

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**FIFTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

- One: The Lord our God, creator of night and day, calls us to come.  
All: **Our Lord and Master, Jesus the Christ, invites us to join in the song.**  
One: Our Guide and Sustainer, the Holy Spirit, beckons us to listen and rejoice.  
All: **So come, let us worship in song and praise, in prayer and thanksgiving.**  
Unison: **Come, let us worship the Lord.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** “For the Beauty of the Earth” GtG 14 (*Verses 1, 2, 4, & 5*)

1. **For the beauty of the earth,  
for the glory of the skies,  
for the love which from our birth  
over and around us lies:  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise.**
  
2. **For the wonder of each hour  
of the day and of the night,  
hill and vale, and tree and flower,  
sun and moon, and stars of light:  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise.**
  
4. **For the joy of human love,  
brother, sister, parent, child,  
friends on earth, and friends above,  
for all gentle thoughts and mild:  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise.**

*(continued...)*

5. For thyself, best gift divine  
to the world so freely given;  
for that great, great love of thine,  
peace on earth and joy in heaven:  
Lord of all, to thee we raise  
this our hymn of grateful praise.

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#### UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy and Merciful God,  
you alone know us fully.  
You know the sins we hide from others:  
the unkind thought,  
the unspoken word of grace,  
the helping hand not offered.  
You alone know how we  
harbor jealousies and resentments;  
hoard resources for ourselves;  
and hold onto prejudices, judging others.  
Our possession have become more important to us  
than your approval.  
We worry a lot rather than  
trusting you and seeking to be good citizens of your realm.  
Forgive us and draw us back to yourself.  
Shine into our lives your marvelous light  
that we might embrace life as you intend.  
remembering always your tender mercy for us, and for all.  
In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

#### SILENT CONFESSION

##### ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Even when we fail, even when we are not perfect, God still claims us. God still calls us by name. God still places God's Spirit upon us.  
All: **We are held with love in God's hands.**  
One: In Jesus Christ we are known and loved, forgiven and made new.  
All: **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 6:19-34

MATTHEW 6:19-34 (various)

<sup>19</sup> *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy them and where thieves break in and steal them. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

<sup>22</sup> *“The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be shining. <sup>23</sup> 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.*

<sup>24</sup> *“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.”*

<sup>25</sup> *“Therefore, I say to you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds in the sky. They do not sow or reap or store away in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they? <sup>27</sup> And who among you by being anxious can add a single moment to your life? <sup>28</sup> And why be anxious about clothes? Notice how the lilies in the field grow. They do not wear themselves out with work, and they do not spin cloth. <sup>29</sup> But I say to you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> If that is how God dresses grass in the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will not God do much more for you, you people of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the gentiles strive for all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But strive first for the kingdom and its righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

<sup>34</sup> *“Therefore, do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”*

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

Again, it seems so simple.

And yet...?

“Do not be anxious,” Jesus says.

Many translations say, “Do not worry.”

I am reminded of the greeting of so many angels, “Do not be afraid.”

Yet we are afraid.  
We hear the assertion that God provides.  
Yet we see so much that contradicts that assertion.  
Douglas Hare puts it rather bluntly:

**it is not true to say that all birds are adequately fed and that all lilies reach their fullest beauty. Droughts and other catastrophes cut short the lives of both birds and flowers as well as of humans who trust in God. It simply is not the case that those who seek first the kingdom of God find invariably that all things necessary for life are added to them.** (Interpretation series, p.74)

It is a conundrum: We hear the assertion that God provides; yet we see so many instances – perhaps even our own – where that is not always the case.

How do we address this conundrum?

One way possibly to address this conundrum is to recognize that most all of the verbs used in this text are second person plural. But that may be difficult to catch at first.

You see, one of the difficulties of the English language is distinguishing the second person singular – ‘you’ – and the second person plural – ‘you’. As my Latin professor in college used to do: when he wanted the singular ‘you’, he’d say simply ‘you’; when he wanted the plural, he’d say ‘y’all’.

Most of the words Jesus uses in this address to the disciples and the crowd are to ‘y’all’: “Y’all don’t be anxious”; “Y’all look at the birds in the sky.”

So yes, these words are addressed to ‘y’all’, to us, to everyone.

God provides for us all.

But how does God provide for us all?

One clear, obvious way God provides for us all is by the beauty and abundance of planet earth. There are sufficient resources in this world, on this planet, to provide for everyone.

Unfortunately we haven’t done a very good job sharing those resources or distributing those resources equitably. We have hoarded those resources for ourselves. We have misused them and abused them. We have mismanaged them. And yes, sometimes we have turned our backs on those resources and refused them because they are not to our liking: they are not what we want or expected.

But God has provided this world, this planet, with its many resources and its abundance. And so God has sought to feed us and clothe us. So, yes, God does provide for us all.

But the fact that there are many who, at any time, do not experience that provision – who do not enjoy access to the necessary abundance and resources – is... well, that may be on us, not God.

Another way to address our conundrum of the assertion of God’s providing with the experience of not...

...we might think of these words metaphorically.

In other words, perhaps when Jesus speaks of God’s feeding the birds in the sky and clothing the flowers in the field, Jesus is not (necessarily) speaking physically, but perhaps he’s speaking to us in metaphors, with images.

So that part of the response to the questions, “‘*What are we to eat?*’ or ‘*What are we to drink?*’ or ‘*What are we to wear?*’” may be ‘Drink of the Spirit’, ‘Feast upon the Word’, and ‘Clothe yourselves with love’.

And yes, I would definitely affirm that, indeed, God has provided an abundance of that nourishment for our souls with the bread of life [--indicate the communion table--] -- the Word of God -- and an abundance of drink to slake the thirst of our hearts with the outpouring of the Spirit; and an abundance of covering for our lives in the grace and love of God.

However, the words and imagery Jesus uses are too earthy and concrete and everyday ... what Jesus says seems too down-to-earth for it to be solely metaphorical. In my estimation (and others’ as well), there has to be at least some material component to it. So that the feeding of the birds refers to actual physical food for the stomach, and the drink for others refers to actual water – and fresh water at that – and the adornment of the flowers refers to actual clothes for us, and even for those who all too often have little or none.

Yet another way to address our conundrum of the assertion of God’s providing with the experience of not providing...

...is to remember its immediate context: “*You cannot serve both God and wealth,*” Jesus says, “*Therefore, do not be anxious.*”

Not to dismiss wealth entirely.

We have to admit nowadays – and yes, in Jesus’ day as well – food mostly cannot be had without wealth of some sort; neither can drink, or clothing for that matter.

Yet we are charged to serve God and God alone, to focus solely on God.

Not to suggest that food and drink and clothing do not matter. But there is a crucial prioritizing going on here.

To “serve wealth,” as Jesus speaks of it, is to allow our focus, our priority, the center of our life to be going after and securing and protecting and having and hoarding stuff, things, money: wealth, however it is seen in any particular culture. And to “serve wealth” is to assume that this stuff, these things can, and will, suffice for us and protect us, and secure us and our lives.

And I think, deep down, we all know that’s not true – even though our choices and our decisions may suggest otherwise.

The truth is to serve anything, or anyone else, as ‘god’, is ultimately to be disappointed. For anything or anyone else besides God only takes and takes and takes.

Whereas God – the God we know as Jesus addresses the disciples and the crowd – God gives and gives and gives. Remember those birds in the sky? those lilies in the fields? And in God’s giving, God sustains us and provides for us, and gives us life.

Any other way – any other choice, any other ‘god’ – takes the very life out of us.

And so, yes, at its very ultimate – at its deepest level – God and God alone feeds us and satisfies our thirst and clothes us, and gives and protects and provides for our life.

Still, in some ways, we are left with our conundrum: the assertion that God provides; the evidence that calls that assertion into question.

And maybe we have not answered or solved or resolved our conundrum.

But maybe there is a way to face – and even live through – our conundrum with an affirmation, a plea, and a challenge.

An affirmation: look and see how wondrously God provides. The birds in the sky. The lilies in the field. The wondrous beauty and bounty of creation: “For the Beauty of the Earth.” So we sing God’s praises for providing all this wonder and beauty and provision in creation.

And, by the way, perhaps I should be more careful with this wondrous creation that God so graciously provides in order to provide for me...and you, and y’all, and us. Perhaps I should put a lot more effort into taking care of this world, that it might take care of me, and others.

And in that affirmation there is embedded an implicit plea.

For I am still anxious and worried, and afraid. And I see where others, and sometimes myself, do not seem to be provided for. And I worry. And I wonder: can, does, will God provide for me?

So there is this longing, this yearning, this need that cries out: “O Lord, provide!...please!” “O God, be good to your word and your promise...and your provision.”

And yes, God hears that plea. And God honors that prayer.

And, by the way, perhaps I should do what I can to help God and work with God to provide for others so that they, too, can enjoy God’s provision and creation’s abundance. And remember, too – an important note – that the birds still have to fly and catch the food, and the lilies still have to stretch out toward the sun and grow. As one person noted, Jesus never told the farmer to stop sowing or stop planting or stop harvesting (Peter Rhea Jones, *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew, Volume 1*). So, perhaps too, I could do a thing or two to help things along by way of providing for others and myself.

And finally, I am left with a challenge: Will I trust God to provide? Will I live, trusting that, in some way, through some means, God will provide for me and my needs and my life? ...though not necessarily in the way or manner that I expect or, quite honestly, want.

And part of this challenge may include another plea: that God would open my eyes – and heart – to see where and how God is providing for me.

But still the challenge – which also in its way is an invitation.

Will I seek first and foremost the kingdom – God’s kingdom – and its righteousness? Will I focus first of all on God’s work and God’s way, God’s call and God’s claim? And trust that somehow, in some way, all the rest will fall into place...by God’s grace and mercy. And all that frantic work I do to secure my future and the next meal – bring them down a notch or two or three or four, and put them in their proper place and proper order; as I serve God and God alone, and not wealth or stuff or prestige or position or any other so-called ‘god’ – i.e., earthly treasure – which always, always, always inevitably disappoints; and thus seek heavenly treasure – in other words, you, O God – in all things, in all ways, in all times.

And in those times when I have difficulty believing – or seeing – God’s provision, maybe another prayer is due: God, will you please help me see, believe, and trust that you will provide.

And yes, I believe, God will.

**\*HYMN** "His Eye Is on the Sparrow" StF 2146

**1. Why should I feel discouraged?  
Why should the shadows come?  
Why should my heart be lonely  
and long for heaven and home,  
When Jesus is my portion?  
My constant friend is he: ...**

*(refrain)* **His eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know he watches me;  
his eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know he watches me.  
I sing because I'm happy,  
I sing because I'm free,  
for his eye is on the sparrow,  
and I know he watches me.**

**2. "Let not your heart be troubled,"  
his tender word I hear,  
and resting on his goodness,  
I lose my doubts and fears;  
though by the path he leadeth  
but one step I may see: ... *(refrain)***

**3. Whenever I am tempted,  
whenever clouds arise,  
when song gives place to sighing,  
when hope within me dies,  
I draw the closer to him,  
from care he sets me free: ... *(refrain)***

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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.**

*(continued...)*

**Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,  
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,  
God is faithful still.**

**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:** Present, powerful God...

**All:** ...provide for us, and prepare us for your way.

### **THE EUCHARIST**

#### **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Abundant God,**

**we strive for many things  
and worry over much.**

**Help us to put our trust in you,  
knowing that you care for us  
in life and in death.**

**Turning from commodities  
toward your kingdom,**

**we offer our gifts for your use,  
seeking your righteousness first and foremost  
today**

**and tomorrow**

**and forever.**

**In Christ's name. 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* (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.**

*Breaking of the Bread*

*Communion of the People*

(With the passing of the bread, please wait until all have been served so that all may partake together, reflecting our unity in Christ.)

**Sing "Feed Us, Lord" GtG 501**

**1. Feed us, Lord.  
Feed us, Lord.  
In the broken bread,  
be revealed again.  
Come and feed our hearts, O Lord.**

**2. Quench us, Lord.  
Quench us, Lord.  
On this thirsty ground,  
may your love flow down.  
Come and quench our hearts, O Lord.**

(With the passing of the cup, please partake as soon as received as an expression of our personal relationship with Christ.)

**3. Fill us, Lord.  
Fill us, Lord,  
with the bread and wine  
of the risen Christ.  
Come and fill our hearts, O Lord.**

**4. Lead us, Lord.  
Lead us, Lord,  
nourished here by Christ,  
given strength for life.  
Come and lead our hearts, O Lord.**

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*Prayer*

### **SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “For the Fruit of All Creation” GtG 36

**1. For the fruit of all creation,  
thanks be to God.  
For the gifts to every nation,  
thanks be to God.  
For the plowing, sowing, reaping,  
silent growth while we are sleeping,  
future needs in earth's safekeeping,  
thanks be to God.**

**2. In the just reward of labor,  
God's will be done.  
In the help we give our neighbor,  
God's will be done.  
In our worldwide task of caring  
for the hungry and despairing,  
in the harvests we are sharing,  
God's will be done.**

*(continued...)*

**3. For the harvests of the Spirit,  
thanks be to God.  
For the good we all inherit,  
thanks be to God.  
For the wonders that astound us,  
for the truths that still confound us,  
most of all that love has found us,  
thanks be to God.**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**\*RESPONSE** “Seek Ye First” GtG 175 (*Verse 1*)

**Seek ye first the kingdom of God  
and its righteousness,  
and all these things shall be added unto you.  
Allelu, alleluia!**

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**POSTLUDE**

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