

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 2023

First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRD SUNDAY in LENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We gather on this day to give thanks and praise...
All: **...to relish the goodness of God**
One: We come to be nurtured and refreshed.
All: **We come to be blessed by the touch of God.**
One: So come, let us worship the Lord our God.

***OPENING HYMN** "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" GtG 65

1. **Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty.
Hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me till I want no more;
feed me till I want no more.**
2. **Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow.
Let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through.
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.**
3. **When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side.**

(continued...)

**Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee;
I will ever give to thee.**

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Words: William Williams, 1762; stanza 1, trans. Peter Williams, 1771; stanzas 2-3, trans. William Williams, 1772
Music: CWM RHONDDA, John Hughes, 1907

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, we come to praise you. We come seeking you. We come in need of your mercy. For though you have called, we have failed to follow. Though you have demonstrated your care, we have sought after other sources of guidance and life. Forgive us gracious God. Return us to you. And turn us again into a people after your own heart -- a people in the image of your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(based on Psalm 103)*

One: The river of God's mercy runs deeper and wider than our sin.
All: **God removes our sins as far as the heavens are above the earth.**
One: Beloved in the risen Christ, we are forgiven.
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 John 6:1-15

JOHN 6:1-15 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. ² A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. ³ Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near. ⁵ When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him,

⁹ “There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?” ¹⁰ Jesus said, “Make the people sit down.” Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. ¹¹ Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, “Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.” ¹³ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, “This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.”
¹⁵ When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Basket Full” by Pastor Bill Vincent

What starts in the wilderness...
...goes through a wasteland...
...and leads to a mountain by the sea...
...to end with baskets full.

It starts in the wilderness: the back story to this story we read in John.

You may remember the people wandering in the wilderness after they have fled from Egypt. And they are hungry. And they have this wondrous experience of God providing for them from this ‘manna’ from heaven. (see Exodus 16)

They cried out in their need and God fed them.

What about our physical needs?

You may remember we read and heard those words from the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus says,

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For...your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.” (Matthew 6:31-32 NRSV)

Our Lord knows. He knows.

And how does he meet our physical needs?

Well, often through the mundane, sometimes through the miraculous.

A group called the Covenant Players had come to a church we were serving. They were sharing their gifts and sharing the message through drama. As they had been traveling around from one church to another, they were getting kind of low on their supplies. And they told a story of rounding the bend, and there in the middle of the road was a loaf of bread. Who woulda thunk of that?

Sometimes that’s the way we experience that sustenance.

Sometimes it’s more subtle, more mundane, more ordinary.

Like that little boy: “I have 5 loaves of bread; I have 2 fish. I’m willing to share.”

Will we?

Through the abundance of the world's resources, our needs are met through miraculous means, yes, and often through simple sharing.

And in that way, our physical hunger is satisfied.

And we are fed.

And our basket is filled.

It starts in the wilderness...

...and goes through a wasteland: the wasteland of exile.

The people had been defeated. They had been uprooted and taken from the only place they had known as home. They had been taken to a foreign land, and from that foreign land, they yearned for something new and different.

They were uprooted. They were scattered.

And yet, even in this wasteland – even in this exile – they heard of hope, with words such as these:

*Ho, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
listen, so that you may live.*

(Isaiah 55:1-3a NRSV)

An invitation to restoration and renewal. An invitation to “*seek the Lord*,” (v.6) to “*return to the Lord*” (v.7).

An invitation to hope.

Having been ripped from their home, they heard the invitation to return to a place they could call home.

But maybe even more so: to a people they could know as home.

That hope spoken of by the prophet in Exile – that hope finds its fulfillment in this man who wanders about the countryside and teaches and shares wondrous signs.

That hope for home, for belonging, for community.

And it can be known by those who follow him and hear him.

A community known as we hear those words,

“*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:39 NRSV)

and as we heed those words,

“*As I have loved you, you also should love one another.*” (John 13:34 NRSV)

And as we embrace others in that sense of community and belonging, we know that sense of community and belonging ourselves.

And our hunger is satisfied.
And we are fed.
And our basket is filled.

It starts in the wilderness...
...and goes through a wasteland...
...and leads to a mountain by the sea, where a crowd flocks to this Jesus, and he wonders out loud how to feed them all.

Did you notice that (almost aside) mention of Passover: "*The Passover...was near.*" It's an alert to pay attention and discern some of those themes, where we are reminded of yet another hunger of the people: a hunger for being freed from being enslaved.

They had been freed from Egypt, but there was more to it than that.

We know something of that as well, in that yearning to be freed from all that hinders and shackles, all that restricts and constricts life.

When others seek to identify us as something less than who we are.

But this Jesus signals our true identity:

"I am the vine, you are the branches." (John 15:5 NRSV)

We hear voices that tend to say 'You are worthless.'

But he affirms our worth in him even as he dies on our behalf.

But we also know that sin that drags us down and steers us wrong, and keeps us from giving ourselves fully to God and being fully who we are created to be.

But

"if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation." (II Corinthians 5:17 NRSV)

For his body has been broken for us and his blood been poured out for us that we might be delivered from our sin.

And if we can hear these words and embrace their message – embrace him – then our hunger will be satisfied.

And we will be fed.

And our basket filled.

It starts in the wilderness...
...and goes through a wasteland...
...and leads to a mountain by the sea...
...to end with our baskets full – FULL!

Note: there is no scarcity in this story.

There may be an appearance of scarcity:

"Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little."

There may be an assumption of scarcity:

"There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?"

But there is no scarcity here.

For each had "*as much as they wanted.*"

And all were "*satisfied.*"

And more than that.

For when all was said and done, there were still 12 baskets full of leftovers.

Plenty:

"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly," (John 10:10 NRSV)
he would say.

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." (John 6:35 NRSV)

This man of the signs meets our deepest needs. And we are fed; we are filled.

We come to him. We receive him. We believe in him.

And we are satisfied.

Maybe not always in the way we want or expect.

Remember: the crowd wanted to *"make him king."* But they misunderstood. And so Jesus withdrew.

Nevertheless, in the deepest sense, in our truest reality he is the one who feeds us and satisfies us and gives us that life...and that abundant.

Remember: these signs reveal Jesus and his glory.

They cannot create faith. But they can confirm it; they can invite faith.

So will we embrace him and embrace this sign? Where we are physically fed, yes, and we find a place to belong, and we are delivered from sin and all that opposes life.

Will we see it, and embrace it? To come to him, to receive him, to believe in him, and to come to know that here in relationship with him, here in him our baskets are full.

***HYMN** "Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts" GtG 494

- 1. Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts,
thou fount of life, thou light of all,
from the best bliss that earth imparts
we turn, unfilled, to heed thy call.**
- 2. Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;
thou savest those that on thee call;
to them that seek thee thou art good,
to them that find thee, all in all.**
- 3. We taste thee, O thou living bread,
and long to feast upon thee still;
we drink of thee, the fountainhead,
and thirst our souls from thee to fill.**
- 4. Our restless spirits yearn for thee,
where'er our changeful lot is cast,
glad when thy gracious smile we see,
blest when our faith can hold thee fast.** (continued...)

5. O Jesus, ever with us stay;
make all our moments calm and bright.
O chase the night of sin away;
shed o'er the world thy holy light.

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Words: Latin, 12th cent.; trans. Ray Palmer, 1858, alt.

Music: QUEBEC, Henry Baker, 1854

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *(The Apostles' Creed)*

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: O God, hear our prayer...
All: ...and sustain us by your grace.

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.

(continued...)

**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*

**God of grace, you provide for all our needs. For the gift of this world
and the gift of our life, we give you thanks. For the gift of you, we give you
thanks. And we give you ourselves. Accept our offerings as signs of our
gratitude; and bless them, and us, to further Christ's ministry and mission
among those in need. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN "Fairest Lord Jesus" GtG 630**

- 1. Fairest Lord Jesus,
Ruler of all nature,
O thou of God to earth come down,
thee will I cherish,
thee will I honor,
thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown.**
- 2. Fair are the meadows,
fairer still the woodlands,
robed in the blooming garb of spring.
Jesus is fairer,
Jesus is purer,
who makes the woeful heart to sing.**
- 3. Fair is the sunshine,
fairer still the moonlight,
and all the twinkling, starry host.**

(continued...)

**Jesus shines brighter,
Jesus shines purer,
than all the angels heaven can boast.**

- 4. Beautiful Savior,
Ruler of the nations,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor,
praise, adoration,
now and forevermore be thine!**

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Words: Munster *Gesangbuch*, 1677; stanzas 1-3, trans. *Church Chorals and Choir Studies*, 1850, alt.; stanza 4, trans. Joseph August Seiss, 1873, alt.

Music: CRUSADERS' HYMN, Silesian folk melody; *Schlesische Volkslieder*, 1842

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...**Amen.**

POSTLUDE

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