

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 8, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**BAPTISM OF THE LORD**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: Come to be blessed and surrounded by the goodness of God.  
Come, not in your wisdom, but in humility;  
come, not to boast, but to learn.

**All: We come to be still before God, and wait patiently;  
to delight in God, who fulfills the desires of our heart.  
We come without power or pretension;  
we bring our weaknesses more than strength.**

One: So consider God's call, and commit your way to God;  
and trust in God to grant you light and new life.

**All: And may God's blessing pour out upon us  
in ways expected, and ways not.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "Baptized in Water" GtG 482

- 1. Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,  
cleansed by the blood of Christ our King;  
heirs of salvation, trusting the promise,  
faithfully now God's praises we sing.**
- 2. Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,  
dead in the tomb with Christ our King;  
one with his rising, freed and forgiven,  
thankfully now God's praises we sing.**
- 3. Baptized in water, sealed by the Spirit,  
marked with the sign of Christ our King;  
born of the Spirit, we are God's children,  
joyfully now God's praises we sing.**

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## UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord, we confess that we give lip service on Sunday to your claim on our lives, but struggle the other six days with the call of the world. We do not understand your ways, yet often we have not sought to understand. We do not believe that love works; that patience, meekness, and humility mark the way to fullness of life. So we idolize success and seek our own way of power and wisdom, wrath and warfare, impatience and evil devices. Forgive us by the power of your mercy, and strengthen our resolve, that we might stand in the goodness of Christ and walk in the light of his love. Amen.

## SILENT CONFESSION

### ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Even when we fail, even when we are not perfect, God still claims us.  
All: **God still calls us by name. God still places God's Spirit upon us.**  
One: So rejoice and be glad, for God's mercy is great!  
All: **And we are known; we are loved; and we are forgiven.**  
**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 READING Matthew 5:1-12

MATTHEW 5:1-12 (various)

<sup>1</sup> *When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> And he began to speak and taught them, saying:*

<sup>3</sup> *"Blessed are those poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>4</sup> *"Blessed are those mourning,  
for they will be comforted.*

<sup>5</sup> *"Blessed are those meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.*

<sup>6</sup> *"Blessed are those hungry and thirsty for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.*

<sup>7</sup> *"Blessed are those merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.*

<sup>8</sup> *“Blessed are those pure in heart,  
for they will see God.*

<sup>9</sup> *“Blessed are those working for peace,  
for they will be called children of God.*

<sup>10</sup> *“Blessed are those persecuted for the sake of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>11</sup> *“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and speak all kinds  
of bad and false things about you, all because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your  
reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.”*

## **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON** by Pastor Bill Vincent

They are radical. They are ridiculous. They are topsy-turvy.  
They are some of the best words we’ve ever heard...and some of the hardest.

‘They’ are the Beatitudes: the ‘bless-ed’ words.

Jesus has begun his ministry among the people, starting with his baptism, then his time of temptation. He has called his first disciples, and has already caught people’s eye with his healings and miracles, and other wise sayings.

And then he embarks on what will be, as Matthew tells the story, the first of five major teachings in his ministry: what we have come to know as the Sermon on the Mount.

You can sense the anticipation in the air as he climbs the mountain – reminiscent of Moses? – and sits down – the posture of a teacher – and speaks, beginning to teach them.

And the first word out of his mouth is “blessed”: fortunate; happy; blessed by God; favored by God.

Blessed.

Yes! We like that word. We like to hear that word. We want to hear more.

And, unfortunately, we do.

*“Blessed are those...poor in spirit.”*

Now wait a minute! That’s not what we want to hear. That doesn’t make any sense. The poor in spirit are not blessed. They are depressed. They are down in the dumps. They are at the end of their rope, or so it seems. The poor in spirit do not look to us to be blessed.

But he’s not finished. Not by a long shot.

*“Blessed are those mourning.”*

Well, if you're one of those who are mourning, you sure don't feel blessed. Kicked in the gut, perhaps. Knocked down and run over by life. But not blessed.

He continues.

*“Blessed are those meek.”*

We think of them as the shy, timid ones who definitely get run over by life...and run over by those with the power to run over them, with no regrets for having run over them. The meek don't inherit anything...except pain and being left behind in the dust.

*“Blessed are those hungry and thirsty for righteousness.”*

You know, they'll get exactly what they deserve...which is last place. The good guys finish last. If honesty is your best policy, then the world will quickly show you that yours is not a policy of success...but defeat and losing and last place.

*“Blessed are those merciful.”*

But if you open yourself up and make yourself vulnerable to be merciful, you'll be kicked and laughed at, called weak and wounded, and left at the bottom of the heap.

*“Blessed are those pure in heart.”*

But a pure heart never saw anything worth seeing...but a heartache or a broken heart.

*“Blessed are those working for peace.”*

Except, you know, they're fighting a losing battle. For war is the way of the world and fighting is in our DNA and being the winner (which means others have to lose) is the goal of life.

*“Blessed are those persecuted for the sake of righteousness.”*

Now, let's get real. Don't be ridiculous. The one persecuted for the right may (every once in a while or for a time at least) get the sympathy vote – until the next great cause or trend comes along. And then all that suffering for the right is ignored and forgotten, no longer on anyone's radar.

Blessed? These are blessed? Really?

But Jesus insists, Yes.

And, let's be honest, he has impressed us with some of the other things he has said and done.

So perhaps he deserves an additional listen, a second chance, another hearing.

For at first hearing, his words really don't make sense, really don't jive with the way we see the world and the way we experience life.

But perhaps that's part of the point.

*“Blessed are those poor in spirit.”*

We know – or think we know – that the poor in spirit feel put upon by life: pushed down, run over, worn out. When Luke tells the story, the word he uses is simply ‘the poor’ (Luke 6:20), and there is certainly something to that. The poor can easily feel pressed down, stressed out, and poor and worn out in spirit.

But maybe it is precisely from that perspective that they know something, or see something, that many of us – who are not so poor...or don’t think we are – fail to see: that when you’re down and out, when you’re at the end of your rope, the only thing to do is to let yourself fall into the arms of God. And that’s what God wants anyway. Not for us to pretend like we can do this thing called life all on our own, pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, making something of our life all by ourself. But relying upon God, dependent upon God, even when it feels like we are forced to do so because there is no other recourse. “OK, God, I give up trying to solve my life. You lead. You take the reins.”

And we are blessed indeed.

*“Blessed are those mourning.”*

They too may be at the end of their rope, in their grief, in their sorrow, in their emptiness. But there may also be another twist – other significance – that we have, at first, overlooked.

Isaiah 61 says,

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
because the Lord has anointed me;*

...

*to comfort all who mourn. (v.1&2)*

Here it is specifically mourning for the destruction of Jerusalem and the people being ripped from their home and exiled to a foreign land.

There is a mourning for the suffering from injustice; mourning “**due to oppression or deprivation**” (Jin Young Choi; Feasting on the Gospels, Matthew, vol.1) or “**the devastation wrought by human avarice and thirst for power**” (Douglas Hare, Matthew, Interpretation series).

And the promise is – the good word shared is – that they will be comforted, that they will know consolation.

And maybe that’s the case because we know, and affirm, that God too is in the fight for justice. And just knowing that is comfort and consolation in itself.

*“Blessed are those meek.”*

Maybe we need to hear that as, “Blessed are those meek and gentle.” Those who walk through life lightly, handling life – and this world and all those in it – gently. As the saying goes, “Life is precious; handle with prayer.”

They – the meek, the gentle – supposedly “*inherit the earth*” – instead of what we typically think, i.e., of their being run over roughshod by life.

And yet I wonder: all those others who do not walk lightly through life – or through this earth – but walk through this earth with a heavy hand and a domineering manner, ravaging and ravishing this planet and its environs, taking what they want with no consideration for others or

for the consequences of their actions. And they take and they take and they take; and the world suffers and resists their taking, so they take even more violently and aggressively.

But those who are meek and gentle, walk through life lightly and gently, kindly and humbly. And in doing so, they do not take, but nurture; they are not crass, but caring.

And so they end up inheriting the earth as the earth responds to them, responds to that care and gentleness, and responds by giving itself and its gifts. And so the meek and gentle inherit the earth, not as a possession, but as a partner, with nurture and gentleness and life.

Blessed indeed.

*“Blessed are those hungry and thirsty for righteousness.”*

But let us be clear: not just any righteousness; not just anybody’s idea of what is right. We’re talking God’s righteousness.

Blessed are those hungry and thirsty for God’s righteousness, for God’s rightness and goodness, for God’s way and God’s will.

As one translation puts it, **“Blessed are those who yearn for the right to prevail”** (Revised English Bible). For God’s right to prevail. Blessed are those who mean it, and work to be a part of it, when they pray, *“Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”* (6:10).

*“Blessed are those merciful.”*

Precisely because God is merciful.

Mercy is at the heart of Jesus’ work and message and life, as Matthew tells the story.

And being merciful is no more – and no less – than imitating God: the God *“who makes the rain fall on the just and the unjust”* (5:45), who *“forgives us our sins...as we forgive those who sin against us”* (6:12).

*“Blessed are those pure in heart.”*

For only those with a clean heart, only those with a pure heart – in other words, only those with a steadfast, true, focused, loyal heart; only those with a heart committed to God and God alone – can actually perceive God in the world, and see God’s work and God’s way and God’s presence...even in the least of those among us.

*“Blessed are those working for peace.”*

For is that not what Jesus himself – as the Apostle Paul would later remind us – is that not what Jesus himself ultimately came to do:

*that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to [Godself].* (II Corinthians 5:19-NRSVue)

*So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near... For he...has broken down the dividing wall...between us...that he might create in himself one new humanity...thus making peace....* (Ephesians 2:17,14,15-NRSVue)

And when we truly work for that peace – when we put our effort into closing gaps and crossing divides and tearing down walls and building bridges – then we too are joining in that ultimate work of reconciliation: peace, *shalom*.

*“Blessed are those persecuted for the sake of righteousness.”*

Yes, I know, that’s a hard one to swallow, let alone believe.

But note how it is expanded upon in the following, and last, beatitude:

*“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you”*

– I know, it didn’t get any easier, did it; it got worse; but listen –

*“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me,”*

Jesus says.

Jesus identifies with us, and stands with us, and acknowledges that following him and his way is not easy.

And No, it’s not.

The life Jesus describes goes against so much of what we understand and believe about life, and how to live life and how to get by – if not get ahead – in life.

He describes a life that goes against our assumptions and the presumptions of our culture and our world.

He describes a way that is counter-cultural.

Counter: in a different direction, against the grain, against the current, opposite of, opposed to.

So of course there is going to be push back and tension, opposition and conflict, hostility and persecution.

And Jesus knows that intimately himself. And that in itself is a comfort: that he has experienced that agony and suffering himself, and he knows what it is like.

But *“rejoice and be glad”*? Surely you jest. Rejoice in suffering? – sounds masochistic. Be glad in persecution? – sounds fatalistic.

But hear what he says. He does not applaud the pain and violence and evil that is happening – that would be sadistic.

But he does remind us of the company we then share: *“For in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.”*

And who are those prophets? Are they not those people who have been most faithful to God and most attentive to God’s way, and closest to God? And isn’t that good company to keep? and an honorable and inspiring and encouraging “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) to accompany us in life?

Blessed indeed.

You see, we must recognize, we must take note that Jesus is not pre-scribing a standard of living that says, “Let me go out and intentionally irritate people so that they will insult me and persecute me and say all sorts of bad and false things about me...all so that I can feel good about myself and the company I keep.” No!

Jesus is not saying, “Go make yourself miserable.”

He is de-scribing the way life is. He is being brutally honest about the mess that is our world in the midst of poor choices and sinful actions and selfish motives and me-centered lives.

And he is describing a way that is different – radically so.

A way that he then calls “blessed.”

Blessed: fortunate; happy; blessed by God; favored by God.

Blessed, because it is God’s way with us and with the world.

Blessed, because, more so than other times and places and circumstances, these are the places where God is.

Those mourning are blessed, because that’s where God is: holding their hands, letting them cry on God’s own shoulders. That’s where God is in the depth of their misery and the sorrow of their souls and the holes of their hearts. That’s where God is, even in their agony and pain and their worn-out-ness from all the work and struggle for justice that seems to get them nowhere...but where God is.

And those meek are blessed, because that’s where God is, and that’s how God is.

And those merciful are blessed, because that’s how God is, with them and with us and with all the world.

And those poor in spirit are blessed, because, more so than many others, they recognize God in their plight and know God’s hands holding them.

Jesus describes this way as blessed because it is God’s way with us, and God stands with us in these hard-to-describe and hard-to-survive places.

Jesus describes this way as blessed, because that’s where God is: here, with us. Sound familiar? Immanuel, God with us.

And that is such a comfort and consolation when we are the ones who mourn and suffer the insults and lies, and we get trampled on and walked upon, and left behind in the dust. God’s presence is an encouragement and support when we are the ones struggling for the right and seeing little or no progress, when we are the ones desperately working for peace against all odds with little (or nothing) to show for it. And we are blessed, because it is precisely in those times and places and circumstances when we may feel God is most absent that God is actually most present.

And we are blessed indeed.

With one final note.

Blessed: favored by.

Those mourning, those persecuted, those meek, those poor in spirit, those merciful, those working for peace – that’s where God is: that’s where God is at work and with whom God is present.

And if that’s where God is, where should we be?

When we seek to minister and serve; when we hear the call of this one who invites us to follow him and walk in his way of care and compassion, gentleness and mercy, justice and kindness; when we yearn to follow him, and these are the people and places where he is, where should we be?



**\*HYMN “Blest Are They” GtG 172**

**1. Blest are they, the poor in spirit;  
theirs is the kingdom of God.  
Blest are they, full of sorrow;  
they shall be consoled.**

*Refrain:*

**Rejoice and be glad!  
Blessed are you; holy are you!  
Rejoice and be glad!  
Yours is the kingdom of God!**

**2. Blest are they, the lowly ones;  
they shall inherit the earth.  
Blest are they who hunger and thirst;  
they shall have their fill.**

*Refrain:*

**3. Blest are they who show mercy;  
mercy shall be theirs.  
Blest are they, the pure of heart;  
they shall see God.**

*Refrain:*

**4. Blest are they who seek peace;  
they are the children of God.  
Blest are they who suffer in faith;  
the glory of God is theirs.**

*Refrain:*

**5. Blest are you who suffer hate,  
all because of me.  
Rejoice, be glad; yours is the kingdom;  
shine for all to see.**

*Refrain:*

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## **\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in Jesus Christ,  
fully human, fully God.  
Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:  
preaching good news to the poor  
and release to the captives,  
teaching by word and deed  
and blessing the children,  
healing the sick  
and binding up the brokenhearted,  
eating with outcasts,  
forgiving sinners,  
and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.  
Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,  
Jesus was crucified,  
suffering the depths of human pain  
and giving his life for the sins of the world.  
God raised this Jesus from the dead,  
vindicating his sinless life,  
breaking the power of sin and evil,  
delivering us from death to life eternal.**

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

## **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**One:** Lord, in your mercy...  
**All:** ...hear our prayer.

## **THE EUCHARIST**

### **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Thank you, God, for hungers satisfied and dreams fulfilled. Thank you for the inheritance of faith, which blesses our life on earth. We trust you to accomplish good among us through the sharing of these gifts and the recommitment of our lives. Help us to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you. 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 the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

#### *Prayer*

### **SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** "When the Poor Ones" GtG 762

**1. When the poor ones who have nothing share with strangers,  
when the thirsty water give unto us all,  
when the crippled in their weakness strengthen others,  
Then we know that God still goes that road with us,  
then we know that God still goes that road with us.**

*(continued...)*

**2. When at last all those who suffer find their comfort,  
when they hope though even hope seems hopelessness,  
when we love though hate at times seems all around us,  
Then we know that God still goes that road with us,  
then we know that God still goes that road with us.**

**3. When our joy fills up our cup to overflowing,  
when our lips can speak no words other than true,  
when we know that love for simple things is better,  
Then we know that God still goes that road with us,  
then we know that God still goes that road with us.**

**4. When our homes are filled with goodness in abundance,  
when we learn how to make peace instead of war,  
when each stranger that we meet is called a neighbor,  
Then we know that God still goes that road with us,  
then we know that God still goes that road with us.**

*When the Poor Ones...*

*...Text and Tune by José Antonio Olivar and Miguel Manzano.*

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### **\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**All:** ...**Amen.**

### **POSTLUDE**

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