

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 9, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

14th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We come to God in humility and anticipation.
All: **God comes to us with compassion and power.**
One: We are here. God is here.
All: **So come, let us worship the Lord our God.**

***OPENING HYMN** “God Is Here!” GtG 409 (*Verses 1, 2, & 4*)

1. **God is here! As we your people
meet to offer praise and prayer,
may we find in fuller measure
what it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us,
all our varied skills and arts
wait the coming of the Spirit
into open minds and hearts.**

2. **Here are symbols to remind us
of our lifelong need of grace;
here are table, font, and pulpit;
here the cross has central place.
Here in honesty of preaching,
here in silence, as in speech,
here, in newness and renewal,
God the Spirit comes to each.**

4. **Lord of all, of church and kingdom,
in an age of change and doubt
keep us faithful to the gospel;
help us work your purpose out.**

(continued...)

**Here, in this day's dedication,
all we have to give, receive:
we, who cannot live without you,
we adore you! We believe!**

Words: Fred Pratt Green, 1979; rev. 1988. Copyright 1994 Hope Publishing Company
Music: ABBOT'S LEIGH, Cyril Vincent Taylor, 1941. Copyright 1942, ren. 1970 Hope Publishing Company
Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Forgive us, O God. We shut our eyes to your working in our midst. We close our ears to your call to us. We shut off our minds and miss your insights. We close our hearts to your still, small voice within. Have mercy upon us, O God. Forgive our shutting ourselves off from you. Open us up to your presence and your word. Touch us by your Spirit, and remake us in the image of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. In the cross of Christ we discern the height and length and depth and breadth of God's love and forgiveness.

All: **So let us rejoice in the good news, for in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved. 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 Genesis 28:10-19a

GENESIS 28:10-19a (New Revised Standard Version)

¹⁰ *Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹² And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am*

the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴ and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵ Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” ¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!” ¹⁷ And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

¹⁸ So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel [that is ‘House of God’].

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Jacob's Dream ... and Ours” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Jacob had cheated his brother, Esau, out of his rightful birthright, by deceiving Isaac, their father. Esau has threatened to kill Jacob. Rebekah, their mother and Jacob's partner in crime, fears for Jacob's life and convinces Isaac, in an underhanded sort of way, to send Jacob away to his uncle's place.

So Jacob is leaving his home: familiar surroundings, the only home he has known. His father knows he has deceived him. His brother wants to kill him. And he is alone. Jacob is traveling with a cloud over him, a price on his head, and the burden of guilt on his shoulders. It does not necessarily make for the most restful of sleeps.

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!"

Even with a guilty conscience, with a fearful soul, he comes to the startling realization that God is with him ... still. And so Jacob makes a covenant, a promise with God:

the Lord shall be my God. (Genesis 28:21 NRSV)

One of those revelatory moments that affect us significantly with an awareness (or heightened awareness?) of the presence of God, of the working of God, of the hand of God.

Such an experience changes us. Redefines who we are; re-orientes our life.

"Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!"

Despised by the King of Israel, Elijah has challenged the prevailing tendency of the day by speaking out against the false gods worshiped and relied on by the king and the people. He is a prophet, a spokesperson for God, who has stood up for what he believes is right, and has seemed to stand quite alone. He has won a great, public victory against the proponents of his

day's trendy god. But in doing so, he has made a powerful enemy, Jezebel, the king's wife, a powerful person in her own right, who has now threatened to kill Elijah.

So what does Elijah do? He turns tail and runs. In fear of his life, believing he stands all alone, he flees. But he is directed to "*Horeb the mount of God.*" And there, outside the entrance to a cave where he had taken up temporary residence,

[The Lord] said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (I Kings 19:8,11-13 NRSV)

In the midst of his fear, in the midst of his terrible aloneness (which was, by the way, inaccurate), he encounters the Almighty God, and is chastised, yes, but also empowered, strengthened, and fed.

He had been down and out. Now he is emboldened, invigorated, and sent forth once again with purpose and direction.

"Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!"

There had been so many people pressing in on him that Jesus had gotten into a fishing boat (belonging to one Simon), put out a little ways from shore, and spoken and taught from there.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to burst. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus's knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" For he and all who were with him were astounded at the catch of fish that they had taken.... Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:4-11 NRSVue)

In the midst of his everyday work and world, Simon Peter comes to the startling realization that God is present to him in this man Jesus. And he is knocked to his knees by the force of the insight.

The awareness of the presence of God is not always a particularly comforting experience: Jacob was afraid, maybe even so Elijah, so definitely was Peter. Convicting is the experience. He stands in the presence of the divine, and he is unworthy.

Confronting God is not always particularly comforting. But it is always transforming ... and renewing.

As Walter Brueggemann remarks,

God's intrusion into human reality...redefines everything. (*Genesis*, Interpretation series, p.244)

"Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!"

And life is now different.

Cleopas and his friend were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They were terribly bewildered by what had taken place the past week, for

"Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, [had been] handed...over [by the "chief priests and leaders"] to be condemned to death and crucified..." (Luke 24:19b-21a NRSV)

And now they had heard strange rumors about his tomb being empty, and they didn't know what to think. Then this man, who had joined up with them along their journey, berated them and then began to teach them about the Messiah.

When

they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together [who] were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then [Cleopas and his friend] told what had happened on the road, and how [Jesus] had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (Luke 24:28-35 NRSV)

In the simplest and most basic of acts – eating – Cleopas and his friend are bowled over by the tearing of the veil before their eyes and the recognition of the Lord in their midst.

"Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!"

There are common threads in these stories we have shared.

The encounter with God is unexpected.

Cleopas and his friend were traveling on a journey.

Simon Peter was going about his normal, daily work.

Elijah was running away.

Jacob was sleeping.

When they least expected it.
And when they most needed it.

This encounter with God changed them: was transforming.
Jacob made a promise with God.
Elijah returned to his work for the Lord.
Simon Peter was now a follower of Jesus.
Cleopas and his friend dropped everything they were doing and rushed to tell others their new-found truth.

And God takes the initiative.
We cannot control such encounters.
But we can be amenable to them, willing for them to happen in our lives.

Jacob had grown up in a family of faith, heard the stories of his father, Isaac, and his grandfather, Abraham. And he was asleep when his encounter took place. But he needed to be jolted into a seriousness that seemed at odds with his character.

Elijah had been about the Lord's work in mighty and wondrous ways, familiar with God and God's work. But he was down and out at the moment, and in need of some encouragement ... and a good swift kick.

Simon Peter lived in a community of faith. He was not looking for anything out of the ordinary day-to-day of life. But he obviously needed some redirection in life, and he got it.

Cleopas and his friend obviously knew Jesus: heard about him and heard him. Probably two of his closer followers. But they were confused and befuddled. Perhaps even ready to give up on this Jesus. But he was not ready to give up on them.

Unexpected. Transforming. Out of our control.
"Surely the Lord is in this place – and I did not know it!"
We cannot control the time or the place of such encounters with God.
But we can be ready for them, with open hands and open hearts and open lives.
And an open prayer: "Come, Lord Jesus. Come to us. Come by here. *Kum ba Yah.*"

***HYMN** "Kum ba Yah" GtG 472

1. ***Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah!**
Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah!
Kum ba yah, my Lord, kum ba yah!
O Lord, kum ba yah!
2. **Someone's crying, Lord, kum ba yah!**
Someone's crying, Lord, kum ba yah!
Someone's crying, Lord, kum ba yah!
O Lord, kum ba yah!

(continued...)

3. **Someone's singing, Lord, kum ba yah!**
Someone's singing, Lord, kum ba yah!
Someone's singing, Lord, kum ba yah!
O Lord, kum ba yah!

4. **Someone's praying, Lord, kum ba yah!**
Someone's praying, Lord, kum ba yah!
Someone's praying, Lord, kum ba yah!
O Lord, kum ba yah!

**Come by here.*

Words and Music: African American spiritual
Public Domain

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from "*A Declaration of Faith*")

**Christ calls us to live in the presence of God.
Jesus lived with a constant sense of his Father's presence.
He put God's claim on his life above all else.
He joined others in God's worship and praise.
He drew strength from the Scriptures.
He prayed and taught his disciples to pray.
We believe Christ gives us and demands of us
personal lives that are centered in God
and open to God's reality and rule.**

**We acknowledge one God alone,
whose demands on us are absolute,
whose help for us is sufficient.
That One is the Lord,
whom we worship, serve, and love.**

"A Declaration of Faith" is Copyright 1977, 1991, the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); adopted (1977) "as a contemporary statement of faith, a reliable aid for Christian study, liturgy, and inspiration, with the clear understanding that" it is not approved as a part of the *Book of Confessions*.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Lord, in your mercy...
All: ...hear our prayer.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Contemporary)

(next page...)

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
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*

In gratitude we bring our offerings before you, O God. You have blessed us in ways known and unknown. Receive our offering of thanksgiving and our pledge of ourselves. Use us as your instruments to bring about the fruit of your kingdom. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Lord, Dismiss Us with Your Blessing” GtG 546

- 1. Lord, dismiss us with your blessing;
fill our hearts with joy and peace;
let us each, your love possessing,
triumph in redeeming grace.
O refresh us, O refresh us,
traveling through this wilderness.**
- 2. Thanks we give and adoration
for your gospel's joyful sound;
may the fruits of your salvation
in our hearts and lives abound.
Ever faithful, ever faithful
to your truth may we be found.**

(continued...)

**3. Savior, when your love shall call us,
from our struggling pilgrim way,
let no fear of death appall us,
glad your summons to obey.
May we ever, may we ever
reign with you in endless day.**

Words: Attr. John Fawcett, 1773, alt.; stanza 3, alt. Geoffrey
Thring, 1880, alt.
Music: SICILIAN MARINERS, Sicilian melody, 18th cent.
Public Domain

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

The Prayers of the People (adapted) are used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from
Connections Worship Companion. Copyright 2023.

The Prayer for Illumination and Prayers of the People (adapted) are written by Tara W. Bulger and used
by permission. © Presbyterian Outlook, 2023.