, God, for proclaiming our worth when we do not value ourselves. Thank you for welcoming us to a celebration of life with so many precious gifts. Thank you now for the privilege of sharing so others may be led to your joyous embrace. Help us to be generous in gratitude for your lavish provision for all our needs. 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 (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.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please hold each of the elements so that we might partake of each together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community, in unity with Christ.)

Bread:

Sing “One Bread, One Body” GtG 530

Refrain:

**One bread, one body,
one Lord of all,
one cup of blessing which we bless.
And we, though many,
throughout the earth,
we are one body in this one Lord.**

**1. Gentile or Jew,
servant or free,
woman or man, no more. *Refrain***

**2. Many the gifts,
many the works,
one in the Lord of all. *Refrain***

**3. Grain for the fields,
scattered and grown,
gathered to one, for all. *Refrain***

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Cup:

Sing “Come to the Table of Grace” GtG 507 (*Verses 1, 2, 3, & 5*)

**1. Come to the table of grace.
Come to the table of grace.
This is God’s table;
it’s not yours or mine.
Come to the table of grace.**

2. Come to the table of peace...

3. Come to the table of love...

5. Come to the table of joy...

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Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “I Come with Joy” GtG 515 (*Verses 1-3 & 5*)

1. I come with joy, a child of God,
forgiven, loved, and free,
the life of Jesus to recall,
in love laid down for me,
in love laid down for me.
2. I come with Christians far and near
to find, as all are fed,
the new community of love
in Christ's communion bread,
in Christ's communion bread.
3. As Christ breaks bread and bids us share,
each proud division ends.
The love that made us, makes us one,
and strangers now are friends,
and strangers now are friends.
5. Together met, together bound
by all that God has done,
we'll go with joy, to give the world
the love that makes us one,
the love that makes us one.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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