

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Lord, you have been our dwelling place;
All: we come today to rest in you.
One: You have been the voice that guides us;
All: we come today to listen.
One: You have been the host who feeds us;
All: we come today to be filled.
One: You have been our joy and crown;
All: we come today to sing your praise!

***OPENING HYMN “We Praise You, O God” GtG 612**

**1. We praise you, O God, our Redeemer, Creator;
in grateful devotion our tribute we bring.
We lay it before you; we kneel and adore you;
we bless your holy name; glad praises we sing.**

**2. We worship you, God of our fathers and mothers;
through trial and tempest our guide you have been.
When perils o’ertake us, you will not forsake us,
and with your help, O Lord, our struggles we win.**

**3. With voices united our praises we offer
and gladly our songs of thanksgiving we raise.
With you, Lord, beside us, your strong arm will guide us.
To you, our great Redeemer, forever be praise!**

Words: Julia C. Cory, 1902, alt.
Music: KREMSEER, *Neder-landtsch Gendenck-
Clanck*, 1626; harm. Eduard Kremser, 1877
Public Domain

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess that once again,
we have done what is evil in your sight.
We've made mistakes.
We've made missteps.
We have hurt people,
by action and inaction.
We have wounded creation,
by action and inaction.
We have chosen our ways over yours,
by action and inaction.
Have mercy on us, Lord.
Hear our confession, and respond to us with kindness,
that we might turn towards goodness,
walk in the light,
and live in equity and peace;
through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Sisters and brothers,
because we belong to our Lord Jesus Christ,
we need not fear—
All: **for he lived for us, he died for us,
he was raised for us and prays for us.**
One: Take to heart the good news,
and believe the promise of God.
For your sins are forgiven by the mercy of Christ,
and you are freed to love one another.
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 Matthew 25:14-30

(next page...)

MATTHEW 25:14-30 (New International Version)

¹⁴ “Again, the kingdom of heaven will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to their ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The one who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the one who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The one who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²² “The one with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²⁴ “Then the one who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ “‘So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Risky Business” by Pastor Bill Vincent

I think I would have been scared, too.

15 years worth of wages – that’s the equivalent of ‘a bag of gold’, or a ‘talent’ – times 5, or two, or even one! Can you imagine that? Someone plunks 15 years worth of your wages into your lap all of a sudden, and entrusts it to you.

We read stories of people who win the lottery. So often they say it won’t change them. But all too often it does.

It may seem exciting. We may think we want it. But it's really scary, too.

Especially since, remember, it's not yours. It belongs to someone else. The master didn't give up his right to the bags of gold ('*talents*'); he entrusted the bags of gold ('*talents*') to his servants, "*to each according to their ability.*"

"Oh my goodness! What if something happens to it? What if the stock market plummets? What if the bank goes under? What if the company declares bankruptcy? What if someone mugs me when I walk out the door? What if I hide it and someone tortures me into telling them where it is? Oh my goodness! I'd be terrified!"

Perhaps someone thinks she has a gift, an ability, a talent for something: she loves animals, and also has a knack for working with them. But she is afraid to share that ability – to offer it, to explore it – for fear of ridicule, or failure. Yet maybe she suspects deep down that if she does not try, she'll lose the ability, even though it is so precious to her. And maybe she knows down deeper still, that if she does not risk, she'll lose a part of herself.

In trying to save her talent – to protect it – she'll lose it.

Jesus once said something about that: "*If you save your life, you'll lose it; but if you lose your life, you'll save it.*" (Matthew 16:25)

We know we have gifts: talents, abilities, aptitudes.

But maybe we're afraid we'll lose them if we use them: that we'll (somehow) use them up.

Or maybe we're afraid we're not ready – which all too often means we'll never be ready.

Ray Gearing shares this wisdom:

Without even saying so directly, the Bible eloquently makes the point that God doesn't wait around for people to be perfect before [God] puts them to work or calls them into action. That ought to say something about the lame excuses I offer for inaction. (Ray D. Gearing, organizing pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Little Rock, Arkansas; found in 4/21/86 issue of Monday Morning a magazine for Presbyterian ministers)

Lame excuses offered by so many.

Like Moses, who complained that he wasn't a good public speaker. Yet God used him to speak to the Pharaoh of Egypt, and to teach the people of Israel.

And there's a corollary to this notion: God doesn't wait around for us to feel safe and secure before calling us to risk, to try.

In the story of "*Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*," Indiana's father has been intentionally wounded in their search for the Holy Grail. Now Indiana must proceed on his own to pass a series of tests in order to reach the holy object that will heal his father. A set of clues guides him through the first two obstacles (which no one else has been able to do). The next clue says simply, "Step out in faith." But there's nothing before him but a bottomless chasm. He can see the path on the other side, but it's way too far for him to jump. Finally, he gathers up his courage, closes his eyes, and "steps out in faith" ... and finds a rock-solid bridge under foot (which he had been unable to see).

He tried. He risked. And he did so out of love for his father.
Will we risk out of love for our heavenly Father?

The third servant did not. He operated not out of love, but out of fear.

But when we fear, we experience tunnel vision: we fear for ourselves. The focus is on us and our world: our safety, our pain, our shame, our failure, what will happen to us, how we will feel.

But when, like the first and second servants, we focus on our Master – who, out of a grace we cannot imagine and for reasons we cannot fathom, has entrusted to us this time, this energy, these abilities, this life – we know not fear, but joy. As our translation has it, “*Come and share your master’s happiness!*” As other translations have it, “*Enter into the joy of your master.*” A joy, a grace, we can know even now.

A joy in serving. A joy, yes, in trusting. A joy even in risking. For it is a joy rooted, not in percentage of success or even in return on investment, but a joy rooted in a relationship of love – the love of our Master.

A love that has demonstrated time and time again its trustworthiness, its ability to provide, its willingness to walk with us even through the valley of the shadow of death with its power to see us through to the other side.

Wow!

In light of that love, will we risk?

I recall another story that Jesus shared: “*A sower went out to sow.*” (Matthew 13:3-9)

The sower was not totally arbitrary or unthinking about where they threw the seed. But to plant anything is to risk – to risk losing it all. We may hope there is a return. We may believe we have some idea of what the return will look like. But, in the end, in the grand scheme, we don’t know and we don’t have any guarantees.

Except this: God says there will be a harvest; there will be a return of some sort, some how, some where, some when. By God’s grace. Yes, with our effort (God chooses to work that way). With our participation. With our partnership. But by God’s grace. For, ultimately, the harvest does not depend upon us; its coming and its abundance does not rest with us. It rests with God.

As Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. (I Corinthians 3:6)

Paul risked when he planted.

Apollos risked when he watered.

What about us?

I liken it to relationships: entering into, engaging in, growing, deepening relationships.

And that takes risk. And if we are unwilling to risk ourselves in growing a relationship, and deepening a relationship, and maybe even starting a new relationship with someone we don’t know – if we are unwilling to risk ourselves, then the relationship will not happen. Period. And there is no possibility for a return on an investment that is never made.

But a sower went out to sow – and risked.

And the first servant “*put the money to work*” – and risked.

And the second servant did the same – and risked.

But the third servant did not risk. He buried his “talent,” his “bag of gold,” his treasure. Because he was afraid.

And when we fear, we focus on ourselves, on our experience.

But it’s not about us.

It’s about our Master.

It’s about our God.

And God has things under control.

God knows what God is doing ... even when God plunks the equivalent of 15 years worth of wages down into our lap.

“Oh my goodness! What if something happens to it? What if I lose the bank wad? What if I wreck this ability of mine? What if I ruin my life? Oh my goodness! I’d be terrified!”

But no, that’s not the point. To think that way is to focus on me, on what happens to me.

And it’s not about me.

It’s not, “Oh *my* goodness!” but, “Oh *God’s* goodness!”

God’s goodness in gifting me with such treasures. God’s goodness in entrusting me with those abilities and this life.

It is about God: serving God, trusting God, giving for God, offering ourselves to the work of God.

And God is in control.

And God knows what God is doing.

So...I want to hope that I’d be willing to risk for that God.

What about you?

***HYMN** “God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending” GtG 716

**1. God, whose giving knows no ending,
from your rich and endless store,
nature's wonder, Jesus' wisdom,
costly cross, grave's shattered door:
gifted by you, we turn to you,
offering up ourselves in praise;
thankful song shall rise forever,
gracious donor of our days.**

**2. Skills and time are ours for pressing
toward the goals of Christ, your Son:
all at peace in health and freedom,
races joined, the church made one.**

(continued...)

**Now direct our daily labor,
lest we strive for self alone.
Born with talents, make us servants
fit to answer at your throne.**

- 3. Treasure, too, you have entrusted,
gain through powers your grace conferred:
ours to use for home and kindred,
and to spread the gospel word.
Open wide our hands in sharing,
as we heed Christ's ageless call,
healing, teaching, and reclaiming,
serving you by loving all.**

Words: Robert L. Edwards, 1961, alt.
© 1961, ren. 1989 The Hymn Society (admin. Hope Publishing Company)
Music harm. James H. Wood, 1958
© 1958, ren. 1986 Broadman Press (admin. Music Services)
Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.
Music: BEACH SPRING, *The Sacred Harp*, 1844. *Public Domain*

***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.**

**In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

**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: God of grace...
All: ...hear our prayer.

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*

We give you thanks and praise, O Lord our God. Accept now the gifts we offer, and use them to bless this community and beyond. Remind us of how much we have been blessed, that we may respond in gratitude and faithful obedience. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN "Lord of All Good" GtG 711**

- 1. Lord of all good, our gifts we bring to you;
use them your holy purpose to fulfill,
tokens of love and pledges brought anew,
that our whole life is offered to your will.**
- 2. We give our minds to understand your ways;
hands, eyes, and voice to serve your great design;
heart with the flame of your own love ablaze,
till for your glory all our powers combine.**

(continued...)

**3. Father, whose bounty all creation shows;
Christ, by whose willing sacrifice we live;
Spirit, from whom all life in fullness flows:
to you with grateful hearts ourselves we give.**

Words: Albert F. Bayly, 1962, alt.

© 1962, 1988 Oxford University Press

Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.

Music: TOULON, Genevan Psalter, 1551; adapt. from GENEVAN 124
Public Domain

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

The Call to Worship, Prayer of Confession, and Prayers of the People (adapted) are written by Rev. Carol Holbrook Prickett and used by permission. © Presbyterian Outlook, 2023.

The Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Pardon are reprinted by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2014.