

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, APRIL 2, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

PALM/PASSION SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 118 & Matthew 21)*

One: "Look, your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey."
All: "This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!"
One: "Hosanna to the Son of David!"
All: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"
Unison: "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

***OPENING HYMN** "Ride On! Ride On in Majesty" GtG 198 [Tune 254]

1. Ride on! ride on in majesty!
Hark! all the tribes hosanna cry;
thy humble beast pursues its road
with palms and scattered garments strowed.
2. Ride on! ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die:
O Christ, thy triumphs now begin
o'er captive death and conquered sin.
3. Ride on! ride on in majesty!
The hosts of angels in the sky
look down with sad and wondering eyes
to see the approaching sacrifice.
4. Ride on! ride on in majesty!
In lowly pomp ride on to die;
bow thy meek head to mortal pain;
then take, O God, thy power, and reign.

Words: Henry Hart Milman, 1827, alt. *Public Domain*.
Tune: PUER NOBIS NASCITUR, Trier ms., 15th cent.;
adapt. Michael Praetorius, 1609. *Public Domain*.

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Dear God,
forgive us of our fickle faith
and our failure to follow you.
We cry out 'Hosanna!' so easily
when we need you or think you can do something for us.
But our voices can all too easily turn to 'Crucify!'
when it is convenient for us or fits our agenda.
Forgive us, gracious God; have mercy upon us.
Forgive us, when we do not know what we are doing,
and even when we do know what we are doing.
Forgive us, not for our sakes,
but for the sake of your Son,
our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,
in whose name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from Romans 5)*

One: In this we know the good news: "God proves God's love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."
All: **"If while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of the Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life."**
One: So rejoice and believe in the good news.
All: **For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are reconciled, 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 John 11:1-45

JOHN 11:1-45 (Common English Bible)

¹ A certain man, Lazarus, was ill. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (² This was the Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped his feet with her hair. Her brother Lazarus was ill.) ³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, saying,

“Lord, the one whom you love is ill.”

⁴ *When he heard this, Jesus said,*
 “This illness is not fatal. It is for the glory of God so that God’s Son can be glorified through it.”

⁵ *Jesus loved Martha, her sister, and Lazarus. ⁶ Yet when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed where he was. After two days, ⁷ he said to his disciples,*
 “Let us return to Judea again.”

⁸ *The disciples replied,*
 “Rabbi, the Jewish opposition wants to stone you, but you want to go back?”

⁹ *Jesus answered,*
 “Are there not twelve hours in the day? Whoever walks in the day does not stumble because they see the light of the world. ¹⁰ But whoever walks in the night does stumble because the light is not in them.”

¹¹ *He continued,*
 “Our friend Lazarus is sleeping, but I am going in order to wake him up.”

¹² *The disciples said,*
 “Lord, if he is sleeping, he will get well.”

¹³ *They thought Jesus meant that Lazarus was in a deep sleep, but Jesus had spoken about Lazarus’ death.*

¹⁴ *Jesus told them plainly,*
 “Lazarus has died. ¹⁵ For your sakes, I am glad I was not there so that you can believe. Let us go to him.”

¹⁶ *Then Thomas (the one called the Twin) said to the other disciples,*
 “Let us go too so that we may die with Jesus.”

¹⁷ *When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.*

¹⁸ *Bethany was a little less than two miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁹ Many Jews had come to comfort Martha and Mary after their brother’s death. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him, while Mary remained in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus,*
 “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² Even now I know that whatever you ask God, God will give you.”

²³ *Jesus told her,*
 “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ *Martha replied,*
 “I know that he will rise in the resurrection on the last day.”

²⁵ *Jesus said to her,*
 “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die. ²⁶ Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ *She replied,*
 “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, God’s Son, the one who is coming into the world.”

²⁸ *After she said this, she went and spoke privately to her sister Mary,*
 “The teacher is here and he is calling for you.”

²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. ³⁰ He had not entered the village but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were comforting Mary in the house saw her get up quickly and leave, they followed her. They assumed she was going to mourn at the tomb.

³² When Mary arrived where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said,
“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also, he was deeply disturbed and troubled. ³⁴ He asked,
“Where have you laid him?”

They replied,
“Lord, come and see.”

³⁵ Jesus began to cry. ³⁶ The Jews said,
“See how much he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said,
“He healed the eyes of the man born blind. Could he not have kept Lazarus from dying?”

³⁸ Jesus was deeply disturbed again when he came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone covered the entrance. ³⁹ Jesus said,
“Remove the stone.”

Martha, the sister of the dead man, said,
“Lord, the smell will be awful! He has been dead four days.”

⁴⁰ Jesus replied,
“Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see God’s glory?”

⁴¹ So they removed the stone. Jesus looked up and said,
“Father, thank you for hearing me. ⁴² I know you always hear me. I say this for the benefit of the crowd standing here so that they will believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ Having said this, Jesus shouted with a loud voice,
“Lazarus, come out!”

⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his feet bound and his hands tied, and his face covered with a cloth. Jesus said to them,

“Untie him and let him go.”

⁴⁵ Therefore, many of the Jews who came with Mary and saw what Jesus did believed in him.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “From Death to Life: A Preview” by Pastor Bill Vincent

This sermon may be as much about remembering as it is about revealing.

Yes, it is a preview; and in that preview, there are things we must remember, even as there are things to be revealed.

This sign – Lazarus’ going from death to life – is a preview – a foreshadowing, an advance look – at Jesus’ own death...and resurrection.

As such, it also serves as a preview, in the broader scheme of things, of our own death and resurrection...maybe in more ways than one.

C.K. Barrett notes,

The pattern of the life of all Christians is determined by the movement from death to life experienced by Lazarus. (*The Gospel According to St. John*, p.395)

But to see that, we must begin by remembering that death is a fact of life: it is a part of the fabric of the reality of our lives, part of the truth of our existence.

“No, duh!” you say. “Death and taxes. We’re all going to die. Tell me something I don’t know.”

But maybe I need to point out some aspects of this death that we might not always be aware of, or might conveniently want to forget.

Note Jesus did not spare Mary and Martha (or Lazarus, for that matter) the experience of death. Jesus delayed two days before responding to their summons.

And if Jesus did not spare Martha and Mary the experience of death then who would suggest he would spare us our experience of death?

And let’s be clear: there is no resurrection unless there is first death. Resurrection – that glory we anticipate for Easter – does not occur without death.

So we must face death: accept it and acknowledge it as a part of life, a part of our experience.

Lazarus is in the tomb.

I am in my own tomb.

Do I realize the walls that encase me?

Do I recognize the bindings that entangle me?

Some deaths/tombs are easier to see, easier to grasp, easier to recognize than others.

When storms and tornados sweep through Little Rock AR, Mississippi, and scores of other communities, we can see the death, the tomb, with winds ripping and roofs collapsing.

When a former student shoots out the door and shoots up people, we can see the death, the tomb. And the loss of life is a tragedy. Do we also recognize the death of a sense of security?

We know death of a way of life through divorce or job loss or some other crisis.

Some of the women of the church heard recently about Light in the Darkness, a ministry of the Presbytery surrounding mental illness and those effected by it. When someone experiences depression, the walls close in, vision is constricted. Sounds tomb-like to me.

William Barclay mentions others:

A [person] can become so selfish that [they are] dead to the needs of others.

[One] can become so insensitive that [one] is dead to the feelings of others.

[We] can become so involved in the petty dishonesties and the petty disloyalties of life, that [we are] dead to honour...[or] become so hopeless [as to be] filled with an inertia, which is spiritual death. (Daily Study Bible Series, p.94-95)

And fear, when it grips me and controls my every waking moment and dictates my every response.

These deaths affect me: put me in a tomb, encased by that fear, and pain, and hopelessness.

And I have to acknowledge that I am in a tomb before I can ever hear Jesus' voice, "Bill, come out!"

There is another aspect of death we must mention, one where we actually embrace death. Not in a masochistic or suicidal sort of way – No!

But remember Thomas:

"Let us go too so that we may die with Jesus."

And Jesus would later say,

"I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever."

(John 12:24-25 CEB)

I must die to myself in order to live to Christ: embrace death to parts of myself.

Often this involves letting go of some things.

-letting go of my need to be in control.

-letting go that deep sense of loss.

-letting go that yearning to hold on to that one thing that is so important to me...in order to hold on to the One who is our life.

Anthony Bloom...reminds us that Christ calls us to die to ourselves. As he explains, "dying to oneself means acceptance of this progressive dying of things within us, until we come to the point when we realize that there is in us a real and deep self that belongs to eternity, and a superficial self that has to be dissolved. We must let go of the superficial self in order to live fully."

("On Death," *Sobernost* 1, 2 (1979): 10-11; found in "Theological Perspectives," by Frederick J. Parrella, *Lectionary Homiletics*, April/May 2014, p.3)

As Brett Younger notes,

Resurrection happens when we die to our old selves and are born once more to the selves God means for us to be. (sermon "Death and Life," *Lectionary Homiletics*, p.9)

And that birth is not something I do to myself.

I do not create life myself.

I do not dig my way out of the grave.

This life comes as a gift.

Jesus gives this life.

And to know this life, I must first accept it, receive it, believe it: receive this gift in hearing his voice, "Bill, come out!"

Then I must embrace that gift, embrace that call, embrace that life: throw myself into this life even as it is poured into me.

Jesus said to Martha, *“Do you believe this?”* Martha says, *“Yes.”*
Will we say “yes” with our words, with our choices, with our lives?
Say ‘Yes’ to this life of love giving, not power grabbing.
Say ‘Yes’ to this life of faith, not fear.
Say ‘Yes’ to this life of hope, not grasping for control.

And let me point out: embracing this life may very well include helping others: *“Untie him and let him go,”* Jesus said.

In untying others – in helping them out of their grave clothes – I help to shed my own.

And who knows? In that story we will mark this Thursday – Jesus washing the disciples’ feet – perhaps, in his own way, Jesus sought to wash the dirt and the grime of the grave from the disciples themselves.

That service is the way of life, and crucial in my moving from death to life.

Robert McAfee Brown tells a story of moving from death to life.

He was an American army chaplain on a troopship in which 1,500 marines were returning from Japan to America for discharge. Greatly to his surprise he was approached by a small group to do Bible study with them. He leapt at the opportunity. Near the end of the voyage, they were studying this chapter and afterwards a marine came to him. “Everything in that chapter,” he said, “is pointing at me.” He went on to say that he had been in hell for the last six months. He had gone straight into the marines from college. He had been sent out to Japan. He had been bored with life; and he had gone out and got into trouble – bad trouble. Nobody knew about it – except God. He felt guilty; he felt his life was ruined; he felt he could never face his family although they need never know; he felt he had killed himself and was a dead man. “And,” said this young marine, “after reading this chapter I have come alive again. I know that this resurrection Jesus was talking about is real here and now, for he has raised me from death to life.” That lad’s troubles were not finished; he had a hard road to go; but in his sin and his sense of guilt – in his death, in his tomb – he had found Jesus as the resurrection and the life. (William Barclay, Daily Study Bible Series, p.102-103)

From death to life.

We can hear this as good news, but only if we face up to our own tomb.

“I am the resurrection and the life,” Jesus said.

This is good news, but only if we will receive it and embrace it.

“Do you believe this?” he asks.

Will you live this?

***HYMN “You, Lord, Are Both Lamb and Shepherd” GtG 274**

(next page...)

**1. You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd.
You, Lord, are both prince and slave.
You, peace-maker and sword-bringer
of the way you took and gave.
You, the everlasting instant;
you, whom we both scorn and crave.**

**2. Clothed in light upon the mountain,
stripped of might upon the cross,
shining in eternal glory,
beggared by a soldier's toss,
you, the everlasting instant;
you who are both gift and cost.**

**3. You, who walk each day beside us,
sit in power at God's side.
You, who preach a way that's narrow,
have a love that reaches wide.
You, the everlasting instant;
you, who are our pilgrim guide.**

**4. Worthy is our earthly Jesus!
Worthy is our cosmic Christ!
Worthy your defeat and victory;
worthy still your peace and strife.
You, the everlasting instant;
you, who are our death and life.**

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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...)

**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: Reassure us with your promises, O God...
All: ...for “God’s steadfast love endures forever.”

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*

**O God, as Jesus released Lazarus from the hands of death, may our
ministry share with others the promise of new life. Accept the gifts that we
offer to proclaim your love. Use our talents in ways that will set others free.
As you have delivered us from death, use our lives to proclaim the good news
of new life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Take Up Your Cross, the Savior Said” GtG 718 [*Tune 223*]

**1. Take up your cross, the Savior said,
if you would my disciple be;
take up your cross with willing heart,
and humbly follow after me.**

(continued...)

2. **Take up your cross; let not its weight
fill your weak spirit with alarm;
Christ's strength shall bear your spirit up
and brace your heart and nerve your arm.**
3. **Take up your cross; heed not the shame,
and let your foolish pride be still;
the Lord for you accepted death
upon a cross, on Calvary's hill.**
4. **Take up your cross, then, in Christ's strength,
and calmly every danger brave:
it guides you to abundant life
and leads to victory o'er the grave.**

Words: Charles William Everest, 1833, alt. *Public Domain*.
Tune: HAMBURG, Lowell Mason, 1824. *Public Domain*.

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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