

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2022

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

33rd SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on Psalm 136)*

One: "O give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good!"
All: **"Whose steadfast love endures forever!"**
One: To the Creator of all peoples near and far, let us give thanks!
All: **To the Giver of all good gifts, let us give thanks!**
One: To the Source of our life and salvation, let us give thanks!
All: **God's steadfast love endures forever!**
Unison: **Come, let us worship the Lord our God!**

***OPENING HYMN** "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" GtG 475

1. **Come, thou Fount of every blessing;
tune my heart to sing thy grace;
streams of mercy, never ceasing,
call for songs of loudest praise.
Teach me some melodious sonnet,
sung by flaming tongues above;
praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
mount of God's unchanging love!**

2. **Here I raise my Ebenezer;
hither by thy help I'm come;
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,
safely to arrive at home.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
wandering from the fold of God;
he, to rescue me from danger,
interposed his precious blood.**

(continued...)

3. **O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart; O take and seal it;
seal it for thy courts above.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O Lord, forgive us, your wayward children. We acknowledge the harm that we have done, and the good we have failed to do. We turn from your ways and ignore your call. We follow our own desires and have confidence that we know what's best for us. Forgive us, O God. Guide us in your truth, and teach us the way to go. Remind us of your grace to us. Teach us to rely upon you. Make us quick to forgive and slow to judge. Mold us into your people – trusting, obedient, and loving – that we may love and serve you well. For it is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from II Corinthians 5)*

One: The good news is this: that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to God, not counting our sins against us.”
All: **God's promises are sure, and God's faithfulness is from generation to generation.**
One: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” So rejoice and be glad.
All: **For we are forgiven and reconciled by the grace of Jesus Christ. Salvation is here! 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 Luke 19:1-10

LUKE 19:1-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. ² A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. ⁷ All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." ⁸ Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." ⁹ Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham." ¹⁰ For the Son of Humankind came to seek out and to save the lost."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "That Silly Little Man Up There In the Tree" by Pastor Bill Vincent
(a dramatic monologue)

Did you see that man up there in the tree this morning? Boy, didn't he look ridiculous. No respectable person would be caught dead shinnying up a tree in public, let alone in full view of a crowd. But then again, he's not a respectable person. That was Zacchaeus, you see. He's with the RRS: the Roman Revenue Service. He's the chief tax collector for this area. So of course he's not a respectable character.

To tell the truth, he's actually in cahoots with the enemy, the Romans, those people who rule over us and make us hostage even in our own country. Why, by consorting with the enemy, he's sold his birthright as a child of Abraham, the father of our faith.

I'm not a real fan of Zacchaeus as you can probably tell. Take last year for instance. He charged me 2 pounds for my taxes. Can you believe that? 2 pounds! That's one half what I make in a year. And when I balked at paying it, he sent some of his heavies over to make sure that I did pay it... plus a little bit of interest: an extra 6 denarii – a whole other week's worth of pay. All that money. And I know the Romans didn't ask that much from him. I just know it. It's his way of lining his own pocket. That's what all those tax collectors do. They're the scum of the earth. They don't deserve spit. They don't deserve

But you're not interested in my personal tirade against Zacchaeus, now are you? You asked me what happened. So let me get on with that story.

Jesus was in town. Jesus himself. We had heard about him, and even my neighbor, Timothy, had seen him up in Galilee when he went to visit his sister. Timothy told me some wonderful stories of Jesus' teaching and sharing about God, and even performing miracles. Timothy had never seen anything like it. Of course, there were some people who didn't like Jesus and tried to talk him down, some of the scribes and Pharisees. But they never won. Jesus was always one up on them.

Well, needless to say, I was more than just a tad bit interested in seeing this Jesus and hearing him for myself. In fact, I was rather excited when I heard he was in town – I and a lot of other folk. We had crowded around him and were straining to hear what he had to say. I happened to be kind of in the back of the crowd, when I sensed a mild stir amidst those of us in back. When I turned, who should I see but Zacchaeus – our friendly, neighborhood tax collector – himself trying to get a look at Jesus. Was he going to demand 6 denarii from Jesus, too? Actually it was kind of fun. Here was short, little Zacchaeus, jumping up and down, trying to steal a peek at Jesus. So those of us in back, kind of by unspoken agreement, did our best to get in his way: pushing him back, standing in front of him, blocking his sight in any way we could. It was a cheap shot, maybe. But he deserved it. And it certainly made my day.

Well, Zacchaeus gave up after a while, and I could get back to paying attention to what Jesus was saying. He had started to walk now, but the crowd was as tightly packed as ever. None of us noticed where we were headed. We were too intent on hearing Jesus. And none of us noticed toward whom we were headed – till it was too late.

Before anyone was really aware of what was going on, there we were, under that big, old sycamore tree on the west side of town. Jesus stopped and looked up into the tree. We all did. And what should we see but Zacchaeus, sitting up there in that tree. Like I said, no respectable person would be caught dead in a tree like that. All of us in the crowd burst out laughing when we saw him up there, his short legs dangling around a limb.

But just as quickly as we burst out laughing, we stopped and were caught up short. What was that Jesus was saying? “I’m going to stay at your house”? “Zacchaeus come down, I’m going to stay at your house”? How could he? Didn’t Jesus know who he was talking to? Surely someone had told him, and if not before, surely someone told him now. No rabbi worth his weight in salt would set foot in the house of a tax collector, let alone address him in public.

But that’s what happened. Zacchaeus came down and was obviously overjoyed at Jesus’ self-invitation. But the crowd was stunned. We couldn’t believe our eyes and ears.

As they were leaving – and Jesus, with his disciples, and Zacchaeus left by themselves, no one went with them – as they were leaving, people began to talk among themselves at this scandal, and some people even booed and hissed as they headed for the house of that sinner.

What a shocker. What a disappointment. This Jesus was supposed to be so great. But one thing like that can really show you someone’s true colors. He can be no prophet, no real rabbi – not after seeing him head off all cozy and friendly with Zacchaeus. That Jesus is something else; I don’t know what, but he’s something else.

But I have heard something of what happened at Zacchaeus’s house ... and it astounds me. My friend Timothy knows one of the servants in Zacchaeus’s house, and she told us the most incredible story of what happened.

Zacchaeus and Jesus were eating together, and Zacchaeus finally found his tongue and pledged to Jesus that he would give half of his possessions to the poor, and anyone whom he had defrauded he would repay them fourfold. Can you believe that? I couldn’t. But then, later in the day, a messenger came to me from Zacchaeus with an apology. And not only that, but he also paid me: paid me close to 8 pounds, 2 year’s wage.

I have always looked at Zacchaeus as one who had sold his own birthright as a child of Abraham by virtue of being a tax collector. But from what I hear, and from what I see, it's almost as if Jesus sees him through different eyes. *"He too is a son of Abraham,"* the servant reported Jesus as saying.

And something else. *"Today salvation has come to this house."* Salvation. God's deliverance of the people. Wow! It's what we all long for.

I wonder. I, too, am beginning to see Zacchaeus through different eyes. His curiosity about Jesus and the lengths to which he was willing to go – jumping up and down behind a hostile crowd, climbing up that tree – they almost have a child-like quality about them. And as I say that, I remember that my friend Timothy told me that Jesus once said that we must become like little children to enter God's kingdom. I have heard of a proverb that says that curiosity killed the cat. This time it seems that curiosity has saved the cat.

I look at the purse of money Zacchaeus gave me to pay me back. And I confess that my first thought was to buy all the things I've ever wanted and then some. But then I think of Zacchaeus and what he said: "half of what I possess I will give to the poor." Our scriptures tell us of God's great love for the poor among us. I may not be the richest person I know. But my family and I, we get along and manage fairly well. But Jeremiah and his family down the street? They don't have very much at all. And they seem to be scratching for food and simple existence all the time. Maybe I'll share some of my new-found fortune with them. It seems like the right thing to do, what God might want me to do.

And I do so long to walk better in God's ways. I know I'm not the best person I could be. Hey, look: I obviously misjudged Zacchaeus. We all did. But is he any more a sinner than I am? Am I in any less need of salvation than he is?

I wonder. The news of God's kingdom, this salvation sounds so exciting, so enticing, so wonderful. It is almost as if this deliverance is somehow present in this man Jesus. If he is capable of transforming someone like Zacchaeus, then maybe he can change me for the better.

Oh, what I'd give to have Jesus come visit me: come dine in my house, be a guest under my roof. But look what Zacchaeus did: he made a fool of himself in front of everyone; didn't give a whit for what others might think. Am I willing to go that far, to those lengths?

But see what he gained. Obviously a new lease on life. To have Jesus call him friend. Salvation. Deliverance.

And behold the radical change in his life. How will he explain it to his friends? How will he explain it to his enemies? If he thinks he was misunderstood before, just wait. But it's almost as if he responded not out of painful necessity, but out of such joy that he couldn't help himself. He joyfully, willingly changed his life. He joyfully, willingly gave so much of himself and so much to others in return.

The change is wondrous. And I yearn for that change, too.

Did you see that man up there in the tree? I wonder: if I climbed a tree, would Jesus do the same for me?

***HYMN** “More Like You” StF 2167

**More like you, Jesus, more like you.
Fill my heart with your desire
to make me more like you.
More like you, Jesus, more like you.
Touch my lips with holy fire
and make me more like you.**

**Lord, you are my mercy.
Lord, you are my grace.
All my deepest sins
have forever been erased.
Draw me in your presence.
Lead me in your ways.
I long to bring you glory
in righteousness and praise.**

**More like you, Jesus, more like you.
Fill my heart with your desire
to make me more like you.
More like you, Jesus, more like you.
Touch my lips with holy fire
and make me more like you.**

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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.**

(continued...)

**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 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*

O God, we are all inheritors of your grace. You have blessed us abundantly. As we offer the gifts we have been moved to share, use them to be a blessing to others: to strengthen the ministry of your church, to meet the needs in our community, and to bring us closer to reconciliation and restoration in Jesus Christ. For it is in his name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Into My Heart” StF 2160

- 1. Into my heart, into my heart,
come into my heart, Lord Jesus;
come in today, come in to stay;
come into my heart, Lord Jesus.**
- 2. Out of my heart, out of my heart,
shine out of my heart, Lord Jesus;
shine out today, shine out alway;
shine out of my heart, Lord Jesus.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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