

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FIFTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We come to worship the Lord our God, the creator of all the universe.

All: We come to celebrate God's claim upon us and God's gift of love and life.

One: We come, because we are invited to come.

All: So come, let us worship the Lord.

***OPENING HYMN** "God, You Spin the Whirling Planets" GtG 23

1. God, you spin the whirling planets,
fill the seas and spread the plain,
mold the mountains, fashion blossoms,
call forth sunshine, wind, and rain.
We, created in your image,
would a true reflection be
of your justice, grace, and mercy
and the truth that makes us free.

2. You have called us to be faithful
in our life and ministry.
We respond in grateful worship
joined in one community.
When we blur your gracious image,
focus us and make us whole.
Healed and strengthened as your people,
we move onward toward your goal.

3. God, your word is still creating,
calling us to life made new.
Now reveal to us fresh vistas
where there's work to dare and do.

(continued...)

**Keep us clear of all distortion.
Polish us with loving care.
Thus, new creatures in your image,
we'll proclaim Christ everywhere.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Almighty God, we confess that without you, we are not whole.
Yet we have tried to hide from you,
for we have done wrong.
We have lived for ourselves,
and apart from you.
We have turned from our neighbors,
and refused to bear the burdens of others.
We have ignored the pain of the world,
and passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed.
In your great mercy forgive our sins
and free us from selfishness.
Wash us with your love and cleanse us with your grace
that we may choose your will
and obey your commandments;
and day by day move closer to the people you would have us be.
Through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: The God who knows you through and through,
whose own body and blood were given for your freedom,
who calls you to renewal every day,
hears your repentance and by grace has made you clean.

**All: Relentlessly God seeks us out
with abundant grace and boundless mercy.
This is good news!
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven,
we are cleansed and made whole!**

One: Give thanks to God,
whose welcome is for each one of us and for all of us together.

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 Mark 1:40-45

MARK 1:40-45 (Common English Bible)

⁴⁰ *A man with a skin disease approached Jesus, fell to his knees, and begged, "If you want, you can make me clean."*

⁴¹ *Incensed, Jesus reached out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do want to. Be clean."* ⁴² *Instantly, the skin disease left him, and he was clean.* ⁴³ *Sternly, Jesus sent him away,* ⁴⁴ *saying, "Don't say anything to anyone. Instead, go and show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifice for your cleansing that Moses commanded. This will be a testimony to them."* ⁴⁵ *Instead, he went out and started talking freely and spreading the news so that Jesus wasn't able to enter a town openly. He remained outside in deserted places, but people came to him from everywhere.*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Angry Caring. Caring Anger." by Pastor Bill Vincent

Today's sermon is not going to be on today's scripture passage.

Except maybe it is.

It is and it isn't.

It may depend upon your perspective.

It may depend upon your comfort level.

It may depend upon a lot of things.

And maybe it is.

And maybe it isn't.

And if, by now, you are confused, that actually may be a very good place to start.

We all know (I hope) that we have no original documents for any of this [--hold up the Bible--].

Not to shock you. Not to cause you to lose confidence in these words or its message.

But the original documents – the original words written for Genesis or Isaiah or Mark or Paul's letters – we have no originals of any of them. We only have copies...of copies...of copies.

Yes, with discoveries such as the Dead Sea scrolls, we come closer to the originals.

But, from whatever original, we still only have copies.

And comparing one copy with another, we realize that sometimes – not often (incredibly so) and certainly not always – but sometimes variant readings have made their way into the stream of copying. (A footnote note in your Bible may say “Variant reading” or “Other manuscripts read...”.)

Variant readings of words, often based on similar sounds in words, or the change of a letter...or two. Or an additional phrase or two. Or something else.

And so in our passage for today, we have a variant reading.

You may – or may not – have noticed when I read it. Because maybe today’s reading sounded strange, or not quite right, or “I don’t remember it said that!”

The typical reading of the passage – the one you’ll find in most translations – has Jesus respond to the man’s request “*moved with pity*” or “*filled with compassion.*”

This sounds like Jesus. We know of other stories where people come to Jesus, or he notices someone, and his response is one of a deep caring toward the person: responding to the need, to the crisis, with genuine love and care and compassion: be it an illness, a death, an “unclean spirit,” even a simple (or not so simple) question.

“*If you want, you can make me clean,*” the man says. And Jesus says, “*I do want to. Be clean.*” And “*instantly the skin disease left him, and he was clean.*” A response of compassion, moved by the plight of this man.

And it is easy to understand the object of his compassion: the “*man with a skin disease.*”

The variant reading of our passage has Jesus respond in what seems to be a quite different manner.

The translation I read this morning says, in response to the man’s request, Jesus was “*incensed*”: he was ‘angry’, ‘indignant’. A deep feeling of a very different kind.

Does this sound like Jesus? Especially if we are automatically inclined to think that Jesus’ response is directed at the “*man with a skin disease.*” Why would Jesus be ‘incensed with’, ‘angry at’ the man?

Unless...his anger is directed, not at the man, but something (or someone) else.

Like the disease...and the circumstances in which the man finds himself.

This skin disease – the word used is ‘leprosy’, which probably also included a number of other skin diseases besides what we (nowadays) would call leprosy – could be a horrible physical condition, deforming the skin and the body. The skin disease was also feared by others. So much so that, by law, those with this leprosy were required to keep away from others and to go about yelling, “Unclean! Unclean!” so others would be warned to stay away from them. The result of the disease was not only physical, but also social and relational isolation: they were literally cast out from community, from involvement and contact with other people.

So that when this variant reading of our passage says Jesus was incensed, could it be that he was angry with this disease – causing pain and suffering – and angry with the fact that this man was being shunned and ostracized as “unclean”?

Plight indeed.

Jesus is certainly angry in other situations.

Another time, when he is in the synagogue on a sabbath, “they” (probably the religious leaders) were watching him to see if he would heal a man with a withered hand...on the sabbath. Jesus invites the man forward and then asks, “Is it permitted on the sabbath to do good or to do evil? to restore life or to destroy it?” But “they” were silent. And Jesus “looked at them with anger, deeply grieved at the hardness of their heart”...and then healed the man. (See Mark 3:1-5) Angry at the hardness, and coldness, of their heart...and compassionate in his response to human need.

Jesus is angry with the money lenders when they misuse and abuse the worship in the temple. He is angry with those who will not repent, who will not “change their hearts and lives.” He is angry, and deeply saddened, when others fail to see God’s love reaching out to them; angry when he sees pain and suffering that should be avoidable and is repairable.

And he appears to be angry with others and with a system that shuns this man with a skin disease and ostracizes him and separates him from what he most needs: human touch, human community, human companionship, human compassion.

And so, “incensed” at the disease and the situation of it all, Jesus himself touches the man and “cleanses” his body and restores his soul...out of compassion.

Variant reading indeed.

But maybe not a case of one way or the other, but both. Not one ‘true’ way of reading the passage, but a deeper, fuller truth: that Jesus responds, both with compassion...and anger.

Compassion for the man, the person, the child of God. And so reaching out to engage, to ‘make clean’, to make whole, to offer connection and community...and love.

And anger for the situation in which this man finds himself. Angry that he is made to feel isolated and shunned and unworthy. Angry that others have ostracized him and diminished him and made him to feel small and less than human.

So the question for us:

How many times, with how many people, have we met someone who comes to us – who searches us out, even – and begs, in so many words or ways, “If you will, you can make me clean”: you can make me whole; you can claim me, include me in community.

Will we respond with the compassion of Jesus? Motivated to engage. Not put off because they look different or sound different or their situation makes us uncomfortable. But reaching out to claim and accept, and to do what we can to meet their need, even if it just be a listening ear.

Will we also respond with the anger of Jesus? Realizing we have to be careful with this one: not to be self-righteous, but appropriately angry with a situation, a relationship, a set of circumstances, a culture, a system that ostracizes another and demeans another and diminishes their personhood and excludes them from human touch and human community and human compassion.

“If you will, you can make me clean.”

If we will, we can be genuinely human; and reach out, genuinely, to another human; and show compassion, and maybe even show, and act on, some appropriate anger, to engage in community and embrace in love and affirm yet another child of God.

Of course, it’s only a variant reading.
Or is it?

***HYMN** “Just as I Am, without One Plea” GtG 442 (*Verses 1, 3, & 4*)

1. **Just as I am, without one plea
but that thy blood was shed for me,
and that thou biddest me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**

3. **Just as I am, thou wilt receive,
wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**

4. **Just as I am, thy love unknown
has broken every barrier down;
now to be thine, yea, thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!**

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

God sends us to exercise compassion.

**In the end the Lord will judge all persons
by the simple, unremembered acts of kindness
they did or failed to do
for the least of their sisters and brothers.**

**We acknowledge God is at work here and now
when people show personal concern for each other
and work to make helping agencies,
including the church itself,
more compassionate.**

(continued...)

**We believe God sends us
to risk our own peace and comfort
in compassion for our neighbors.
We are to give to them and receive from them,
accepting everyone we meet as a person;
to be sensitive to those who suffer in body or mind;
to help and accept help
in ways that affirm dignity and responsibility.
We must not limit our compassion to those we judge deserving,
for we ourselves do not deserve the compassion of God.**

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Hear us, O God...
All: ...be gracious to us.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**For your gifts that live all around us in creation, O God,
we give you thanks.
For your gifts that come from the servanthood of your Son, O God,
we give you praise.
For the gifts that arise in our daily lives
through the work of your Holy Spirit, O God,
we give you thanks.
With faith and hope, we offer our gifts to you.
Use them, even as you use us,
to accomplish your purposes in Jesus Christ,
to your glory. 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

Sing "Loaves Were Broken, Words Were Spoken" GtG 498 (*Verses 1, 3, & 4*)

**1. Loaves were broken, words were spoken
by the Galilean shore.
Jesus, Bread of Life from heaven,
was their food forevermore.
By your body broken for us,
by your wine of life outpoured,
Jesus, feed again your people.
Be our Host, our Life, our Lord.**

(Please hold the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community.)

**3. Loaves are broken, words are spoken,
as in faith we gather here.
Jesus speaks across the ages:
“I am with you; do not fear!”
By your body broken for us,
by your wine of life outpoured,
Jesus, feed again your people.
Be our Host, our Life, our Lord.**

(Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

**4. By the loaves you break and give us,
send us in your name to share
bread for which the millions hunger,
words that tell your love and care.
By your body broken for us,
by your wine of life outpoured,
Jesus, feed again your people.
Be our Host, our Life, our Lord.**

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Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Called as Partners in Christ’s Service” GtG 761

**1. Called as partners in Christ's service,
called to ministries of grace,
we respond with deep commitment
fresh new lines of faith to trace.
May we learn the art of sharing,
side by side and friend with friend,
equal partners in our caring
to fulfill God's chosen end.**

(continued...)

2. **Christ's example, Christ's inspiring,
Christ's clear call to work and worth,
let us follow, never faltering,
reconciling folk on earth.
Men and women, richer, poorer,
all God's people, young and old,
blending human skills together
gracious gifts from God unfold.**
3. **Thus new patterns for Christ's mission,
in a small or global sense,
help us bear each other's burdens,
breaking down each wall or fence.
Words of comfort, words of vision,
words of challenge, said with care,
bring new power and strength for action,
make us colleagues, free and fair.**
4. **So God grant us for tomorrow
ways to order human life
that surround each person's sorrow
with a calm that conquers strife.
Make us partners in our living,
our compassion to increase,
messengers of faith, thus giving
hope and confidence and peace.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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