

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

31st SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We come to worship the great and wonderful Lord:
All: to remember all that God has done for us;
One: to celebrate all that God is doing among us;
All: to commit to all that God intends to do through us.
One: Come, let us worship the Lord our God.

***OPENING HYMN** “God, You Spin the Whirling Planets” GtG 23

1. **God, you spin the whirling planets,
fill the seas and spread the plain,
mold the mountains, fashion blossoms,
call forth sunshine, wind, and rain.
We, created in your image,
would a true reflection be
of your justice, grace, and mercy
and the truth that makes us free.**

2. **You have called us to be faithful
in our life and ministry.
We respond in grateful worship
joined in one community.
When we blur your gracious image,
focus us and make us whole.
Healed and strengthened as your people,
we move onward toward your goal.**

3. **God, your word is still creating,
calling us to life made new.
Now reveal to us fresh vistas
where there's work to dare and do.**

(continued...)

**Keep us clear of all distortion.
Polish us with loving care.
Thus, new creatures in your image,
we'll proclaim Christ everywhere.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God, forgive us when we follow after our own designs and plans. Forgive us when we make life all about us, and forget others, and even forget you. Forgive us when we refuse to open our eyes to the plight of neighbors who need our helping hand. Speak to us your word of life. Touch us by your tender Spirit. Re-create us in your own image after the example of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, 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 16:19-31

LUKE 16:19-31 (Common English Bible)

¹⁹ "There was a certain rich man who clothed himself in purple and fine linen, and who feasted luxuriously every day. ²⁰ At his gate lay a certain poor man named Lazarus who was covered with sores. ²¹ Lazarus longed to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Instead, dogs would come and lick his sores.

²² “The poor man died and was carried by angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ While being tormented in the place of the dead, he looked up and saw Abraham at a distance with Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ He shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am suffering in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received good things, whereas Lazarus received terrible things. Now Lazarus is being comforted and you are in great pain. ²⁶ Moreover, a great crevasse has been fixed between us and you. Those who wish to cross over from here to you cannot. Neither can anyone cross from there to us.’

²⁷ “The rich man said, ‘Then I beg you, Father, send Lazarus to my father’s house. ²⁸ I have five brothers. He needs to warn them so that they do not come to this place of agony.’ ²⁹ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets. They must listen to them.’ ³⁰ The rich man said, ‘No, Father Abraham! But if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent and change their hearts and lives.’ ³¹ Abraham said, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, then neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.’”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Whatcha See?” by Pastor Bill Vincent

There’s seeing.
And there’s *seeing*.
You see?

In the movie “Avatar” (being re-released this Fall), on a planet (Pandora) far, far away, humans have discovered an ore that they need and begin to mine, ravishing the land for the ore.

The native people on the planet – the Na’vi – live in harmony with each other and the land. They have a phrase they use – “I see you” – which refers to far more than simple physical sight.

To say, “I see you,” means I know who you are, the true you. It is a deeply personal insight. It is an insight into someone’s true self, fully aware of the reality of another, understanding and respecting who they really are.

The root of the conflict in the story is that most humans do not see the Na’vi. They use and abuse them; they push them out of the way, find them simply a distraction.

Most humans simply do not see the Na’vi.

In our story, the rich man did not see Lazarus.
Do we?

Describing the consequences and issues faced by those caught in a vicious cycle of poverty, one wrote,

With hunger comes poor health, with despair can come addiction, with inadequate wages can come incentives to turn to crime, crime often brings imprisonment, with joblessness comes homelessness that breaks families apart, and with the eventual powerlessness that is felt while in this vicious cycle comes a high risk of being exploited. (USAME Presentation, Presbyterian Women Study Trip to Appalachia, 2013)

Do we see those caught in this cycle?

Let us be clear: as Charles Cousar writes,

The rich man is not pictured as inherently wicked. He does not persecute Lazarus, nor does he refuse him food, nor does he sponsor legislation to rid the gates of poor people like Lazarus. ... he simply does not "see" the man at his gate. ... As John Donahue points out... "One of the prime dangers of wealth is that it causes blindness." (Feasting on the Word, "Exegetical Perspective")

Now, we may not picture ourselves as Lazarus, but neither do we identify with the rich man.

However, Anne Kiome Gatobu (Asbury Theological Seminary) challenges our assumption and asks us to think deeper.

...there are many who cannot identify with either the rich man or the beggar. Yet if I stepped back and counted my blessings materially, spiritually, and health-wise, I would find that I am richly blessed and have many gaps to bridge. I have a generous roof over my head, a car to ferry me around, adequate food, three wonderful sons, a great husband, friends, family, good health, a church family, education, etc. I would be missing a great opportunity to learn from the parable if I equated the term *rich man* to only the wealthy! Indeed if I really paid attention I might "notice" a number of beggars by my "doorstep" in the form of people that I could be in relation with spiritually, financially, and physically. ... The forms that the "beggars by our doorsteps" take are countless! However, like the rich man, we might never have noticed them. How easy it is to dig a valley of separation from others without even knowing. (Lectionary Homiletics, August-September, 2013)

And, unfortunately, I cannot tell you how many times we have pulled off the interstate and stopped at the traffic light at the end of the exit ramp where a person stands there with a cardboard sign that reads, "No Job, No Home, Need Food"...and I cannot bring myself to look the person in the eye, even to offer a smile.

Do we want to see those whose lives have been devastated by bombs exploding in Ukraine?

Do we want to see the soldiers...on both sides?

Will we see those who lives have been torn apart by the school shooting in St. Louis this week?

The TV ad for medication for a particular skin condition, has various people say, “See me.” Not the skin condition, but me.

And we hear the chant: “Black lives matter.” Not the skin color, but the person. Do we see them?

And the chant: “Police lives matter.” Not the uniform, but the person. Do we see them?

Yes, it can be hard – and maybe too hard.

Let’s be honest. It is disturbing, and overwhelming, when we begin to see all the pain, the hurt, the need.

It can be overwhelming. I don’t know what to do! How can I make a difference to the crisis in Ukraine? How can I make a difference to school shootings (St. Louis)? How can I make a difference with all the rancor in our society?

And we may want to be absolutely certain that what we do will make a difference, and absolutely certain that the need is genuine.

But are there times when this demand for certainty is itself nothing but an excuse?

The rich man pleads for a clear sign for his brothers.

What [he] wants is a sign that carries with it no ambiguity, no possibility that it will be treated as just another opinion to take or leave. ... [Yet] There is no act of communication that rises above our finitude and our sinful penchant for self-serving misreadings. We are always located in the situation of hearing a word from another and trusting it—or not. We are always in a place of having to have faith. (Scott Bader-Saye; Feasting on the Word, “Theological Perspective”)

As Paul reminds us,

we walk by faith, not by sight. (II Corinthians 5:7 NRSV)

...or certainty.

The quest for certitude often becomes an excuse for not acting. ... [So] We are left with a call to act based not on an absolute certainty in the divine command, but on the visibility of the suffering face that becomes, for us, the face of Christ himself.... (Scott Bader-Saye; Feasting on the Word, “Theological Perspective”)

But to see that face – to see Christ – we have to look. We have to see.

And too often we don’t.

Do we not see those who are right under our nose?

Do we intentionally not see those who are “out of sight” therefore “out of mind”?

Not to overwhelm us. But remember: God sees. God sees the injustice and pain, the oppression and suffering. This is a major affirmation of who our God is.

God sees.

And God expects us not to turn a blind eye, but a faithful eye.
And in turning a faithful eye, offering a faithful hand.

The rich man did not see. As a consequence, he did not do a thing.
We are called to see, and do something.

Not to solve everything. Not to save the world – that’s already been taken care of. But to be faithful in using what we have, in offering who we are, in doing what we can.

The little boy had gone to the grocery store and bought some milk. On his way home, he tripped and fell, the milk spilling everywhere. A crowd gathered around him, with people saying, “What a shame!” “How terrible this is!” “I’m so sorry!” Until finally a woman whipped out a dollar bill and said, “I care a dollar’s worth. How about you?”

Will we invest ourselves in our caring, and our seeing?

Edward Hale wrote,

**I am only one,
But I am one;
I cannot do everything,
But I can do something;
And because I cannot do everything,
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.**

(Edward Everett Hale (1822-1909) - American author, historian, and Unitarian minister)

And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do.

So a 13-year-old in Kentucky sees a need and asks a question and helps “create a program called A Place to Sleep that helps furnish beds for children who don’t have them.”

And a woman who regularly volunteers to stay the night at a women’s homeless shelter asks her congregation to collect those coffee packets that we all take from the hotel room...so the women at the shelter can have their coffee.

And a nurse sees **“increasingly younger victims of gunshot wounds”** cycle through the hospital. And she is motivated to

create a new approach to ending violence [where] youth experience first-hand the consequences of violent acts on pediatric victims and their families...making a positive impact on the lives of more than 600 young people. (Presbyterian Mission Agency, Peacemaking Offering insert, 2013)

And these things come to pass – where grace is shared and justice is served – these things come to pass all because someone sees...and does.

- **Step out on a busy street
See a girl and our eyes meet
Does her best to smile at me
To hide what’s underneath**

- **There's a man just to her right
Black suit and a bright red tie
Too ashamed to tell his wife
He's out of work, he's buying time**
- **All those people going somewhere
Why have I never cared?**

sings Brandon Heath in his song.

- **I've been there a million times
A couple of million eyes just move and pass me by
I swear I never thought that I was wrong**
- **Well, I want a second glance
So give me a second chance
To see the way You see**
- **Give me Your eyes for just one second
Give me Your eyes so I can see
Everything that I keep missing
Give me Your love for humanity**
- **Give me Your arms for the broken hearted
The ones that are far beyond my reach?
Give me Your heart for the ones forgotten
Give me Your eyes so I can see
(“Give Me Your Eyes,” 2013)**

See the people; see the need. See the world; see that one person.
Not with eyes of absolute certainty, but with eyes of faith and faithfulness.
And then respond, in faith, with faithfulness.

Caring for people with our hands, reaching out to them – because God reaches out, and we need to as well.

Opening our eyes to see – because God sees them and we need to as well.

You know, we claim to have good news to share in this gospel message of Jesus Christ, of God's love and grace.

Could it be that, crucial to the good news we are called to proclaim, crucial to the good news people need to hear, is...I see you, I really see you.

***HYMN** “Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service” [*Tune 490*]

1. **Lord, whose love through humble service
bore the weight of human need,
who upon the cross, forsaken,
offered mercy's perfect deed,**

(continued...)

**we, your servants, bring the worship
not of voice alone, but heart,
consecrating to your purpose
every gift that you impart.**

- 2. Still your children wander homeless;
still the hungry cry for bread;
still the captives long for freedom;
still in grief we mourn our dead.
As, O Lord, your deep compassion
healed the sick and freed the soul,
use the love your Spirit kindles
still to save and make us whole.**

- 3. As we worship, grant us vision,
till your love's revealing light,
in its height and depth and greatness,
dawns upon our quickened sight,
making known the needs and burdens
your compassion bids us bear,
stirring us to tireless striving,
your abundant life to share.**

- 4. Called from worship to your service,
forth in your dear name we go,
to the child, the youth, the aged,
love in living deeds to show;
hope and health, goodwill and comfort,
counsel, aid, and peace we give,
that your servants, Lord, in freedom
may your mercy know and live.**

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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: O Lord, our refuge and our savior...
All: ...provide your strength and your grace.

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.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**We give you thanks and praise, generous God,
for every good gift that comes from your hand:
for food and clothing,
for life and health,
for family and friends,
above all for the treasure of your grace.
Make us rich in good works,
generous and ready to share,
taking hold of the life
that really is life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “The Church of Christ in Every Age” GtG 320

- 1. The church of Christ in every age,
beset by change but Spirit-led,
must claim and test its heritage
and keep on rising from the dead.**
- 2. Across the world, across the street,
the victims of injustice cry
for shelter and for bread to eat,
and never live before they die.**
- 3. Then let the servant church arise,
a caring church that longs to be
a partner in Christ's sacrifice,
and clothed in Christ's humanity.**
- 4. For Christ alone, whose blood was shed,
can cure the fever in our blood,
and teach us how to share our bread
and feed the starving multitude.**

(continued...)

5. **We have no mission but to serve
in full obedience to our Lord:
to care for all, without reserve,
and spread Christ's liberating word.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

***RESPONSE** “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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POSTLUDE

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