

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**TRANSFIGURATION SUNDAY**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: With steadfast love, God calls our names.  
All: **We come to find refuge in the shelter of God's ways.**  
One: Feast on the abundance of God's house.  
All: **We come to drink deeply from the fountain of life.**  
One: Reach out to claim the gifts God pours out on us.  
All: **The Spirit is eager to inspire and empower each one of us.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly" GtG 509

1. **All who hunger, gather gladly;  
holy manna is our bread.  
Come from wilderness and wandering.  
Here, in truth, we will be fed.  
You that yearn for days of fullness,  
all around us is our food.  
Taste and see the grace eternal.  
Taste and see that God is good.**
  
2. **All who hunger, never strangers,  
seeker, be a welcome guest.  
Come from restlessness and roaming.  
Here, in joy, we keep the feast.  
We that once were lost and scattered  
in communion's love have stood.  
Taste and see the grace eternal.  
Taste and see that God is good.**
  
3. **All who hunger, sing together;  
Jesus Christ is living bread.  
Come from loneliness and longing.  
Here, in peace, we have been led.  
Blest are those who from this table**

**live their lives in gratitude.  
Taste and see the grace eternal.  
Taste and see that God is good.**

*All Who Hunger Gather Gladly, Text by Sylvia G. Dunstan.  
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### **UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**We come as your people, O God.  
We hunger for you,  
we hunger for grace,  
we hunger for forgiveness.  
When we forget your creation of us,  
or distort your image in us,  
forgive us.  
When we overlook your bounty or abuse it,  
forgive us.  
When we ignore your grace or your call,  
forgive us.  
Reclaim us as your own.  
Renew us in your image.  
And restore us to the joy of your way,  
your word,  
your presence.  
In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

### **SILENT CONFESSION**

#### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

**One:** In the strength of the Lord Almighty we confide.  
**All:** **In the mercy of God we trust.**  
**One:** By the power of God we are restored.  
**All:** **By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we are renewed.**  
**One:** So rejoice and celebrate this day!  
**All:** **For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved, we are given new life. 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 John 2:1-11

JOHN 2:1-11 (New International Version)

<sup>1</sup> On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup> and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

<sup>4</sup> "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

<sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

<sup>6</sup> Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the water jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

<sup>8</sup> Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, <sup>9</sup> and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside <sup>10</sup> and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

<sup>11</sup> What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

#### SERMON "The Best Is ... Now!" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Did the mother of Jesus force his hand?

I find it hard to imagine Jesus as a 30-year-old momma's boy: "Jesus, do this! Jesus, do that!"

The portrait of Jesus in the Gospel of John is someone very much in control of himself, master of his own destiny, making choices, taking action on his own terms, at the appropriate time, not before or after.

Even when he heard about Lazarus' illness, he delayed "two days longer" before going to see him (John 11:6 NRSV).

And when he's in Jerusalem for the final time and some Greeks "wish to see him," then it is when he says, "The hour has come" (John 12:21, 23 NRSV).

Perhaps his mother's statement to the servants – "Do whatever he tells you" – is less forcing Jesus' hand, and far more affirming her faith in him. She believes he can do it. She has confidence in him.

And if signs are for the purpose of revealing Jesus' glory and calling forth faith; then, even before the first sign has been completed, it has fulfilled its purpose: faith has been called forth, for Jesus' mother has faith.

Today we begin a series on the 7 Signs of Jesus as found in the Gospel of John. Seven wondrous works, all of which seem to take place in the midst of a crisis of human need.

Like the death of Lazarus (John 11).

Or someone who, from birth, has been blind...perhaps in more ways than one? (John 9)

When Jesus walks on water, it at first seems only a display of power. Yet he speaks that word, "*Do not fear,*" suggesting the crisis is that of fear (John 6).

We face hunger (also John 6).

And someone who, for 38 years, has been unable to walk...again maybe understood on more than one level of meaning? (John 5)

Then there is the crisis of illness, not just with anyone, but with your own child (John 4).

And then there is our sign this morning: the crisis of human need...for a good time?

Hmmm. I'm not sure about that.

At a wedding in Cana we have our first sign: first in the sequence. But it may also be first in priority so that it sets the stage for the rest.

First, let us discard for good the notion that Jesus was a dour sourpuss, always serious and stern, who never smiled or laughed.

A group called the Fellowship of Merry Christians, publishes the "Joyful Noiseletter" filled with jokes and humor. Their trademark is a painting entitled "The Risen Christ by the Sea" which pictures Jesus with a big smile on his face and a light (twinkle?) in his eyes, looking like he is ready to burst out in a belly laugh at the wondrous joy of life.

Remember he was at a wedding, for goodness sake: a joyous occasion, a celebration. He had been invited, and he went. And I have no doubt he was smiling and laughing and having a good time.

You know, "*The word became flesh and lived among us*" (John 1:14 NRSV). Not simply serious flesh. Not simply "dwelling in the somber corners of life" flesh. But fully flesh, dwelling in all of life, in the tears and in the joy.

Second, let us never forget John's knack for telling the story with great depth in simple language on multiple levels.

On one level, we start with water and end with wine. In the typical process water must be soaked up into the vine to nurture and ripen the grape that becomes the wine. So, in one sense, Jesus simply speeds up the process, conveniently skipping over the step that calls for a grape.

On another level, we start with water for ceremonial washing – rituals for purification – and end with a heavenly feast, the fulfillment of God's reign, often portrayed as a wedding banquet.

Water to wine. Yes.

But so much more.

Jars filled with water for ceremonial washing.

And out of these jars comes the good wine, the best wine, the choice wine...for a heavenly banquet.

Out of the old comes the radically, wondrously new.

And there's a connection between the old and the new.  
Jesus does not discard the old. He transforms it.

Remember as we heard in the Sermon on the Mount:

*"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."* (Matthew 5:17 NRSV)

Paul writes to the Christians in Corinth,

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being.* (II Corinthians 5:17 NRSVue)

I am still me.

But an old part of me is gone, blown away by a breath of fresh air that breathes into me a newness, a vitality, a vibrancy.

Like we will read in the next chapter when Nicodemus comes to Jesus, and Jesus speaks of being "born from above," from the Spirit, giving new life (see John 3:3-8).

Jesus does not erase the previous history of God's people. Or a particular person.  
He transforms it. He enlivens it, infuses it with new life – with his life.

And he does all this "*On the third day*," as our story begins.

We've heard that phrase before, haven't we?

**On the third day he rose again from the dead.** (The Apostles' Creed)

"On the third day": an echo of the resurrection. The characters in the story may not know that, but we do.

What is happening here in this Jesus is something wondrously, graciously, transformatively new – new life.

And not simply new, but now.

Not simply in the far off 'whenever', but now.

Maybe fulfilled in the future: completed, filled full in the future.

But also a newness that can be had and experienced, known and embraced and shared...now.

As John portrays it, we can taste it now in Jesus Christ: snippets of the realm of God – God's presence and God's wondrous work in our lives – a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

Not in anyway shape or form to dismiss or ignore the pain and sorrow, the brokenness and the crush and despair with which we are all too familiar.

But we can see that sign, and know it and experience it in the here and now.

And Paul was familiar with it.

He's sitting in prison, for goodness sake. And from prison, he writes wonderful, joyous words:

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be*

*made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7 NRSV)*

The peace of God that we can know now, even in the midst of prison. That courage, that hope that we can know now, know even in the most despairing of times. That joy and new life that we can know now, even in the most sorrowful of days.

And Paul shares how we can know this:

*In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through the one who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:12-13 NRSV)*

We hear of that water for ceremonial washing, for cleansing...on the outside.  
But when we take the wine and drink it and consume it...it becomes a part of us.  
As Christ becomes a part of us.

That does not negate or deny the notes of sorrow and grief and pain that we can know in our lives.

But even those notes are undergirded and touched by the sound of rejoicing and the song of celebration. And the goodness and newness of life that we know in Christ.

The goodness that we know, that we proclaim, because it is good news about the good Lord and his good life and his good way. Here, now, for us.

A goodness, a wondrous taste of life, that we can share with others as we reach out and take the hand of family and friend and stranger.

A goodness and taste of life that we can know as we reach up to the Lord who reaches down to us and embraces us.

So that even now we can “taste and see that the Lord IS good”! And THAT we celebrate.

For Christ is here!  
Christ has come!  
Christ – the best in life – is now!

**\*HYMN** “Sing of God Made Manifest” GtG 156

**1. Sing of God made manifest  
in a child robust and blest,  
to whose home in Bethlehem  
where a star had guided them,  
magi came and gifts unbound,  
signs mysterious and profound:  
myrrh and frankincense and gold  
grave and God and king foretold.**

**2. Sing of God made manifest  
when at Jordan John confessed,  
“I should be baptized by you,**

but your bidding I will do.”  
Then from heaven a double sign—  
dove-like Spirit, voice divine—  
hailed the true Anointed One:  
“This is my beloved Son.”

3. Sing of God made manifest  
when Christ came as wedding guest  
and at Cana gave a sign,  
turning water into wine;  
further still was love revealed  
as he taught, forgave, and healed,  
bringing light and life to all  
who would listen to God’s call.

4. Sing of God made manifest  
on the cloud-capped mountain’s crest,  
where the law and prophets waned  
so that Christ alone remained:  
glimpse of glory, pledge of grace,  
given as Jesus set his face  
towards the waiting cross and grave,  
sign of hope that God would save.

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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.  
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: God of grace and glory...  
All: ...give us your light and life.

**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*

We give you thanks, O God, for the gifts we have received from the abundant provision of your good creation. Bless our gifts as a sign of our commitment and bless our lives to your service, that they may reveal your glory, nurture faith, and manifest the common good. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** "As the Wind Song" GtG 292

1. As the wind song through the trees,  
as the stirring of the breeze,  
so it is with the Spirit of God,  
as the heart made strangely warm,  
as the voice within the storm,  
so it is with the Spirit of God.  
Never seen, ever known



**where this wind has blown  
bringing life, bringing power  
to the world,  
as the dancing tongues of fire,  
as the soul's most deep desire,  
so it is with the Spirit of God.**

**2. As the rainbow after rain,  
as the hope that's born again,  
so it is with the Spirit of God,  
as the green in the spring,  
as a kite on a string,  
so it is with the Spirit of God,  
making worlds that are new,  
making peace come true,  
bringing gifts, bringing love  
to the world,  
as the rising of the yeast,  
as the wine at the feast,  
so it is with the Spirit of God.**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**POSTLUDE**

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