

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 23, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

16th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come to Christ, all who are weary.
Gather together, all who carry heavy burdens.
All: **The gentle spirit of Christ invites us.
We have come to find rest for our souls.**

***OPENING HYMN** “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” GtG 366 (*Tune 761*)

1. **Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling;
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion;
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.**
2. **Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast;
let us all in thee inherit;
let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.**
3. **Come, Almighty to deliver;
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
nevermore thy temples leave.**

(continued...)

**Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.**

- 4. Finish then thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1747, alt.
Music: BEECHER, John Zundel, 1870
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Dear God, trusting in your grace and mercy,
we confess to you our sin,
for we are tired and weighed down by the mistakes we have made.
You bid us love one another freely and generously,
but we parcel out our love
according to human standards of worth and deserving.
You bid us trust in you and rely upon you for guidance and life itself,
but we take the world on our shoulders
and try to do it all on our own.
Forgive us, merciful God.
By your love, redirect us.
By your Spirit, guide us;
that we might be transformed in the image of your Son,
our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Friends, hear the good news of our faith:
God is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,
showing compassion to all.

All: **Forgiven and freed, we share our joy
as we share our peace with one another.**

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 Matthew 11:2-6, 16-19, 25-30

MATTHEW 11:2-6, 16-19, 25-30 (Common English Bible)

² Now when John heard in prison about the things the Christ was doing, he sent word by his disciples to Jesus, asking, ³ “Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?”

⁴ Jesus responded, “Go, report to John what you hear and see. ⁵ Those who were blind are able to see. Those who were crippled are walking. People with skin diseases are cleansed. Those who were deaf now hear. Those who were dead are raised up. The poor have good news proclaimed to them. ⁶ Happy are those who do not stumble and fall because of me.”

...
¹⁶ “To what will I compare this generation? It is like a child sitting in the marketplaces calling out to others, ¹⁷ ‘We played the flute for you and you did not dance. We sang a funeral song and you did not mourn.’ ¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ ¹⁹ Yet the “Son of Humankind” came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunk, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is proved to be right by her works.”

...
²⁵ At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have shown them to babies. ²⁶ Indeed, Father, this brings you happiness.

²⁷ “My Father has handed all things over to me. No one knows the Son except the Father. And nobody knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal the Father.

²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are struggling hard and carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Put on my yoke, and learn from me. I am gentle and humble. And you will find rest for yourselves. ³⁰ My yoke is easy to bear, and my burden is light.”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “The Right Fit” by Pastor Bill Vincent

(next page...)

Yes, we are struggling hard, carrying heavy loads...with cares and concerns and worries about life and the world.

The blessed rains come to water the earth ... and then seep into our basement...or wash away the house altogether.

The sun shines and it's going to be a good day ... till it shines too hard and too long, and the power goes out and the air conditioning is off.

Is there enough money to pay the bills?

Or an unexpected accident leads to a crisis in life.

Or a word is said in anger leading to a breakdown in a crucial relationship.

We have concerns regarding the shape of the world, whether it be the Korean peninsula or the Crimean plains.

And there is just the basics: what will we eat? what will we drink? what will we wear?

Yes, we are tired, burdened.

Yes, we are struggling hard, carrying heavy loads...with searching for God.

Like John the Baptist's question,

"Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"

And we think our way through the questions and the issues.

Or we feel our way through the decisions and choices.

Searching for meaning and significance and purpose in our daily activities, in the years of our life.

Yes, we are tired, burdened.

Yes, we are struggling hard, carrying heavy loads...with trying to be good.

Trying to buy the acceptance of others, earn our way into heaven. As the rich young man asked, *"What must I do to inherit eternal life?"* (Matthew 19:16)

Knowing we've made mistakes, we try to make up for yesterday plus trying to be good today, etc.

And the word we hear is, "The way to be good is to stop being angry and love your enemy. Do not look lustfully at another. Turn the other cheek."

"Oh, my, I can't do this!"

Life can be so difficult. So tiresome trying to keep everything straight, trying to avoid making a mistake.

Yes, we are tired, burdened.

And perhaps the biggest burden of all is we're doing it all wrong.

"My yoke is easy," Jesus says.

William Barclay paints the picture:

The word *easy*...in Greek...can mean *well-fitting*. In Palestine ox-yokes were made of wood; the ox was brought, and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out, and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was then carefully adjusted, so that it would fit well, and would not gall the neck of the patient beast. The yoke was tailor-made to fit

the ox. (The Gospel of Matthew vol.II, The Daily Study Bible Series,
Westminster Press, 1957, 1958; p.19)

So, which would we prefer?

A yoke tailor-made?

Or one ill-fitting?

For maybe the reason we are burdened by our cares and concerns and worries is because we try to take them on all on our own. We try to handle them ourselves. And we give them first priority and time and energy. "If I can just take care of this..." "I've got this; I don't need any help." "I can take care of this myself."

And that is the wrong way.

So Jesus says,

"Come to me.... Put on my yoke, and learn from me."

For the way to handle our cares and concerns and worries is to give them to God and let God take care of them, and us. Not that we sit back and do nothing. But we let God help us carry them and show us the way to carry them. We put our trust in God, praying, "Into your hands I commit my spirit...and my life and my cares and my concerns"; believing that God knows what our needs are and will take care of us, "*what we will eat and what we will drink and what we will wear*" (Matthew 6:31).

And we give the priority, the focus to God and God's way:

"But strive first for the kingdom of God and [God's] righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33)

Let God carry our cares, and us, in this way...

"And [we] will find rest."

And the reason we are burdened in our searching for God is because we are "looking for [God] in all the wrong places." And looking for God in all the wrong ways.

We're looking for purpose and meaning in horoscopes and superstitions, or even overly-sacred traditions.

Looking for God through noble causes and even the assumption that we know already: "Oh, I just feel God; I don't need to learn or be guided any further."

And that is the wrong way.

So Jesus says,

"Come to me.... Put on my yoke, and learn from me."

For the way to search for God is through Christ.

Remember? "Fully human; *fully God*." In Christ we best see and understand and come to know God.

Yes, the leaning of our conscience, the wonder of nature, the words of others – all these maybe helpful in our search for God. But they are incomplete without the key: Jesus Christ.

For in our search for God, in the end, we will come to discover we cannot find God ourselves; we can only be found by God. "Wisdom is known by its deeds." And the key is the Father revealing the Son, and the Son revealing the Father:

"No one knows the Son except the Father. And nobody knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal [the Father]."

We are helpless to reach up to heaven and find God. But the good news is that God has reached down to us and found us...in Jesus Christ. We need only open ourselves up to be found by God.

Search for God in this way...
"And [we] will find rest."

And the reason we are burdened with trying to be good is that we believe we have it within us to be good.

"If only we could try a little harder..." Put our mind to it. Focus. Get all those temptations out of the way; set aside all those distractions. "I can do this." Positive thinking.

And that is the wrong way.
So Jesus says,

"Come to me.... Put on my yoke, and learn from me."

For the way to be good is to admit that we can't – not on our own. We don't have it within us to be good on our own,

Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

In the search for being good, we cannot do it; we can only have it done for us.

When the rich young man came to Jesus inquiring about how to gain eternal life, and goes away despairing at the answer, the disciples

were greatly astounded and said, "Then who can be saved?" ...Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:25-26)

The way to be good is to allow God to create that good within us through the transforming power of the Spirit: to pray and be open to God planting within us the seeds of the fruit of the Spirit:

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)

So Jesus says, "Come to me." Learn from him. Trust in him. Let him transform you.
"Put on my yoke, and learn from me."

Open ourselves up to being shaped and formed and used by God in the working out of God's purposes and will – this is the good. Even if it lead to a cross.

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?" (Matthew 16:24-26)

The ways of the Lord are not all fun and games. They include a cross. But Jesus makes it clear that the way of the cross is the way of life.

Any other way is the way of losing our life, the way of death.
But Jesus' way...?

So, if we try to be good in this way – even with a cross...
"[we] will find rest."

For we only know the weary-some burdens when we try to live life the wrong way – our way – and we end up wearing a yoke that doesn't fit, going against the grain of what is divinely ordained and intended. And that is hard work, burdensome, wearying.

But we can know *"the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding"* (Philippians 4:7) when we live life the right way: open ourselves to trust that God will take care of us; be open to God finding us and making Godself known to us; be open to God using us in loving and caring and good ways. Living life in the way that is divinely ordained and intended.

And that is far easier, that is indeed restful, rest for the soul.

For then we are carrying a burden as intended and in the way intended. We are living a life as God created us to live it.

"And [we] will find rest." Rest in the ways of God.

For it is far better to live out our life with a yoke that is tailor-made and fits, than with a yoke that does not fit at all.

***HYMN "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say" GtG 182**

**1. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down
your head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
so weary, worn, and sad;
I found him in a resting place,
and he has made me glad.**

**2. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
the living water, thirsty one;
stoop down and drink and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.**

**3. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk
till traveling days are done.**

Words: Horatius Bonar, 1846, alt. Music: KINGSFOLD, *English County Songs*, 1893,; harm. Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906. *Public Domain*.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from “*A Declaration of Faith*”)

Christ calls us to be disciples.

In forming his people and sending them into the world

Jesus called individuals to be disciples.

They were to share the joy of his companionship,

to understand and obey his teachings,

and to follow him in life and death.

We confess that Christians today are called to discipleship.

Life shared with Christ and shaped by Christ

is God's undeserved gift to each of us.

It is also God's demand upon every one of us,

never perfectly fulfilled by any of us.

Forgiven by God and supported by brothers and sisters,

we strive to become more faithful and effective

in our daily practice of the Christian life.

“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: Compassionate God,...

All: ...you are good to all.

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.

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*

**Dear God,
for your many blessings we give you thanks.
For the gift of your word,
we give you thanks.
For your guidance and sustenance and care,
we give you thanks.
Bless and multiply
the gifts we offer in gratitude,
that they may be used to proclaim
the glory of your kingdom
and make known to all people
the power of your saving acts. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Take Thou Our Minds, Dear Lord” GtG 707

- 1. Take thou our minds, dear Lord, we humbly pray;
give us the mind of Christ each passing day;
teach us to know the truth that sets us free;
grant us in all our thoughts to honor thee.**
- 2. Take thou our hearts, O Christ; they are thine own;
come thou within our souls and claim thy throne;
help us to shed abroad thy deathless love;
use us to make the earth like heaven above.**
- 3. Take thou our wills, Most High! Hold thou full sway;
have in our inmost souls thy perfect way;
guard thou each sacred hour from selfish ease;
guide thou our ordered lives as thou dost please.**
- 4. Take thou ourselves, O Lord, heart, mind, and will;
through our surrendered souls thy plans fulfill.
We yield ourselves to thee: time, talents, all;
we hear, and henceforth heed, thy sovereign call.**

Words: William H. Foulkes, stanzas 1-3, 1918, stanza 4, ca. 1920.
Music: HALL, Calvin Weiss Laufer, 1918.
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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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