

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 15, 2023

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SECOND SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: God sends light to us this day
All: **and invites us to meet one another in this light.**
One: Let us humble ourselves for the worship of God,
All: **that we may be empowered to serve.**
One: God makes us to be the salt of the earth
All: **and lights to show God's works to the world.**

***OPENING HYMN** "Longing for Light, We Wait in Darkness" GtG 314
(Christ, Be Our Light)

**1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.**

Refrain:

**Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your church gathered today.**

**2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice. *Refrain:***

**3. Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed. *Refrain:***

(continued...)

**4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone. Refrain:**

**5. Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come. Refrain:**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**You are the light of the world, O Lord,
yet we do not reflect that light.
You have called us salt,
but our lives are bland and inspire no one.
You give wisdom and the means for discerning your will;
yet we are aimless and prisoners of the whims of others.
You call us to build a more just society
but we cling to our advantages.
We have put our own pleasure ahead of your purposes.
We have been more inclined to feed our own egos
than to give bread to the hungry.
Forgive us, O Lord.
Set us right and renew us by your Spirit.
Give us integrity of heart,
that we may shine forth the light of your salvation,
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: God, who knows our thoughts,
All: **answers our cries and rescues us from darkness.**
One: God, who understands our motives,
All: **reaches out to heal us and make us righteous.**
One: God, who is with us in our weakness,
All: **grants strength and power to live as salt and light.**

(continued...)

One: Hear the good news of the gospel: God will not withhold mercy from us.
The steadfast love and faithfulness of the Lord is with us, now and
forever.

All: **In Jesus Christ, 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 5:13-20

MATTHEW 5:13-20 (various)

¹³ *“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how will it become salty again? It is good for nothing except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.*

¹⁴ *“You are the light of the world. A city that stands on a hill cannot be hidden.*

¹⁵ *Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a basket. Instead, they put it on top of a lampstand, and it shines on everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before people, so that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

¹⁷ *“Do not even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I have not come to do away with them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth disappear, neither the smallest letter nor even the smallest stroke of a pen will disappear from the Law until everything comes to pass. ¹⁹ Therefore, whoever sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I say to you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

Salt. Light.

We've heard it before, yes.

In fact, these may be some of the most familiar and recognizable words of Jesus:

“You are the salt of the earth.”

“You are the light of the world.”

Salt.

It adds flavor to food. One person noted that maybe, in this day and age, we might need to use another image to get the point across; something like “**red hot pepper**” (Douglas Hare, Interpretation series). Or simply “zest.”

Do we add flavor, or zest, to life?

Salt also serves as a preservative. Not for everything in the world, mind you. But a preservative for meat and foods: you know, the stuff that feeds and sustains life. Pretty important stuff.

So how are we preserving that which is important for life? that which sustains life? our life, and others’?

Light.

It illumines. It enlightens. It reveals.

It also helps dispel the darkness, which in its own way brings comfort and a sense of security.

And we too are meant to illumine and enlighten and reveal life, and its truth, and its true way; and in that way, dispel the darkness that hides its own threats and treachery, and seeks to diminish life and squelch life and snuff it out.

Salt. Light.

We’ve heard it before, I know.

And, yes, I would affirm that we can affirm (this weekend in particular) that Martin Luther King, Jr. certainly served as salt and light for his time and day, and people and country and world.

Oh yes, he had his “impurities,” we might say. But he certainly flavored and preserved life, even as he lost his. And he certainly illumined and enlightened, and dispelled darkness, by his manner and his words and his way.

But, you know, I’ve often wondered about that “losing its taste” business.

Can salt really lose its saltiness?

Some have pointed out that what passed for salt in those times often was not pure salt, but impure, mixed together with other materials. And, as salt is readily water soluble, it could be that, in the presence of moisture – say, through humidity – the real salt might be leached out of what passed for salt (Connections series). So that it certainly might appear that salt – or what passed for salt – had lost its saltiness.

And there may be something to that as we ponder. Might it be that our saltiness could be lost when life and its troubles, and pressures and stresses and temptations, wash over us, thereby leaching out of us that which constitutes our saltiness, our zest?

On the other hand, though, real salt does not lose its saltiness. That taste, that flavor, that saltiness is of the essence of what salt is. If there is no saltiness, then you do not have salt...and maybe you never did.

But remember: Jesus did not say, “You can be salt if...” No. He said, “*You ARE the salt of the earth.*” He affirms that’s what you are; that’s who you are.

And remember who he’s addressing. He’s speaking to those who have been following him, maybe simply out of curiosity, maybe out of something more substantial, like even burgeoning faith.

And he’s describing this life, this way he is inviting them to; this way of life, this way of being he presents to them, not only in his words, but also in his own life and way and manner and being.

A way that he has already, in a topsy-turvy sort of way, described as “blessed.” You know, those gentle and meek; those merciful and mourning; those pure in heart and righteous in their hunger and thirst.

He has described them as “blessed.”

He is describing this way of life as “blessed,” because it is God’s way and where God is.

And now he’s saying, this way of life, this manner of being in the world, is like salt for the earth. It provides flavor to a world that is all too often bland and boring. It preserves true life in the midst of so much that seeks to destroy and put down and diminish life.

“*You ARE the light of the world,*” he says.

And he’s saying this way of life, this manner of being in the world, is like light to the whole world. It illumines another possibility – a true, lively, faithful possibility. It enlightens a new day and a new way. It reveals a truth that sets us free and sets us on the path of life and love and all things good. And it shines into the dark corners of the world, and into dark hearts. And it dispels that darkness that even tries to keep the light itself under wraps, so to speak: that darkness that seeks to extinguish and defeat the light. Yet we know, from another gospel writer, that the darkness does not, cannot, and will not extinguish that light (John 1:5).

And in the same breath in which he affirms that we who follow him and seek to embrace him and his way and his life – that we ARE salt and we ARE light, he also challenges us TO BE salt and TO BE light (Eduard Schweizer): to live so that our saltiness impacts our world and makes a difference in the lives of those around us; to live so that our light shines and shines brightly, not to call attention to ourselves, but to display God’s goodness and God’s graciousness, to illumine God’s way for others and point to – and even embody – God’s presence in the world; and so to dispel the darkness that seeks to assert that God is no good and God is dead and gone.

And we are to be that salt and to be that light together.

One person noted that this is a community calling and challenge. Salt for the earth. Light to the world. “**Such a task,**” writes Douglas Hare,

cannot be accomplished by independent individuals. It is one we must work at together. (Interpretation series)

Today we (ordain and) install officers for our congregations. And the all-too-often default perspective is that the officers get to do everything, and do our work and fulfill our ministry.

But that is not the case. In the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in particular, we acknowledge that officers do have particular tasks and functions to which they are called. But

that in no way means they are intended (or even equipped) to do all the ministry of the church: all the salty and light-y work. No!

If we are to be salt for the earth, we are to be salt together – all of us.

If we are to be light to the world, we are to be light together – all of us.

Finally, what's this about the Law and the prophets that Jesus says?

It's almost as if Jesus is engaging in a pre-emptive strike against the accusations he knows are coming: accusations that this way of his, this life of his, this good news and gospel he proclaims – accusations that in all of this, he seeks to set aside and do away with the Law and the prophets, the Torah of the people, the instruction for life.

But Jesus is emphatic:

“Do not even begin to think that I have come to do away with the Law and the prophets.”

But the interpretation that they know and rely on – that's another thing.

The interpretation that is so ingrained in their minds and hearts – that interpretation and understanding of the Law and prophets – that interpretation he may definitely do away with. But the Torah itself? The Law and the prophets themselves? No. He has come, not to set them aside, but to fulfill them, to complete them: to interpret them fully and completely and rightly in light of God's goodness and grace, in light of God's work and will. And who better to do that than him?

And believe you me, that affirmation of his will be severely tested in some of the next words he says.

But that is for another time: next week is the plan.

As for now, as for this week, as for us here, today – I believe our pondering being the salt of the earth...that is enough for us to chew on, so to speak.

And our pondering being the light of the world...that is enough to illumine our path. And hopefully for us to do the same for others as well.

***HYMN** “Bring Forth the Kingdom” StF 2190 (*Verses 1-3*)

1. *Leader:* You are salt for the earth, O people:

***All:* Salt for the Kingdom of God!**

Leader: Share the flavor of life, O people:

***All:* Life in the Kingdom of God!**

Refrain:

**Bring forth the Kingdom of mercy,
bring forth the Kingdom of peace;
bring forth the Kingdom of justice,
bring forth the City of God!**

(continued...)

2. *Leader:* You are a light on the hill, O people:
All: Light for the City of God!
Leader: Shine so holy and bright, O people:
All: Shine for the Kingdom of God! Refrain:
3. *Leader:* You are a seed of the Word, O people:
All: Bring forth the Kingdom of God!
Leader: Seeds of mercy and seeds of justice,
All: grow in the Kingdom of God! Refrain:

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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.
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)

ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION OF OFFICERS

- One: "There are varieties of gifts."
All: **"But it is the same Spirit who gives them."**
One: "There are varieties of service."
All: **"But it is the same Lord who is served."**
One: "There are varieties of working."
All: **"But it is the same God who inspires them all in every one."**
One: "Each one is given a gift by the Spirit..."
All: **"...To use it for the common good."**
One: "Together we are the body of Christ..."
All: **"...And individually members of him."**

(from I Corinthians 12)

Constitutional Questions to Officers

Constitutional Questions to the Congregation

Do we, the members of the church, accept these people as ruling elders, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ?

Do we agree to pray for them, to encourage them, to respect their decisions, and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone is Head of the Church?

The Laying On of Hands

Prayer

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

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

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*

Generous God, we offer our gifts in gratitude for all we have received. Use them to strengthen the ministry of your church to meet the needs of your children. May our offerings bear witness to your love made known to us in Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Lord, the Light of Your Love Is Shining” GtG 192
(Shine, Jesus, Shine)

**1. Lord, the light of your love is shining,
in the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us;
set us free by the truth you now bring us.
Shine on me; shine on me.**

Refrain:

**Shine, Jesus, shine;
fill this land with the Father’s glory.
Blaze, Spirit, blaze;
set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow;
flood the nations with grace and mercy.
Send forth your word, Lord,
and let there be light.**

**2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
from the shadows into your radiance;
by the blood I may enter your brightness.
Search me; try me; consume all my darkness.
Shine on me; shine on me.**

Refrain:

(continued...)

**3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
so our faces display your likeness;
ever changing from glory to glory,
mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me; shine on me.**

Refrain:

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...**Amen.**

POSTLUDE

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