

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 25, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

12th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, O people of God, to give thanks to the Lord who created you.
All: **We give thanks and praise to the God who stands by us all our days.**
One: Come, O people of God, to rejoice in the Lord's saving graces.
All: **We sing for joy, knowing how good God has been to us.**
One: Come, O people of God, to be refreshed for the journey, and to listen to
God's word of guidance.
All: **We come to worship the Lord.**

***OPENING HYMN** "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" GtG 39

1. **Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee.
Thou changest not; thy compassions they fail not.
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.**

Refrain: **Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning, new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!**

2. **Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. (Refrain)**

3. **Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow:
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! (Refrain)**

(next page...)

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty God: you call us to trust in you, but we do not. Even though your promises remain sure, we seek assurance in our own capabilities and resources. You call us to new life, and we wonder how, failing to fathom the depth of your love for us. Forgive us, O God, for the sake of your dear Son, Jesus Christ. Call forth in us an abiding faith. Heal us from past disappointments, that we might have confidence in you, for great is your faithfulness, mercy, and love. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: God's favor rests on us.
All: Sincere confession is met with caring acceptance.
One: God hears the prayers of our hearts and grants us peace the world cannot give.
All: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us, that we might have access to the grace in which we stand.
One: For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, renewed, restored.
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 Genesis 18:1-15

GENESIS 18:1-15 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ *The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day.* ² *He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground.* ³ *He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant.* ⁴ *Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.* ⁵ *Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on -- since you have come to your servant."* ⁶ *So they said, "Do as you have said."* ⁶ *And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures*

of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes." ⁷ Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

*⁹ They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent."
¹⁰ Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?" ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?' ¹⁴ Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son." ¹⁵ But Sarah denied, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. He said, "Oh yes, you did laugh."*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Living on Nothing More Than a Word" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Promises, promises.

We've heard them before: words spoken so easily.

"I'll get right back to you."

"The check's in the mail."

"I'm there for you."

The experience in human relationships of promises, some of which are fulfilled, some of which are not.

So you'll pardon us, God, if we have our doubts. We're a wee bit wary when we hear "the check's in the mail," or even "Sarah shall have a son."

Now we know how this story ends, how this promise is fulfilled.

But all too often where we live is at the end of this passage, where we don't have the end of the story; all we have is a word.

Give us something concrete.

Living on nothing but a promise; having to rely on nothing but someone's word; hearing the word but not having.

Our experience of promises with others, which means our experience of disappointment and betrayal. Having nothing in hand but a word.

Whereas we'd rather live by

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

"Show me the money."

"Prove it."

Note: There is an interconnectedness – an intimate relationship – between the word spoken and the one who speaks it.

So maybe the issue is not so much the promise itself as who makes it; not so much the word itself as the speaker.

Is the speaker trustworthy?

Is the promise maker faithful?

In other words, *whose* word is it?

Again, we are wary.

For, from our experience, we know you can trust some, but not others.

And even then...

Cara and Robert had just announced their engagement. We were ecstatic. They were so good together. This was great! We were so excited, my roommate and I threw open the windows to our dorm room and announced it to the whole campus.

The next day, I began to hear rumors that the engagement was a joke.

I couldn't believe it. "That's not true. I know these people. They wouldn't do that."

Only they did.

And I was crushed, devastated.

Yes, I got over it. But such an experience leaves a mark.

Can we trust those who speak a promise (explicitly or implicitly) to us?

Maybe there have been times when someone has spoken a promise to us and fallen down on the job. And we have become disillusioned and cynical.

Of course, part of the reason we are uncomfortable with this passage is because of the mirror it holds up to us, and the question it asks:

Will we be trustworthy in the promises we make?

Are we ourselves trustworthy when we speak a promise?

"Everything will be fine."

"Everything will turn out all right."

"Things are going to work out just fine."

Do we know whereof we speak? Are we speaking a promise we can fulfill?

Maybe we need to be careful with the promises we make, making promises that are within the realm of our control, our ability.

For everything may not turn out fine: we don't know; we don't have control over everything that may happen. We cannot protect our loved one from every eventuality.

But maybe we can deliver on the promise of helping them as best we can, standing with them in their struggle, being there when they need us.

And be committed to the promises we make on which we can deliver.

This is the stumbling block for Sarah (and Abraham). I.e., can God deliver?

Sarah laughed when confronted with that question.

Was Abraham laughing inside? too polite to laugh in his guest's face.

But note – with this God – the laughter gives birth to Isaac, whose very name means ‘laughter’.

And how many times have we laughed at God's promises, at God's future?

“A new heaven and a new earth”? Yeh, right.

“Lose your life to save it”? Oh, that makes *perfect* sense.

One wise person – by name of Jesus – once said,

“You will know them by their fruits.” (Matthew 7:16)

And as it turns out, God more than measures up to God's own standard.

For God promised a son to Abraham and Sarah. And guess what?

God promised to deliver the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. And guess what?

God promised a deliverer *“when the fullness of time had come”* (Galatians 4:4) And guess what?

God promised a son to Mary. And guess what?

And that very Son promised... Well...

One person noted,

Sarah's laughter arises from the absurd disproportion between the divine promise and the human possibilities. (*New Oxford Annotated Bible*)

But is it any more absurd than the promise to raise a crucified man from the grave?

Will we trust God, the one who makes such promises to us?

The ultimate foundation of our life is based on the word of promise God has spoken to us. And the God who has spoken to us is faithful.

God has proven God's faithfulness and trustworthiness in the past, so we can rely on God's faithfulness and trustworthiness for the present and the future. And we can live with but a promise, even though we may not see its final fulfillment.

“In the world you will have trouble. But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

“I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

“Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

“A new heaven and a new earth,” with no more tears and no more crying (Revelation 21:1,4).

God promises to be with us, to guide us, to strengthen us, to redeem us.

Of course, we still we have our doubts.

For there are times when God doesn't seem to be around, or our prayers are not answered.

And so still, we experience ‘disappointment’.

But maybe these experiences do not so much call into question God's faithfulness, as our understanding.

Walter Brueggemann notes that this passage

leaves itself open to misunderstanding, as though faith makes every desirable thing possible. But not everything is promised. What is "possible" is characterized only as everything promised by God. That is, only what corresponds to God's good purposes is possible. [God] has promised a future in a new community, but not everything we would seek. (*Genesis*, Interpretation series, p.161)

God never promised us a rose garden, but God did promise to be with us.

God never promised everything we wanted, but God did promise to watch over us, like the lilies of the field and the birds of the air (see Matthew 6:25-33).

God promises to be with us, to guide us, to watch over us, to welcome and receive us...always.

And in light of our experience with oh-so-many other promises, that's a promise I'll take.

John Newton, in his incomparable hymn, reminds us,

the Lord has promised good to me[us]
("Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound" 1772)

When it comes to the Lord, that's a promise we can bank on.

***HYMN** "How Firm a Foundation" GtG 463

1. **How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in God's excellent Word!
What more can be said than to you God hath said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?**
2. **"Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
for I am thy God, and will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.**
3. **"When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
for I will be near thee, thy troubles to bless,
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.**

(continued...)

4. "When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
the flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.
5. "The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake."

Words: "K" in John Rippon's *A Selection of Hymns*, 1787, alt.
Music: American folk melody; Funk's *Genuine Church Music*, 1832, alt.
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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.**

**We trust in God,
whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image,
male and female, of every race and people,
to live as one community.
But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
Ignoring God's commandments,
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
accept lies as truth,
exploit neighbor and nature,
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
We deserve God's condemnation.
Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
In everlasting love,
the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
to bless all families of the earth.
Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.**

(continued...)

Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
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: Hear our prayer, O God.
All: We call on your name, O Lord...

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 thank you, O God, for your word of promise and the gift of creation. We are grateful for all your many gifts to us. Teach us to say, "Thank you" not only with our words, but also with our actions and our lives...and our trust in you. In gratitude and in faith we offer all that we have and all that we are to you and your service in the world. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Standing on the Promises” GtG 838

**1. Standing on the promises of Christ my king,
through eternal ages let his praises ring;
glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,
standing on the promises of God.**

Refrain: **Standing, standing,
standing on the promises of God my Savior;
standing, standing,
I’m standing on the promises of God.**

**2. Standing on the promises that cannot fail,
when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail,
by the living Word of God I shall prevail,
standing on the promises of God. *Refrain:***

**3. Standing on the promises of Christ the Lord,
bound to him eternally by love’s strong cord,
overcoming daily with the Spirit’s sword,
standing on the promises of God. *Refrain:***

**4. Standing on the promises I cannot fall,
listening every moment to the Spirit’s call,
resting in my Savior as my all in all,
standing on the promises of God. *Refrain:***

Words and Music (PROMISES): R. Kelso Carter, 1886
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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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