

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on II Corinthians 13 & Psalm 34)*

One: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion
of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.
All: And also with you.
One: Let us give thanks this day for God's wonderful goodness.
All: God's steadfast love endures forever.
One: "O taste and see that the Lord is good;"
All: "happy are those who take refuge in God."
One: With hearts and hands and voices,
All: let us praise the Lord.

***OPENING HYMN** "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart!" GtG 804

1. **Rejoice, ye pure in heart!**
Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!
Your festal banner wave on high,
the cross of Christ your King.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!
2. **With voice as full and strong**
as ocean's surging praise,
send forth the sturdy hymns of old,
the psalms of ancient days.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!
3. **Yes, on through life's long path,**
still chanting as ye go,
from youth to age, by night and day,
in gladness and in woe:
Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!

(continued...)

4. **At last the march shall end;
the wearied ones shall rest;
the pilgrims find their home at last,
Jerusalem the blest.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!**
5. **Then on, ye pure in heart!
Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!
Your festal banner wave on high,
the cross of Christ your King.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice, give thanks, and sing!**

Words: Edward Hayes Plumptre, 1865
Tune: MARION, Arthur Henry Messiter, 1883
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God, you call us your own children and cover us with your love. We would seek to be merciful as you are, and to show compassion as you do, but we fail to live the life to which we have been called. We exalt ourselves while evaluating and judging others. We assume too much and don't invest enough in listening, learning, and seeking to understand. You call us to humility, yet we resist, puffing ourselves up with prideful arrogance and rigid certainty. Forgive our sinful ways. Soften our hearts, tame our wayward wills, and make us more like Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Sisters and brothers,
God has made a way where there was no way.

All: **In Christ Jesus evil and death have been vanquished,
and we live in a state of grace.**

One: Believe the gospel:

All: **in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.**

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 Joshua 3:7-17

JOSHUA 3:7-17 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁷ *The Lord said to Joshua, "This day I will begin to exalt you in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses. ⁸ You are the one who shall command the priests who bear the ark of the covenant, 'When you come to the edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.'"* ⁹ *Joshua then said to the Israelites, "Draw near and hear the words of the Lord your God."* ¹⁰ *Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God who without fail will drive out from before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites: ¹¹ the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth is going to pass before you into the Jordan. ¹² So now select twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. ¹³ When the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan flowing from above shall be cut off; they shall stand in a single heap."*

¹⁴ *When the people set out from their tents to cross over the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. ¹⁵ Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, ¹⁶ the waters flowing from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan.*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Arks Among Us" by Pastor Bill Vincent

So here they are.

The people have been wandering in the wilderness: a nomadic life of alternately pitching tents, then picking up stakes; pitching tents, then picking up stakes.

Moses has led them through all this time: taught them, guided them.

Now they stand on the banks of the Jordan River. They are on the cusp of entering the promised land.

How exciting!

But also unnerving. For they are crossing over from a known nomadic life to an unknown settled life; from a landscape with which they are familiar to a landscape that is unfamiliar.

Besides that, they are now led by the ‘new guy’, Joshua, still ‘wet behind the ears’. And not like the Moses they still remember.

And besides all that, there’s this obstacle that stands in their way...or *flows* in their way: the Jordan River, whose waters they somehow need to figure out how to cross.

Joshua said, "By this you shall know that among you is the living God."

And, lo and behold, the waters of the river part, and the people cross over into the promised land.

Nice story! don’t you think?

Kirsi Stjerna comments,

The ark and its safe passing through the river was the assurance for the Hebrews they needed.

– assurance in the midst of uncertainty, assurance in the midst of life –

Since then, the arks have varied, just as the rivers needing to be passed through have varied. (*Lectionary Homiletics*, Oct.-Nov.2005)

The arks have varied, as have the rivers being crossed.

What are some of those rivers? What are some of those arks?

The two churches had struggled to survive where they were, on their own.

Then they began some conversations to see if maybe they might chart a course together. I served as one of the presbytery members who walked with them through their process as they talked and shared and eventually developed a plan to merge the two congregations.

The time came for the congregations to vote on the plan and make a decision – for or against – the new path, the new chapter, the new future.

What would be the ark for them as they crossed over from a known past (and present) to an unknown future?

For one, throughout their conversations, they had shared stories of their communities. They had told of challenges met, and other crossings of other rivers. And those stories served as an ark to remind them of the presence of God.

But also I suggest that the four of us from the presbytery served as an ark for them. By our presence, by our listening, by our walking with them, we served as a reminder that they were not alone – that the living God was in their midst.

For me the river was a hospital ward.

As part of my training in seminary, I was spending a summer doing Clinical Pastoral Education, living and learning how to minister to others in the context of a state psychiatric hospital. I was assigned two wards, one of which was a ward for those with chronic mental illness. There I was slammed with a reality I struggled to deal with – behaviors I had never experienced – including a woman who had been in the ward for 30 years, ever since she was 15.

I was overwhelmed.

The weekend came, and I found my way to a Presbyterian church on Sunday morning. There I was welcomed and introduced to a family with whom I sat.

And there I found my ark, in the songs sung and the prayers said and the ritual celebrated.

But also in the community of faith that bolstered and sustained me. They did not know what I was going through. But in their very presence, and in their faithfulness, they served as an ark for me, to remind me of the presence of the living God.

We all face rivers to cross – different rivers – as individuals, as communities.
A variety of obstacles, challenges – often the unknown – change, transition.
The crossing over is not always smooth. It does not always go as we expect.
What happens when the crossing doesn't turn out the way we hoped...or expected? Or this is the wrong river to cross? Or this is the right river but the wrong crossing?
What about when the Red Sea doesn't part? Or the Jordan River does not either?
And what happens when the cancer does not go into remission? when the abuse is not stopped? when the war does not end?
What happens then?

Many questions. Not many answers.
Save for one: trust. I know: we've heard that before. But I'm telling you: the key to crossing over the river is trust.

Joan Chittister puts it rather succinctly:

We learn faith [– trust –] very slowly. At least I did. It took a whole series of changes before I got the message that God is in the next place as surely as God is in this one. (*Called to Question: a spiritual memoir*, p.91)

I remember an incident significant for me in learning that truth...or *beginning* to learn that truth.

A controversial movie was going to be shown on TV – “The Day After” – about nuclear holocaust: what might happen, what life might be like. A number of us from the school decided to watch it together. And it was devastating: sad, depressing, overwhelming.

Afterwards, a group of us stuck around to talk and share and reflect together. Amidst some stunned silence, one person shared simply, “I know God will be there.” Simple, yet profound. And her affirmation of faith served as an ark for me, and for others.

Sometimes – maybe more often than we think – we are arks for one for another: reminders that the living God is among us...and will be; “that God is in the next place as surely as God is in this one.”

Martin Luther knew that. (Reformation Day was recently.)

Martin Luther, who nailed his 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenberg, Germany, expecting discussion and debate to follow; instead it led to a maelstrom of dissension and division. He did not know what was coming. But he had faith in God.

John Calvin, who had started his work in Geneva, later to be expelled: kicked out of the city into his own wilderness. He did not know what was coming. But trusted in God.

They knew the one who is among us is the living God. Not the dead God. Not the faraway, distant God. But the living God: here, now, alive, active.

God present, working. Just not necessarily in our time frame, or according to our standards, or in our particular line of sight.

Maybe not in the way we expect. But living and working nonetheless.

So the wilderness wanderers faced the obstacle of the Jordan River, looking longingly at the promised homeland. Their well-known leader was gone. They didn't have a clue how to get across to the other side. All they had was a promise. And then God did something they could not have imagined: dammed up the river to let them walk through to the other side.

Many years later, for the followers of Jesus – men and women – hope seemed to have come to an end. He was dead. They had seen it. They had witnessed his flogging and the nails driven through his flesh. They had gathered up his lifeless body and laid it to rest in a stone-cold tomb. And with it, they had seen the death and burial of their hopes and their very reason for living. Why go on? And then God did something none of them ever would have imagined: and the tomb was empty, and their dead teacher was now their living Lord, and they themselves were transformed by the living God doing a new thing among them. The living God among them in a new way, a new form; in a new, yet familiar, person.

“By this you shall know that among you is the living God.”

God is present – living, working, acting...though maybe not in the way or the ‘where’ we envision.

Are our eyes open?

Are we willing to see the ark where we've never seen it before?

And are we willing to cross the river God places before us, trusting in God with nothing but a word of promise? Is that ark enough?

Years later, as the story is told in Joshua, the people had crossed the Jordan and settled in the land. Then they gathered at Shechem to renew the covenant.

Joshua reminded them they had seen God at work – the ark, evidence of the living God in their midst. Would they re-dedicate themselves to this God?

And Joshua said,

“Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve ... but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15)

We, too, have seen evidence of the living God at work among us and heard the promise of more to come.

Will we dedicate ourselves, and all that we are, to crossing those rivers and following in the way of our living Lord? The living God who is here just as surely as God is in the next place.

For we have seen arks among us.

We have seen the living God in our midst.

Will we follow that God to “the next place”?

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

Words: William Williams, 1762; stanza 1, trans. Peter Williams, 1771; stanzas 2-3, trans. William Williams, 1772
Tune: CWM RHONDDA, John Hughes, 1907
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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**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.**

(continued...)

**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.**

(Today's translation of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission from Book of Common Worship, copyright 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.)

CELEBRATING THE SAINTS: “For All the Saints” StF 2283

**1. For all the saints who've shown your love
in how they live and where they move,
for mindful wo-men, caring men,
accept our gra-titude again.**

Lighting a Candle for Family

**2. For all the saints who loved your name,
whose faith increased the Savior's fame,
who sang your songs and shared your word,
accept our gra-titude, good Lord.**

Lighting a Candle for Friends

**3. For all the saints who named your will,
and showed the king-dom coming still
through selfless pro-test, prayer, and praise,
accept the gra-titude we raise.**

Lighting a Candle for Others

**4. Bless all whose will or name or love
reflects the grace of heaven above.
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,
your life through theirs has hallowed ours.**

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Tune: O WALY WALY, English folk melody. *Public Domain*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

Let your Word be at work in us, gracious God, and through the offerings we present for your blessing. We offer here our support for the work of teaching, preaching, and good counsel, our assistance for those who are burdened and hungry and lost, our encouragement for questioners, seekers, and risk-takers intent on leading a life worthy of your approval. We are all your students, your children. Let us also be your humble servants, through the offering of our substance and ourselves. In Jesus' name. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: **We lift them to the Lord.**

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

(The prayer continues...)

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.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please partake of both elements as you are served, remembering Christ is with you.)

Sing “For the Bread Which You Have Broken” GtG 516

1. **For the bread which you have broken,
for the wine which you have poured,
for the words which you have spoken,
now we give you thanks, O Lord.**
2. **By this promise that you love us,
by your gift of peace restored,
by your call to heaven above us,
hallow all our lives, O Lord.**
3. **With the saints who now adore you
seated at the heavenly board,
may the church still waiting for you
keep love's tie unbroken, Lord.**
4. **In your service, Lord, defend us;
in our hearts keep watch and ward;
in the world to which you send us
let your kingdom come, O Lord.**

Words: Louis FitzGerald Benson, 1924, alt.
Tune: KINGDOM, V. Earle Copes, 1959
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Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” GtG 730

1. **I sing a song of the saints of God,
patient and brave and true,
who toiled and fought and lived and died
for the Lord they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor, and one was a queen,
and one was a shepherdess on the green:
they were all of them saints of God, and I mean,
God helping, to be one too.**

(continued...)

2. **They loved their Lord so dear, so dear,
and God's love made them strong;
and they followed the right, for Jesus' sake,
the whole of their good lives long.
And one was a soldier, and one was a priest,
and one was slain by a fierce wild beast:
and there's not any reason, no, not the least,
why I shouldn't be one too.**
3. **They lived not only in ages past;
there are hundreds of thousands still;
the world is bright with the joyous saints
who love to do Jesus' will.
You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea,
in church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea;
for the saints of God are just folk like me,
and I mean to be one too.**

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Tune: GRAND ISLE, John Henry Hopkins, 1940. Public Domain.

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...Amen.

***RESPONSE** “Go with Us, Lord” GtG 748

**Go with us, Lord, and guide the way
through this and every coming day,
that in your Spirit strong and true
our lives may be our gift to you.**

Words: Mary Jackson Cathey, 1986. © 1990 Hope Publishing Company.

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POSTLUDE

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