

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FOURTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We approach God in reverence and wonder,
rejoicing in the invitation to holy places.

All: We seek the One who grants us life,

One: Take time to still your hearts.

All: We have left important pursuits to gather here.

One: All that was on your mind as you entered does not matter now. Come to
this quiet place, come to your Heavenly Father who is waiting for you.
Come.

All: We come to offer ourselves in worship to the Lord our God.

***OPENING HYMN** “Come and Find the Quiet Center” StF 2128 [*Tune: GtG 716*]

**1. Come and find the quiet center
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the frame where we are freed:
Clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.**

**2. Silence is a friend who claims us,
cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us,
knows our being, touches base,
making space within our thinking,
lifting shades to show the sun,
raising courage when we're shrinking,
finding scope for faith begun.**

(continued...)

3. In the Spirit let us travel,
open to each other's pain,
let our loves and fears unravel,
celebrate the space we gain:
There's a place for deepest dreaming,
there's a time for heart to care,
in the Spirit's lively scheming
there is always room to spare.

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God, we come seeking your presence and assurance;
yet we know we have not heeded your ways.
We have amassed treasures that are transitory.
We seek acclaim that is temporary.
We hoard your gifts for ourselves
and turn away those in deep need we could help.
We have withheld what is not our own.
We have judged where it was not our place.
We have sinned by what we have done
and what we have failed to do.
Forgive us, gracious, merciful God.
Cleanse us and guide us.
And strengthen us
that we may follow in the way you would have us go.
For me make this and all our prayers
in reliance upon our faithful savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from Psalm 51)*

One: The prayer of the psalmist is our prayer: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."
All: **"Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit."**
One: The good news that the psalmist proclaims and that we know in Jesus Christ is that our God is a God of grace, quick to forgive and ready to recreate in us a heart of faithfulness and a spirit of trust.
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 Matthew 6:1-6,16-24

MATTHEW 6:1-6,16-24 (various)

¹ *“Be careful not to practice your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.*

² *“So whenever you give alms to those in need, do not announce it with a flourish of trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may win the praise of others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give alms to those in need, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your almsgiving may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

⁵ *“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by others. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward in full. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

¹⁶ *“And whenever you fast, do not look gloomy, like the hypocrites, for they make their faces unsightly so that they may be seen by others to be fasting. Truly I say to you, they have received their reward in full. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you may not be seen by others to be fasting, but only by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

¹⁹ *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy them and where thieves break in and steal them, ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys them and where thieves do not break in and steal them. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

²² *“The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be shining. ²³ But if your eye is no good your whole body will be dark. So if the light in you is darkness, how great a darkness that will be.*

²⁴ *“No one can serve two masters, for either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and wealth.”*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

Dear God:

I'm having a hard time with this passage. It seems, in some ways, so simple.

And yet, I can't help but have this feeling that there's something deeper here that I'm missing: something that kind of ties things together and makes sense of it all and gathers all the pieces together into a sensible, powerful, whole.

OK.

I get the introduction: don't make a show of my faith so that others see it. My faith – my relationship with you, seeking to follow you and know you, and live with and for you – the purpose of my faith is not to be seen. Not that I need to be ashamed of my relationship with you. I mean, you did say something about letting my light shine so others would see my good works and give glory to you. But the focus of my relationship with you is supposed to be you and your will and your directive. And even if (or when) any good works I might do, shine so that others give glory to you; still, the purpose is not for ME to be seen, but YOU.

I wonder: is that maybe what's going on here, too?

But getting back to these words we read this morning.

“Don't make a show of my faith. Don't be ostentatious.” It comes off as fake. It comes off as insincere, not genuine.

And then you give these illustrations that focus on what were known as the three major pillars of Judaism in its expression of faith.

And maybe I need to note that, you never say, don't do these things: don't NOT give alms to those in need, don't NOT pray, don't NOT fast. But you are kind of particular about HOW I (and others) would do those things.

Giving alms: giving out of my resources to help those who have little, or none; giving of myself to help another in need. That's a good thing.

However, giving specifically so that others will see it and take notice and (hopefully?) pat me on the back and give me kudos and praise... that's NOT the way to do it. You make that clear with the outlandish picture you paint of someone (even sometimes me?) giving “*with a flourish of trumpets.*” “Hey, look at me! Aren't I so good?”

But noooo, you say. Give to help those in need so that, even in some way, I don't know that I'm doing it: where my left hand doesn't know what my right hand is doing. Is that even possible? Or is it a matter of giving so that it's so much a part of me that it comes naturally and I don't even think about it, or don't think twice about it, but I do it just naturally, almost instinctively. And so, I'm not looking for others to look and see what I'm doing, but I'm doing it because this is what I'm supposed to do and this is part of who I am as a child of God – as your child – responding in kind to another one of your children: to a brother or sister, a member of the family. So of course I'll help them. Of course I'll do it. Attention? Who needs attention? It's simply the right, and kind, and good, thing to do.

Then praying.

I have to confess already that I may be guilty of stringing long prayers together in order to impress people (some might say it's an occupational hazard).

But prayer – real prayer – is a conversation with you. The focus is you. The relationship is with you. The one I am supposed to address is you.

So what's the point of praying so that others are impressed... except as a distraction, or an attempt at self-promotion, which goes totally against what prayer is from the get-go.

But how often have I – we – heard prayers whose words sound so smooth and poetic... “Oooh! Doesn't that sound good! How impressive that is that that person can do that.” And maybe indeed the words and the poetry speak to others and truly communicate that important address to you: the heart of the one praying, the depth of the need, the yearning of the soul. But the point of the prayer is not to win a Pulitzer or to get published and have others fawn on you and tell you how great your prayers are. The point of the prayer is to communicate – to converse – with you: to share the yearnings of the heart and the aching of our lives and the cries for relief and the depths of our souls, and who we are and our longing for you.

And so, maybe it is true, that the best place for such communication and conversation is off in a quiet place somewhere, where it's just you and me, and the focus is clear: you and me, God, talking, sharing, meeting one-on-one, almost face-to-face, in the secret places of my heart and life that only you know.

And then there is fasting.

How often I have heard others “brag” about fasting, say, during Lent: bragging about what they are giving up, as if it is such an impressive sacrifice on their part; and the bigger the sacrifice, the more impressed we're supposed to be.

I would never do that, God, would I?

Yet fasting, even in our day, is intended, not as a call to others for their attention, but as a call to myself for attention: attention to my need for you, my dependence upon you, for life, for breath, for my daily needs (you know, “Give us this day our daily bread”). A discipline to focus on you and my need for you.

And maybe that's the tie-in: what ties everything together.

Focus. You.

Not the attention of others. Not the praise of others. Not gaining points in our social status.

But you. Focus on you.

You said those people who give to those in need “*with a flourish of trumpets,*” and those people who pray so that others will hear, and those people who fast so that others will see and know they are fasting... you said that those people have “*received their reward in full.*”

And their reward is the praise of others, the attention of others, having others think how great and wonderful they are.

But it is not to be so with me, you in essence said.

This praise of others, this high-esteem of others is an earthly treasure. Its value gets eaten away by the moths and rust of time and fickle attention spans and the latest fad which quickly draws people's attention away from us toward something, or someone, else.

But the treasure in heaven... Well, I would say the treasure in heaven is you.

And when I focus on you – when I focus on the treasure in heaven that is you – when that is truly where my heart is and my focus is and my faith is – then I want to give to those in need naturally, because that is where you direct my attention; and knowing your own heart for those in need, I want to reach out to help a brother or sister who is also a child of God, loved and beloved and cared for by you, and so, also by me.

And when I focus on you – when I focus on the treasure in heaven that is you – when that is truly where my heart is and my focus is and my faith is – then my prayer is to you, and my conversation is focused on communing with and getting to know you, and genuinely sharing me with you as I learn and grow in my relationship with you.

And when I focus on you – when I focus on the treasure in heaven that is you – when that is truly where my heart is and my focus is and my faith is – then my fasting serves as an opportunity to open myself up to you, and how you might teach me and what you might show me and how I might learn, on a deeper level, to rely upon you and depend upon you and learn from you and love you.

And you are my focus. For you are my treasure. And you and your will and your life and your heart are where my heart is.

And hopefully, that will make my eye – “*the lamp of my body,*” supposedly – sound, and good, and healthy. So that my body – my whole person – may shine with your goodness and grace and love, for your glory, not mine.

And with this focus – a focus on you – surely I will see the treachery and the sinister temptation of serving or following anything, or anyone, else but you: that not wealth, or prestige, or the praise of others, or even my own self-praise, would be that to which I give my service and time and energy, and my focus and attention; but you, only you.

Is that what it means, Lord?

Is that maybe what this passage and its words mean, for me, and, yes, maybe for others too?

My prayer is simple, O Lord, and I hope genuinely sincere: help me to live my life focused on you: directed by you, working with you, focused on you and your will – on you, only you.

Amen.

So let it be ... in my life ... and in yours.

***HYMN** "Be Thou My Vision" GtG 450 (*Verses 1, 3, & 4*)

**1. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
naught be all else to me, save that thou art;
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.**

**3. Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise;
thou mine inheritance, now and always;
thou and thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art.**

**4. High King of Heaven, my victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**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!"**

**With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: In your mercy...
All: ...Lord, 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*

**For blessing us with the opportunity to give, we pour out our thanks,
O God. For your steadfast love and mercy, we are most grateful. For
drawing us closer to you, we bow in humble praise. Now we dedicate to you
our offering of gratitude, not to be praised by others, but to be used
according to your purposes. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Spirit of God, Descend upon My Heart” GtG 688 (*Verses 1, 3, & 5*)

- 1. Spirit of God, descend upon my heart;
wean it from earth; through all its pulses move;
stoop to my weakness, mighty as thou art,
and make me love thee as I ought to love.**
- 3. Hast thou not bid us love thee, God and King;
all, all thine own, soul, heart, and strength, and mind?
I see thy cross; there teach my heart to cling.
O let me seek thee, and O let me find!**

(continued...)

**5. Teach me to love thee as thine angels love,
one holy passion filling all my frame;
the baptism of the heaven-descended Dove,
my heart an altar, and thy love the flame.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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