

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRD SUNDAY in LENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Praise the Lord!
All: **Praise the Lord, O my soul!**
One: I will praise the Lord as long as I live!
All: **Let the name of the Lord be renowned throughout the earth, now and forever.**

***OPENING HYMN “Fairest Lord Jesus” GtG 630**

1. Fairest Lord Jesus,
Ruler of all nature,
O thou of God to earth come down,
thee will I cherish,
thee will I honor,
thou, my soul's glory, joy, and crown.
2. Fair are the meadows,
fairer still the woodlands,
robed in the blooming garb of spring.
Jesus is fairer,
Jesus is purer,
who makes the woeful heart to sing.
3. Fair is the sunshine,
fairer still the moonlight,
and all the twinkling, starry host.
Jesus shines brighter,
Jesus shines purer,
than all the angels heaven can boast.

(continued...)

**4. Beautiful Savior,
Ruler of the nations,
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor,
praise, adoration,
now and forevermore be thine!**

Words: Munster *Gesangbuch*, 1677; stanzas 1-3, trans. *Church Chorals and Choir Studies*, 1850, alt; stanza 4, trans. Joseph August Seiss, 1873, alt.
Music: CRUSADERS' HYMN, Silesian folk melody; *Schlesische Volkslieder*, 1842
Public Domain

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We sing our praise of you, O Lord, and confess our need for you as well. We lose our way in life and need you to guide us. We turn away from your way and need you to return us to you. We find it hard to love our neighbors, and need you to transform us by your love that we might love in return. Help us, O Lord our God. Forgive us our sins. Strengthen us in our weakness. And guide us in the way of your abundant life. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Brothers and sisters, in Jesus Christ, crucified, risen, and coming again, we are forgiven and set free to live in faithfulness with God and with 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 READINGS Mark 12:41-44
Mark 14:3-9

(next page...)

MARK 12:41-44 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁴¹ *Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. ⁴² A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny. ⁴³ Then he called his disciples and said to them, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. ⁴⁴ For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”*

MARK 14:3-9 (New Revised Standard Version)

³ *While Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. ⁴ But some were there who said to one another in anger, “Why was the ointment wasted in this way? ⁵ For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor.” And they scolded her. ⁶ But Jesus said, “Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. ⁷ For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. ⁸ She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. ⁹ Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “The Gift Which Counts” by Pastor Bill Vincent

The difference: two small coins, worth a penny, from the poor widow; and a year's worth of wages from the woman with the ointment. A vast difference.

And yet, no difference at all. For both are praised and applauded by Jesus in their giving: in their example of discipleship

“Oh, boy,” you say, “then I can get by with two small coins.” No; such thinking betrays that one is precisely not like these two women. Not like them at all.

A woman boldly enters the house where Jesus is. She has this very expensive ointment that she pours over Jesus' head. Others are aghast at what she has done. “How can you do that? The money from this ointment could have been used for better purposes: to feed the poor! How dare you! The waste!”

But Jesus says, “No!”

“She has performed a good service for me. ... She has done what she could.”

In this case, “anointing his body for burial.”

“She did what she could.”

Do we do what we can?

It seems a simple question...with rather profound implications.

Halford E. Luccock writes:

Doing what we can is frequently the last thing we care to do. As a rule it is unexciting and unspectacular. How much more [exciting] to think of ourselves as doing what we cannot do! ... We sigh and think...what we could accomplish for some fine cause with the \$50,000 we do not have, instead of going through the prosaic business of doing something with the \$50 we do have. ... To think of ourselves in fanciful daydreaming as the author of immortal books is far more thrilling – and easy – than to write the helpful letter we can write.

And we dream our life, and our usefulness, away.

Yet the world has been blessed not by reverie but by act, by people who did what they could; not with the imaginary \$50,000 or the imaginary eloquence, but with the actual \$50, or \$5, and with the word in season, fitly spoken. (*Interpreter's Bible*, p.871)

Will we do what we can with what we have?

Like the widow?

Others are putting in large sums of money in the treasury. And this poor widow has but two small copper coins: the smallest coins available, and worth next to nothing.

Yet Jesus applauds her giving:

“she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.”

She gave her all.

“She put in everything she had.”

Do we?

Or do we give only partially? and that, hesitantly.

“**It is our tragedy,**” William Barclay writes,

that there is so often some part of our lives, some part of our activities, some part of ourselves which we do not give to Christ. Somehow there is nearly always something we hold back. (*The Gospel of Mark*, revised edition, p.302-303)

Maybe because we don't want to give it all. We want to keep something for ourselves.

Or perhaps we think that what we have to give is not worth giving, not worth the trouble; no one would think it important or worthwhile.

Yet, as someone notes,

No gift of love is too small to count. (*Interpreter's*, p.853)

But the question is: Will we give it?

“Put in everything we have.” “Do what we can.”

This is what we are called upon to do. This is the proper worship given to Jesus; the proper response to our relationship with him.

Think of that which is most precious to you. The widow: all she had. The woman: very expensive ointment, almost a year's worth of wages.

Would you be willing to give it up? give it to Jesus?

Like a talent that is precious to you, a skill that is so much a part of who you are. Would you be willing to hand it over to God? Not simply for your own benefit, but to serve God and benefit others? A dream, a hope; your time, your possessions.

What about your family? That's a tricky one: what does it mean to give our family to God? Maybe, when it comes to our children, realizing they are not ours to do with what we wish, not to live our lives through, but to nurture and support their lives. "How, God, might I serve you in my relationship with them?"

Like our life: many would say the most precious thing we have. Yet even here, Jesus says,

For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. (Mark 8:35 NRSV)

"Put in everything we have." "Do what we can."

Maybe this is what it means to "*love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.*" (Mark 12:30 NRSV)

To be willing to throw our whole selves into our response to God, into following Jesus. With no holding back, no saving a portion for yourself. Giving our all, even that which is most precious. For

the gift which counts is the gift which costs. (*Interpreter's*, p.852)

Yet, to give it, not as a cost we count, but a cost we give, and give freely, willingly, joyfully; not calculatingly, but from the heart, with genuine love and devotion.

Ever done something almost 'on a lark'? One of those "Random acts of kindness." Just did it, without calculating, without counting up beforehand the cost and whether or not you could "afford" it. Just did it: to express love, to show you care; because it was right, because it seemed the right thing to do.

Yes, there are times when it is important to stop and think and figure things out, consider the consequences before we act. But there are also times when such calculating only gets in the way and provides an all-too-easy excuse for avoiding the right thing, for avoiding the sacrifice of "the gift which costs."

"She has performed a good service for me." Jesus said. *"She has done what she could."*

Lamar Williamson puts his finger on it when he says,

Her act is beautiful because she has invested herself in it. (*Mark, Interpretation series*, p.248)

Really put herself into it. And in doing so, given of herself – actually given herself.

Think of one of those gifts you may have received from a family member or a special friend: a special gift where it is absolutely clear that person gave of themselves in the gift. The gift represents a giving of self.

"God, this represents me."

"God, this is me, giving me, to you."

God wants us to give ourselves, and everything that comes along with us – be it two coins or a year’s salary – and everything else.

Of course, what would ever possess someone to do that?

What? but some other giving in kind.

Like one who “*gave his life a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45).

As Paul reminds us,

For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

(II Corinthians 8:9 NRSV)

Jesus emptied himself – no holding back – and gave himself that we might be rich in the grace and life and love of God.

So we give in response to Christ’s giving to us.

And when we do, Jesus applauds, like his cheering the response of both women: lifts them up as examples to follow.

It reminds me of the response of the master to those two servants: one who started with five talents and ended with five more; another who started with two talents and ended with two more. And the master said,

“Well done, good and trustworthy [servant]” (Matthew 25:21&23 NRSV)

I mean, what higher praise could there be, than a good word such as that from the one whom we love with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and all our strength.

Whether it be two coins or a year’s salary, a heart of prayer or a hand of service, a moment of grace or a whole day of waiting, give of your all: give yourself. Give to one who has given himself to you.

***HYMN** “Savior! Thy Dying Love” (*Verses 1-3*)

**1. Savior! Thy dying love
thou gavest me,
nor should I aught withhold,
dear Lord, from thee:
in love my soul would bow,
my heart fulfill its vow,
some off’ring bring thee now,
something for thee.**

**2. At the blest mercy seat,
pleading for me,
my feeble faith looks up,
Jesus, to thee;**

(continued...)

help me the cross to bear,
thy wondrous love declare,
some song to raise, or prayer,
something for thee.

3. Give me a faithful heart,
guided by thee,
that each departing day
henceforth may see
some work of love begun,
some deed of kindness done,
some wand'rer sought and won,
something for thee.

Words: Sylvanus D. Phelps, 1862

Music: SOMETHING FOR JESUS, Robert Lowry, 1871

Public Domain

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

We trust in Jesus Christ,
 fully human, fully God.
Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:
 preaching good news to the poor
 and release to the captives,
 teaching by word and deed
 and blessing the children,
 healing the sick
 and binding up the brokenhearted,
 eating with outcasts,
 forgiving sinners,
 and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.
Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
Jesus was crucified,
 suffering the depths of human pain
 and giving his life for the sins of the world.
God raised this Jesus from the dead,
 vindicating his sinless life,
 breaking the power of sin and evil,
 delivering us from death to life eternal.

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Generous God...
All: ...hear our prayer as we give ourselves to you.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

Unison Prayer of Dedication

Dear God, with your power you create us, by your grace you forgive us, through your Spirit you renew us. We give you thanks for your countless blessings. Accept these offerings, we pray, and teach us to be generous, giving fully of ourselves in thanksgiving and service to you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Sing "Lord, We Have Come at Your Own Invitation" GtG 503 (*Verse 1*)

- 1. Lord, we have come at your own invitation,
chosen by you, to be counted your friends;
yours is the strength that sustains dedication;
ours, a commitment we know never ends.**

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 (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.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(You are invited to hold the bread so we may eat it together, signaling our commitment as a community. You are invited to drink the cup as you are served, marking our individual commitment to the Lord.)

Sing “Lord, We Have Come at Your Own Invitation” GtG 503 (*Verse 3*)

**3. When, at your table, each time of returning,
vows are renewed and our courage restored,
may we increasingly glory in learning
all that it means to accept you as Lord.**

Words: Fred Pratt Green, 1977, alt. © 1979 Hope Publishing Company.
Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.
Music: O QUANTA QUALIA, Paris *Antiphoner*, 1681;
harm. La Feillee's *Methode du plain-chant*, 1808. *Public Domain.*

Prayer

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.**

(continued...)

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.**
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 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, Assurance of Pardon, Prayer for Illumination, Prayers of the People (adapted), and Prayer of Dedication are used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2014/2015.

The Prayers of the People (adapted) are written by Ginna Bairby and used by permission. © Presbyterian Outlook, 2024.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving is used by permission from *The Service for the Lord's Day: Supplemental Liturgical Resource 1*. Copyright 1984 The Westminster Press.