

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 14, 2024
Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SECOND SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 117)*

One: "Praise the Lord, all nations!"
All: **"Give praise to God, all peoples!"**
One: "The Lord's love for us is strong."
All: **"God's faithfulness is eternal."**
Unison: **We come to worship and praise the Lord!**

***OPENING HYMN** "From All That Dwell Below the Skies" GtG 327

1. **From all that dwell below the skies
let the Creator's praise arise:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Let the Redeemer's name be sung
through every land, in every tongue.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia!**
2. **In every land begin the song;
to every land the strains belong:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
In cheerful sound all voices raise
and fill the world with joyful praise.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia!**
3. **Eternal are thy mercies, Lord;
eternal truth attends thy word:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thy praise shall sound from shore to shore,
till suns shall rise and set no more.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia!**

(next page...)

Words: Stanzas 1, 3, Isaac Watts, 1719; stanza 2, *A Pocket Hymn Book*, 1781
Music: (LASST UNS ERFREUEN) *Geistliche Kirchengesang*, 1623, alt.; harm.
Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1906
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We sing of your praises, O Lord, and hope that you will hear. But when you speak to us, we turn to you a deaf ear. We have neither heard your word nor followed your will. We grow lax in our discipline, and we disobey Christ. Our faith is flabby when put to the test; our courage vanishes in the face of temptation. Our wills stiffen when we are called to act. We profess loyalty, while our actions deny commitment. Have mercy upon us and forgive us. Forgive us, gracious Lord. Out of your never-ending patience, call to us again. Open our ears that we might hear. Open our minds that we might understand. Open our hearts that we might love. And open our lives that we might follow and obey. For it is in Christ's name that we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from Psalm 51 & 103)*

One: "Be merciful to me, O God, because of your constant love. Because of your great mercy wipe away my sins!"
All: **"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."**
One: "Wash away all my evil and make me clean from my sin!"
All: **"Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit."**
One: "The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting." By the grace of God we are loved and accepted, forgiven and restored through Jesus Christ our Lord. Know that you are forgiven and be at peace.
All: **Alleluia! 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 READINGS I Samuel 3:1-10
Romans 12:1-2

I SAMUEL 3:1-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. ² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and Samuel said, "Here I am!" ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; lie down again." So Samuel went and lay down. ⁶ The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if the Lord calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

ROMANS 12:1-2 (New Revised Standard Version)

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Listening With More Than Two Ears" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

A people attuned to God's will. That's what God desires.

Eli was priest for the people. His sons were supposed to inherit the position, the role. But his sons were not of good stock.

So God sought

"...a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind." (I Samuel 2:35 NRSV)

Someone to discern the heart and mind – the will – of God.

As another translation puts it,

"...a priest who will be faithful to me and do everything I want him to." (Today's English Version)

Like Samuel.
Like us?

But if we are to do that, we must learn to listen.

Like Samuel. *"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening,"* he says.

Now, there may indeed be some people among us who have had an experience or two that they would describe as having heard God speak to them with these two ears [--pull ears on side of head--]. Such an experience can be transforming, energizing, inspiring; and for that we must give thanks.

At the same time, I suspect for those people most of the time, and for most other people all of the time, we must listen with more than just these two ears [--pull ears on side of head--].

One crucial affirmation of our Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition is that God continues to be actively engaged in life; not off sleeping somewhere, but at work, here and now, involved in your life and mine, and in the life and happenings of the world.

So the Book of Order talks about

A faithful member...responding to God's activity in the world through service to others. (G-5.0102)

One way to hear God speak, then, is to listen – strange as it may sound – to listen with the ears of our eyes.

Look around you. Read between the lines of life, so to speak. Look with discernment and wisdom. Where do you see God working, nudging, leading? Where do you see God involved in life, in small ways and in large? in historical happenings and in everyday life?

Many would say – have said – God was working in the Civil Rights movement, notably in the words and actions of Martin Luther King, Jr.

“A Declaration of Faith” of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) notes,

**We serve humankind
by discerning what God is doing in the world
and joining in [God's] work.**

And,

**We affirm that the Lord is at work,
especially in events and movements
that free people by the gospel
and advance justice, compassion, and peace.**

(Eight(1) lines 11-13, 19-22)

So where do we see God working as we listen with the ears of our eyes?

God can speak in the needs of people around us and those far away. So we must listen, too, with the ears of our heart.

In the incomparable story of the Good Samaritan it is the outcast, the enemy, who has compassion on the one who had been robbed and beaten and left for dead. The Greek says he responded with his innards, his gut; he was moved viscerally. His heart went out to him, in other words; and he cared for this man in his need.

Where does your heart go out to others?

What needs do we perceive in those around us? How is God speaking to us in the hurts and needs of others as we listen with the ears of our heart?

God speaks in the words of the Bible, the Scriptures. It is not for nothing that we refer to these pages, this collection of writings, as "the Word of God." The witness of faithful people who have gone before us is that here in these words we experience God's Word.

So we must listen with ear, not only of the heart, but also the ear of our mind.

The Bible is both simple and complex; both easy to understand and not-so-easy to understand. Not to discourage our reading and study of the Bible – "It's over my head!" – but to engage our minds.

As we read the Bible, we are not to turn our minds off, but turn them on. Be wise in our discernment, be mindful in our listening, think as we read, and ponder as we study. How does God speak in what I read here? What is God saying in what these words are saying as we listen with the ears of our mind?

God also speaks in and through other people, as we talk together, as we listen together, as we struggle together to discern and be faithful.

So we must also listen with the ears of community.

Remember: Eli directed Samuel to God. To his credit, Eli did not accept credit for what was happening. He didn't accept Samuel's misplaced attention, but directed Samuel to God. In this way offering his guidance and assistance to Samuel.

Another foundational tenet of our Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition is that we are more likely to discern God's will and hear God's voice as we do it together in community, rather than in isolation as individuals. For in this way we seek to minimize the dangers of self-deception: you know, "coloring" God's voice, filtering God's word so it says what I want it to say, what I want to hear.

We affirm the importance of other perspectives and other people in this task of listening.

So well illustrated by the familiar poem:

**It was six men of Hindostan,
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the elephant,
(Though all of them were blind);...**

And one felt the side of the elephant and said, "The elephant is like a wall!" And one felt the tusk of the elephant and said, "The elephant is like a spear!" And one felt the trunk of the elephant and said, "The elephant is like a snake!" And one felt the knee of the elephant and said, "The elephant is like a tree!" And one felt the ear of the elephant and said, "The elephant is like a fan!" And one felt the tail of the elephant and said, "The elephant is like a rope!"

**And so these men of Hindostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each of his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!**

("The Blind Men and the Elephant" by John Godfrey Saxe)

Our own self-deception, our own limited perspective, can be tempered if we would but be willing to listen to others.

How is God speaking to you, to me, to us, as we listen with the ears of community?

All this listening takes time and effort, and practice.

Another translation says,

The Lord had not spoken to Samuel before, and Samuel did not recognize the voice. (Contemporary English Version)

Recognizing the voice of God takes practice and experience. We have to be willing to work at it. Open to listening. Learn to hear and recognize God's voice.

I had visited someone in the hospital. It was a warm, early autumn day. And I took a little break, sitting in one of those patches you'll find interspersed in a parking lot, that are filled with grass and trees. And I listened to the gentle wind blowing through the grass and the leaves. Then the huge fans of the hospital's HVAC system started up and blew, the roar drowning out the sound of the wind. Yet, having heard the rustling of the wind before, I found I could recognize it, even amidst the great distraction of those fans a-blowing.

As we practice listening to God's voice more and more, we learn to recognize God's voice better and better, and hear it even through the distractions of the myriad other voices in our lives that vie for our attention.

But another important insight I gained from my experience sitting outside that hospital: I found that my ability to hear the wind in the leaves and grass depended a great deal on how I turned my head, in what direction I pointed my ears...and my attention.

Like those satellite dishes that have to be pointed in the right direction in order to pick up the signal.

So, too, with us in our ability to hear God speak, to discern God's voice. A lot will depend upon the practice and the discipline of directing our attention toward God.

So we speak of spiritual disciplines as we gather to worship, and are intentional in prayer, as we read and study the Bible, and make a point of joining together in Christian fellowship, the community of faith, and engage in service to others. All are ways of turning our lives in the right direction, focusing our attention in the right direction, turning – and tuning – our ears in the right direction; so that we better hear the voice of God and discern the will of God, *“what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*

“Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.”

Are we?

Let us be diligent in worship. Let us be constant in our prayer. Let us be faithful in our reading and study of the Bible. Let us be committed to the work and worship of the community of faith. All so that we might better hear the voice of God and discern the will of God.

Keep our "ears" open: of eye, of heart, of mind, of community.

And as we listen, let us pray for strength and courage so that when – and as – we hear God speak, we might be granted the fortitude and the faith to follow and obey.

***HYMN** “Open My Eyes, That I May See” GtG 451

1. **Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me.
Place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes; illumine me, Spirit divine!**
2. **Open my ears, that I may hear
voices of truth thou sendest clear.
And while the wave notes fall on my ear,
everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my ears; illumine me, Spirit divine!**
3. **Open my mouth, and let me bear
gladly the warm truth everywhere.
Open my heart, and let me prepare
love with thy children thus to share.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my heart; illumine me, Spirit divine!**

Words and Music (OPEN MY EYES): Clara H. Scott, 1895
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***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.
Christ teaches us
to put obedience to God
above the interests of self, family, race, or nation;
to offer God joyously
our money, ability, and time.**

(continued...)

**It is part of our discipline
to observe a day of worship and rest,
setting aside our own working to enjoy God's work,
celebrating with sisters and brothers the Lord's goodness.
We need constantly to search out God's way in Scripture,
not expecting detailed directions for every decision,
but relying on the Word to tell us who God is,
to press God's present claim on us,
and to assure us of God's grace and comfort.
We are charged to pray for ourselves and others
with gratitude, boldness, and persistence,
confident that God hears and answers our prayers
in ways best for us all.
Life in God's presence issues in life for others,
for if we do not love sisters and brothers whom we see,
we cannot love God whom we do not see.**

“A Declaration of Faith” is © 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: God of grace,...
All: ...hear the prayers of your people.

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*

O God, you nourish us by the outpouring of your love. You strengthen us with your enlivening Spirit. Our bodies are sustained by your goodness and power. You are the source of every good deed we perform and of every gift we possess. Our offerings are but a portion of what you give us in abundance. Accept them as signs of our thanksgiving and of our commitment to you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak" GtG 722

1. **Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
in living echoes of your tone.
As you have sought, so let me seek
your erring children, lost and lone.**
2. **O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
the wandering and the wavering feet.
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
your hungering ones with manna sweet.**
3. **O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
the precious truths which you impart.
And wing my words that they may reach
the hidden depths of many a heart.**
4. **O fill me with your fullness, Lord,
until my very heart o'erflow
in kindling thought and glowing word,
your love to tell, your praise to show.**
5. **O use me, Lord, use even me,
just as you will, and when, and where
until your blessed face I see,
your rest, your joy, your glory share.**

Words: Frances Ridley Havergal, 1872, alt.

Music: (CANONBURY) Robert Schumann, 1839, alt.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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