

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FOURTH SUNDAY in LENT

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come to give worship and praise.
All: **We come as God's people to be nurtured and rejoice.**
One: Come to sing songs and share prayer.
All: **We come to be challenged, to learn, and to grow.**
One: Come to be refreshed and renewed by the power of God with us.
All: **We come to worship our God.**

***OPENING HYMN** "Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun" GtG 663

1. **Awake, my soul, and with the sun
your daily stage of duty run;
shake off dull sloth, and joyful rise
to pay your morning sacrifice.**
2. **Lord, I my vows to you renew.
Disperse my sins as morning dew;
guard my first springs of thought and will,
and with yourself my spirit fill.**
3. **Direct, control, suggest, this day,
all I design or do or say,
that all my powers, with all their might,
in your sole glory may unite.**

Words: Thomas Ken, 1695, alt.

Music: MORNING HYMN, Francois Hippolyte Barthelemon,
1785; harm. *The Church Hymnal for the Christian Year*, 1917
Public Domain

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God,
we need your help in following you,
for we are blind and foolish.
Part of us wants to do your bidding,
but part of us does not,
and we struggle within ourselves.
Though our hearts may be in the right place,
we fear we do not have what it takes to follow in your way.
Forgive us, gracious God.
In your mercy, deal tenderly with us.
Renew our pledge to you.
Strengthen and encourage us,
and lead us in the way of Jesus Christ our Lord,
in whose name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Relentlessly, God seeks us out.
All: **With abundant grace and boundless mercy,
God seeks us out.**
One: This is good news!
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 Mark 14:32-42

MARK 14:32-42 (New Revised Standard Version)

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." ³³ He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴ And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." ³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ He said, "Abba, Father,

for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” ³⁷ *He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour?”* ³⁸ *Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* ³⁹ *And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words.* ⁴⁰ *And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him.* ⁴¹ *He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Humankind is betrayed into the hands of sinners.* ⁴² *Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “It’s Hard to Watch When You’re Asleep” by Pastor Bill Vincent

[--an alarm clock sounds--]
Everyone awake?

Alarms shake us from slumber. They may be a clock, or a bird singing outside the window, or an inner nagging or voice, or the sun rising.

They rouse us to a heightened sense of awareness. Our level of physical activity increases: heart rate, breathing. We engage in deliberate movement, purposeful activity; make conscious choices.

All in contrast to sleep.

[Jesus] came and found them sleeping.

Actually, there is more here than meets the eye. This is not simply the story of three men who have been up too late and who now have been found snoring under a tree.

It is almost as if we have here an acted out parable on the issue of wakefulness.

But to fully understand, we must remember an incident from earlier in the week.

Jesus had mentioned something about the coming destruction of the Temple. When the disciples asked him about this – when this might be and how they might know – Jesus warned them by saying, among other things,

“you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Therefore, keep awake – for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.” (Mark 13:32-37 NRSV)

Be alert! Stay awake!

In our context – in the Gethsemane story – the words for ‘awake’ and ‘sleep’ refer to both a physical, bodily state – on the surface of the story – and a figurative, spiritual state – below the surface of the story.

And the disciples were asleep on both accounts: not only physically asleep, but also spiritually unaware of what was really going on.

Ever been going along in life, only to have it strike you that you missed your opportunity a couple of days ago?

Ever have one of those days where you are just going through the motions, never really plugged into the day, almost as if in a dream, maybe sleepwalking: “Excuse me, were you talking to me?”

Ever been driving down the road only to have it suddenly dawn on you that you missed your turn a couple of blocks back?

An ad in the newspaper, for an evangelistic event, pictured a road sign that read,

Dangerous Intersection

and then asked,

Do you know which way to turn? (ad for “Billy Graham Television Special,” March 1997)

Along the highway of life, we can and will know which way to turn...but only if we are awake and alert to the road signs.

To state the obvious, Jesus is awake: aware of the import of what was happening.

“The hour has come,”

he says. And he seeks to rouse his disciples from what one person termed

a supernatural drowsiness. (*Interpreter's Bible*, p.883)

Not the first time he tried to rouse them. He had sought to do so from the very beginning, proclaiming

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15 NRSV)

The original wake up call.

Yet how many people were alert to the presence and working of God in Jesus himself? Even his closest associates slept.

How many of us are alert to the presence and working of God here and now?

And how many of us are asleep? Blind to God's working and calling, unaware of God's guiding and providing. A burning bush? We just don't see it!

Sleepwalking, in a way: unaware of imminent dangers around us so that we foolishly rush in where angels fear to tread. We place ourselves in compromising positions, unaware of the fate we are tempting.

Jesus warns the disciples, and us,

“Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.”

Watch out. Keep alert, be prepared, on the lookout. So when the time comes to act, we'll be ready; when temptation comes your way, you can steer clear.

If we could do that, then we would show ourselves to be awake.

Halford E. Luccock notes,

It is a plea for living on the alert, living on tiptoe, with eyes, mind, and heart on the [lookout]. (*Interpreter's Bible*, p.865)

A way of living, a style of life, a stance nurtured by prayer and worship, Christian fellowship and discussion, and service to others and reflection; reading and study of the Bible; all by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Being awake. Our minds clear. Our hearts sensitive. Attuned to things around us.

On top of things. Where we demonstrate wisdom and discernment regarding the choices we make. Where we demonstrate insight regarding the activities and events around us, and within us.

As the Book of Order reminds us, part of the responsibility of a faithful member of the church includes,

responding to God's activity in the world through service to others. (*The Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)*, G-1.0304)

The beginning of being awake: to affirm that God is at work here and now in our midst. Not dead; not far away; not uninvolved. So we open our eyes to be alert; we perceive, and work together with God in the work that God is already doing in the world.

James M. Gustafson writes on the crucial intersection of theology (what we believe) and ethics (what we do). He says,

The practical moral question in a [God-centered understanding] of the world is [this:] ... "What is God enabling and requiring us to be and to do?" (*Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, vol.1 Theology and Ethics*, p.327)

To ask that question is to be awake.

To discern an answer is to be wide awake.

Will we be open to the extraordinary wonder and mystery present within the everyday and the ordinary? In our drive to church. In a walk in the park.

Will we discern in the muffled cries of the marginalized and the silent shadows of those at the outskirts of society, an opportunity to give of ourselves...to the Lord, "*for as often as you did it to the least of these, you did it to [him]*"?

Will we discern in the misfortune of a hated enemy an opportunity, not to gloat, but to serve and offer compassion...like the Good Samaritan did?

When the time of trial comes, will we be alert to what is God's will in the midst of the trial; and will we be open to praying, "*Not my will, but yours be done*"?

We will, if we are awake.

Now, I'm not saying we have to be exceptionally bright and intelligent in order to be spiritually awake. But we do have to work at it: practice it; cultivate being alert to God's

presence in our midst, sensitive to God's guidance, tuned in to God's voice, on the lookout for God's working in our midst, here and now, around us.

And the disciples were not. Oh, they knew something special was up with Jesus, for certain. Still, they were blind to the approaching hour and its significance, "*for their eyes were very heavy.*"

And, to be fair to them, according to the way Mark tells and understands the story, they could not have been fully awake; for they could not have fully understood...without the cross. For it is the cross of Christ which is the ultimate alarm, the ultimate wake-up call.

The cross of Christ alerts us to the power of God's love to shatter even the grip of death. The cross of Christ alerts us to the lengths to which God will go in order to reclaim us as God's own. The cross of Christ alerts us to the power of God's grace to transform even the greatest tragedy into a vehicle of life and hope. The cross of Christ alerts us to the power and presence of God at work in our midst here, now, even in our times of greatest pain.

You see, we have an advantage over the original disciples, for we live on this side of the cross, where the alarm sounds louder and clearer, and more distinctly.

So, perhaps we will wake up!

Wake up! to God's extraordinary presence even in our ordinary lives and routine and activities.

Wake up! to God's power and ever-present help even in the most trying and difficult of times.

Wake up! to God's call to us even in the "*least of these*" around us.

Wake up! and watch.

"Watch," as one person notes,

lest the great opportunities for service to God's kingdom come and pass by, unseen and unseized (*Interpreter's Bible*, p.865)

...all because we were asleep.

[--sound alarm--]

Everyone awake?

*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!**

(continued...)

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. *Public Domain* .

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and binds us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.
The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.
In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
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!"**

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Merciful God...
All: ...hear our prayer.

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*

Dear God,
for the gift of good friends and good fellowship,
 we give you thanks.
For the wonder of this creation and its bounty showered upon us,
 we give you thanks.
For the sacrifice and love of Christ,
 we give you thanks.
As we offer our gifts,
 use them, and us,
 to accomplish your purposes,
 making our lives a continuous song
 of gratitude and commitment to you.
In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

*CLOSING HYMN “Christ of the Upward Way”

1. **Christ of the upward way,
my guide divine,
where you have set your feet
may I place mine;
and move and march wherever you have trod,
keeping face forward up the hill of God.**

2. **Give me the heart to hear
your voice and will,
that without fault or fear
I may fulfill
your purpose with a glad and holy zest,
like one who would not bring less than the best.**

3. **Christ of the upward way,
my guide divine,
where you have set your feet
may I place mine;
and when your last call comes serene and clear,
calm may my answer be, "Lord, I am here."**

Words: Walter John Mathams, ca. 1915; alt.

Music: SURSUM CORDA (Lomas), George Lomas, 1876
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*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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Music: TALLIS’ CANON, Thomas Tallis; adapt. Parker’s *Whole
Psalter*, ca. 1561. *Public Domain.*

POSTLUDE

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