

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SIXTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Steady our steps, O God, as we travel the journey set before us.
All: **Let us walk in the way of light and pursue the path of peace.**
One: Keep us on your course of life as we seek to be faithful;
All: **as we love our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds,**
One: and love our neighbors as ourselves.
All: **And as we gather to praise you, our faithful Lord and God.**

***OPENING HYMN** “Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me” GtG 703

1. **Jesus, thy boundless love to me
no thought can reach, no tongue declare;
O knit my thankful heart to thee,
and reign without a rival there!
Thine wholly, thine alone, I'd live;
myself to thee entirely give.**
2. **O grant that nothing in my soul
may dwell, but thy pure love alone;
O may thy love possess me whole,
my joy, my treasure, and my crown!
All coldness from my heart remove;
may every act, word, thought be love.**
3. **O Love, how gracious is thy way!
All fear before thy presence flies;
care, anguish, sorrow melt away
where'er thy healing beams arise.
O Jesus, nothing may I see,
nothing desire, or seek, but thee.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God, you have forgiven us many times. Still we wander away from you, seeking to live for ourselves. We depend on our own cunning rather than on your direction. We flex our muscles instead of relying on your mercy. We boast of our accomplishments rather than your generous provision for us. Forgive us, we pray. Turn our hearts to your intentions that we may hold fast to one another and draw near to your presence. In Christ's name we pray. Amen

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from I John 4)*

One: "In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent the Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven."

All: **"God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent the only Son into the world so that we might live through him."**

One: So rejoice and be glad and believe in the good news!

All: **For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved, we are given new life. Amen! Alleluia!**

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 7:12-29

MATTHEW 7:12-29 (various)

¹² "Therefore, in everything, whatever you would wish that others would do for you, thus you also do for them; for this is the law and the prophets.

¹³ "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴ How narrow is the gate and constricted the road that leads to life, and there are few people who find it.

¹⁵ "Be on your guard against false prophets, who come to you dressed up as sheep while underneath they are savage wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but the rotten tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot produce bad fruit. And a rotten tree cannot produce good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ So then, you will know them by their fruits.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name, and perform many mighty deeds in your name?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you people who do wrong.’

²⁴ “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it collapsed with a great crash.”

²⁸ Now when Jesus finished these words, the crowds were astounded at his teaching ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Foundation, Root...and Key” by Pastor Bill Vincent

There’s a connection between the foundation and the house, as there is a connection between the root and the fruit.

And that foundation and that root is Christ and his words and his teaching: a foundation that is solid and strong; a root that is nurturing and sustaining.

We are called to have Jesus and his words and his way become a part of us so that it is on this foundation our lives are built and from this root our lives grow.

And always, always, always made real and visible in action, behavior, doing: in how we live and how we are in the world.

For simple, shallow, superficial lip service will not do.

You know, saying simply, ‘Lord, Lord.’ Yet our actions deny what we say and claim.

There is an understanding that runs throughout the Bible, that to hear God’s word is to obey God’s word. If I truly hear and understand, then I will obey them. Therefore, if I do not obey them, then I have not truly heard them, or understood.

And the Apostle Paul may help us in understanding here. For at first it seems like prophesying and casting out demons and mighty deeds are good things (v.22), and yet Jesus says, “Get away from me, you people who do wrong.” As Paul says, “And if I have prophetic powers” – so that I might indeed prophesy – “and [if I] understand all mysteries and all knowledge” – and so perhaps even cast out demons – “and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains” – certainly a mighty deed – “but do not have love, I am nothing” (I Cor.13:2 NRSV).

Love is the key. And love is the connection. Love as we see it and hear it, know and experience and (even) relate to it in Jesus Christ.

So that, if I do not have love – if I do not demonstrate love in my life and my choices – then Jesus will be justified in saying, *“I never knew you.”* Harsh words, maybe. But will they be true words demonstrated in our actions...or inaction? For *“you will know them by their fruits.”*

Remember how we started out this morning:

“Therefore, in everything, whatever you would wish that others would do for you, thus you also do for them.”

That verse is a fairly literal translation of what we have come to know as ‘The Golden Rule’ – “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” – which we tend to think of as a very good piece of advice. However, as Douglas Hare (Interpretation series, p.80) points out, this ‘Golden Rule’ can be terribly misconstrued. For if what I want for others to do for me is not to snitch on the illegal activities in which I am engaged... well, I don’t think that’s exactly what Jesus had in mind. The proper understanding of this ‘Golden Rule’ is dependent upon its context. And immediately before Jesus speaks this ‘Golden Rule’, he has shared this wondrous picture of God and God’s giving:

7 “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask!” (7:7-11 NRSV)

The grace, the generosity (the magnanimity) of God toward us. The love of God for us.

And remember, we are to *“be perfect”* – whole, full, complete – *“as your heavenly Father is perfect”* (5:48 NRSV) ...in love.

Love is the foundation of Jesus’ words and teaching, his life and his way; and the root out of which all else grows.

So we look back over the Sermon on the Mount through this lens, and we see that the Sermon on the Mount is not a new program: it is not “The new and improved Ten Commandments, now with fewer ‘Thou shalt not’s and more ‘Yes, you can!’”

The Sermon on the Mount is not another list of regulations.

But a picture of life: a serious picture, and a wonderful one. Where those who mourn are comforted, and where even the enemy receives the benefit and the care of the rain and sunshine...even when we be the enemy.

The Sermon on the Mount also serves as an invitation: a serious one – one we need to take seriously; but also a wonderful one – an invitation to a new way of life, an invitation to true life.

A serious picture. A serious invitation.

And not easy. For the gate is narrow and the road constricted, and there are few who find it. But for those who search – who seek and strive for and take this search and this picture and this invitation seriously – *“search, and you shall find”* (7:7 NRSV) ...or perhaps be found by.

But this searching, this seeking, embracing this picture and this invitation... well they can be exhausting.

And Jesus knows that.

Later on in his ministry, he will issue another – related – invitation:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30 NRSV)

I think all too often we hear those words and think, “Great, every burden will be taken off my shoulder.” But no: there’s a yoke. The yoke of discipleship, of his teaching and guidance, and his way of life, his way. A yoke whose shape appears an awful lot like a cross. Yet also a yoke that provides rest for our souls.

He’s serious.

So simply giving lip service to the invitation will not do.

Commitment is needed. Real commitment. Full bodied, and fully embodied, commitment.

All in: heart, mind, and soul and strength.

“And you will know them by their fruits.”

And truth is, we too will be known by our fruits.

Which seems like a burden again: that angst, that anxiety; those high expectations that we’re not sure we’re up to.

The foundation of his words and his teaching and his life is awesome.

And the root of his way and his life with us is incredible.

And the key to it all is in the living – living it out, and living out of it – embracing this way of life pictured so wondrously, and answering this call willingly, accepting this invitation eagerly.

Living out of the very life that issues the invitation in the first place.

And so, living out of love – his love.

Love – his love – as the foundation of all that we do and all that we are.

Love – his love – as the root that feeds us and nurtures us, sustains us and encourages us to grow and to reach out and to reach up to bear the fruits of this love and to share the fruits of this love.

And on the foundation of this love our lives will stand – in life and in death – because his love will stand...always.

And on any other Sunday of the year, I might have been able to end with those words.
But not this Sunday, not this week.

For the pictures of crumbled buildings in Turkey and Syria are a marked – and potentially dangerous – contrast to the image of a house built on the rock that does not fall.

Let us be clear: there is nothing – nothing! – in the devastation of the earthquake to suggest that “those people” have somehow failed morally, whereas we have not.

When will we give up the attitude that “they get what they deserve,” when we know – by the grace of God – that we do not get what we deserve.

The Sermon on the Mount, and all of Jesus’ teaching and all of his life, shows us God reaching out to all of us in love: to embrace the lost and the least, to help the victim and even the victimizer, to sustain and care for and nurture and nudge in compassion and mercy and love.

And if our hearts do not go out to those whose lives have been devastated by the earthquake, then the love we profess seems superficial.

And if our hands do not reach out to them – in some way, in some real way that makes a difference – then the Lord we confess has been denied...by us.

We know and have experienced the love of God from which nothing in life or in death, nothing that happens today or tomorrow – from which nothing can separate us (see Romans 8:38-39).

We are called to share that very same love with others in the choices we make and the decisions that guide us and the life we live.

Is this the fruit by which the world will know us?

***HYMN** “Spirit, Open My Heart” GtG 692

Refrain: **Spirit, open my heart
to the joy and pain of living.
As you love may I love,
in receiving and in giving.
Spirit, open my heart.**

**1. God, replace my stony heart
with a heart that's kind and tender.
All my coldness and fear
to your grace I now surrender.**

Refrain: **Spirit, open my heart
to the joy and pain of living.
As you love may I love,
in receiving and in giving.
Spirit, open my heart.**

(continued...)

**2. Write your love upon my heart
as my law, my goal, my story.
In each thought, word, and deed,
may my living bring you glory.**

Refrain: **Spirit, open my heart
to the joy and pain of living.
As you love may I love,
in receiving and in giving.
Spirit, open my heart.**

**3. May I weep with those who weep;
share the joy of sister, brother.
In the welcome of Christ,
may we welcome one another.**

Refrain: **Spirit, open my heart
to the joy and pain of living.
As you love may I love,
in receiving and in giving.
Spirit, open my heart.**

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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.**

(continued...)

**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)

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*

**Into your hands, faithful God, we commit our spirits, our substance,
our plans. We offer the best we have to give, in thanks for your abiding love.
Receive the fruit of your mercy and the offerings of our lives. Use our gifts,
and us, to grow your harvest of justice and mercy and love; that we might
proclaim and embody your presence in the world. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Together We Serve” GtG 767

1. Together we serve,
united by love,
inviting God's world
to the glorious feast.
We work and we pray
through sorrow and joy,
extending God's love
to the last and the least.

2. We seek to become
a beacon of hope,
a lamp for the heart
and a light for the feet.
We learn, year by year,
to let love shine through
until we see Christ
in each person we meet.

3. We welcome the scarred,
the wealthy, the poor,
the busy, the lonely,
and all who need care.
We offer a home
to those who will come,
our hands quick to help,
our hearts ready to dare.

4. Together, by grace,
we witness and work,
remembering Jesus,
in whom we grow strong.
Together we serve
in Spirit and truth,
remembering love
is the strength of our song.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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