

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord...
All: **...for we know the Lord's mercy!**
One: Let us sing the praises of our God...
All: **...for we have seen God's greatness!**
One: So, let us join and sing...
All: **...of the blessings of the Lord our God.**

***OPENING HYMN** "O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing" GtG 610 (*Verses 1-4*)

1. **O for a thousand tongues to sing
my dear Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of God's grace!**
2. **The name of Jesus charms our fears,
and bids our sorrows cease,
sings music in the sinner's ears,
brings life, and health, and peace.**
3. **Christ speaks, and listening to his voice
new life the dead receive;
the mournful waken to rejoice;
the poor in heart believe.**
4. **My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad
the honors of thy name.**

Words: Charles Wesley, 1739, alt.

Music: AZMON, Carl Gottthelf Glaser, 1828; arr. Lowell Mason, 1839
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, giver of mercy, in Christ's name hear us as we confess our sin,
for we confess that our good intentions have gone astray.
We favor the people who are like us
and honor those we deem to be important.
We dishonor the poor,
write off those with whom we disagree,
excuse our self-serving behavior, and
sow injustice in our own unfair treatment of others.
It is so much easier to give advice than to do good.
We would rather point fingers at others who are unfair
than to give up our own advantages.
Forgive us, O God, and lead us in your life.
Renew us in body and spirit,
that we will be able, through your help,
to walk in the way you intend for us.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from Isaiah 44)*

One: The Lord says, "I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and
your sins like mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you."
All: **In the name of Jesus Christ we approach God in confidence. For
through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we are restored and forgiven.
Thanks be to God!**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you all.
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 7:24-37

MARK 7:24-37 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, ²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. ²⁶ Now the woman was a gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ He said to her, "Let the

children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."
²⁸ But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs."
²⁹ Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter."
³⁰ And when she went home, she found the child lying on the bed and the demon gone.
³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went by way of Sidon toward the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. ³⁴ Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one, but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

SUNG PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION "Open Our Eyes" StF 2086

**Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus,
to reach out and touch him,
and say that we love him.
Open our ears, Lord,
and help us to listen.
Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus.**

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SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

We're at something of a crossroads with this story.
At something of a crossroads.
And indeed, Jesus crosses the road...to the other side.

In the big picture of Mark's sharing of this gospel story, we have just witnessed the end of Jesus' Galilean ministry.

Now, in our story, he crosses over into decidedly Gentile territory.
Maybe just to get away for awhile? To take a break from the crowds and the controversy?

The text simply says "he." Is Jesus there on his own? Or is it understood that, of course, his disciples accompanied him? That's not clear.

But it is clear that he's in Gentile territory. And so, foreign territory. And that's where these two stories of healing, and wholeness, take place.

In foreign territory.

Having crossed the border: that sort of blurry line that separates you from me and us from them, the familiar from the unfamiliar, the known from the unknown, the comfortable from the different and down-right scary, the friend from the foe.

Crossing boundaries. Crossing borders. Crossing a line. Crossing the tracks.

That's hard to do: difficult. There is a natural, instinctual resistance to it.

Maybe even resistance from Jesus himself. Maybe that's the reason for Jesus' 'peculiar' response to this Syro-Phoenician woman.

But notice that even so – 'peculiar' response notwithstanding – something happens. Even though there is resistance, something happens.

And grace and mercy, and healing and wholeness, spill out onto unimagined recipients.

And life is changed.

And we – as Gentiles ourselves – should be grateful that Jesus DID cross that border.

And so, encourage his followers to do the same.

I mean, could this indeed be the Messiah, the Savior who is to come? Whose mercy and healing will encompass 'our' people...and also others?

That may be something of the suggestion from the response of those to the healing of the deaf mute. The way it is described seems to allude to a passage in Isaiah:

*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.*

(Isaiah 35:5-6a-NRSV)

The coming reign of God that will spill out, not only to the identified people of God, but to all people, to all creation, to all.

Still, we have to admit that there is resistance to that inclusion, to that stepping over the line.

And if Jesus himself had difficulty with crossing this boundary – not conclusive that he did, but IF he did – imagine the obstacle we face. And even if he did NOT have difficulty – even if that was his plan all along – still we have difficulty.

And we must face this difficulty square on.

In our story, it is the whole issue of crossing the tracks from Jew to Gentile.

One source suggested that in our day and age it may be hard for us to understand the "intensity" of the strain in that relationship – the tension between Jew and Gentile – and so the difficulty over engaging the other, that other side.

But then again, maybe we don't have difficulty understanding that obstacle, that divide. Maybe it's all too real in our lives, and all too much a part of who we are and how we identify ourselves – and others – and all too much a part of how we respond and relate to 'the other'.

Maybe what's really difficult is for us to imagine a different response, a different way, a different life.

Reaching out to the other side of the aisle. Crossing the tracks.
That's hard.

Even though Jesus shows us the way.

Yes, even if he was himself resistant initially, he shows us the way to let go of that dearly held belief that I and my kind – and we only – deserve the attention and blessing of God.

He shows us the way by being willing to learn and grow...and respond differently.

And so, by his example, he helps us to make that change, and take that step, and cross that line to the other side, to 'the other'.

But I suggest to you that there are others who also show us the way, and may suggest to us how to make that change.

Notice how, in both instances, one person (or more) acts on behalf of the one in need of that grace and mercy and attention and healing.

The Syro-Phoenician woman – a mother – spoke on behalf of her daughter to bring healing to her daughter.

An undefined "*they*" – the "*crowd*" – brought the man to Jesus, and "*begged Jesus to lay his hand on him.*" "Beggd him" – just like the mother – implored on behalf of the man in need.

This willingness – or unwillingness – to cross the border and reach out to the other is a 'healing' we are in need of.

How might we help each other cross this border, step over this artificial line that has so much power over us, that causes so much disruption and divisiveness and disharmony?

How might we help others – how might we solicit the help of others – so that we might better cross this border ourselves...and reach out with the compassion and healing and the power of Jesus?

"Pray for me," we might ask. "Come join me, and let's do this together." Hold me accountable when I say I want to do better at this.

How might we encourage one another and hold one another accountable to this offering of grace and this spilling out of mercy upon all people, unconditionally, abundantly, graciously?

And how will we be persistent – and insistent – in our encouragement of one another and in our own pushing ourselves to cross this line?

Like the persistence of the Syro-Phoenician mother. She kept at it, even in the face of resistance, and even a rebuke. She kept at it, knowing there was something here worth her while. And she knew, somehow, that it was available to her. She knew somehow that God would not leave her out in the cold. So she pressed on.

Will we? Will we press on in the conviction that God will not leave anyone out in the cold? ...and wants to use us to push beyond those borders?

Even though the methods and the results may be unorthodox.

And even messy.

You know, I wonder if maybe the messiness of it all is part of our resistance.

The spilling out of grace beyond our borders – beyond ourselves – beyond our neatly ordered expectations, beyond our nicely defined – and confined – world-view – that spilling out of grace upsets the applecart, and our lives: the nice, neat, orderly way we had of understanding life and each other and others.

Mercy is messy.

Maybe that's something of the point.

Things are not always so clearly defined and set within boundaries.

But, when our ears are opened – and our eyes, too – can we not help but see that something wondrous is taking place? when mercy is shared and grace is extended and compassion is embraced?

And though we may not be able to explain it all – and we certainly will not be able to place it in nice, neat categories – “how can we keep from singing?” as the hymn says (“My Life Flows On/How Can I Keep from Singing?” words by Robert Lowry, 1869).

Mercy is messy.

Caring is “crazy.”

Healing is “haphazard” – or so it seems sometimes.

And love is “all over the place.” Thank God!

And for those with eyes to see it and ears to hear it, they are gushing with the news.

We may not fully understand. It may not fit into our categories or our world-view.

But in the end, a little girl is freed – and so are we – and a man deaf and mute can hear...and speak for himself – and so can we.

And mercy and caring and healing and love are breaking all the rules and breaking through all the boundaries, and spilling out all over.

In spite of resistance.

We may not be able to explain it all.

We may not fully understand it.

We certainly can't predict it.

But surely we can see it.

When our ears – and our eyes – have been touched and opened.

Surely we can see that something wondrous is taking place.

Something wondrous that points, not to me and my efforts, fumbling and stumbling as they are.

But points to the God who – amazingly – resides with us in the flesh, in the midst of our mess.

The God who – astoundingly – hears our cries – and the cries of others – and who responds...though not always how we would like or expect.

The God who – blessedly – showers us with grace and mercy, wherever we are, whoever we are, within or beyond whatever borders we have set up.

I may not understand. I certainly can't explain or predict. But maybe what I can do is I can lift up those instances, and point them out and give thanks – and give witness to what I do see and what I do understand and what I do know: that God is in our midst; and God is not dead but still very much alive; and God is doing wondrous, mind-blowing, unexpected, life-affirming things.

So lift up those stories.

And point them out.

And give thanks to God for them all.

And tell other people.

And, be open to how God might open you up, not only to see and acknowledge and proclaim and celebrate, but also to be a part of what God is doing: the love that is flowing, the grace that is spilling out, the healing that is bringing wholeness to life, to others, to you and to me.

***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!**

(continued...)

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** (from “*A Declaration of Faith*”)

God sent God’s Son

**to proclaim release to those who are bound,
to announce that God's promised kingdom is at hand,
to urge everyone to repent and believe the good news.**

The Lord is moving toward the time

**when the glorious liberty of the children of God
will be manifest throughout the whole creation.**

We testify God is at work here and now

**when people obey Christ's commission
to witness to him and make disciples of all nations,
when they spread the good news by their words
and embody it in their lives.**

We believe that God sends us

**to tell all nations
that Christ calls everyone to repentance, faith, and obedience.**

We are to proclaim by word and deed

**that Christ gave himself to set people free
from sin and self-hatred,
from ignorance and disease,
from all forms of oppression,
and even from death.**

We are to offer them in Christ's name

fullness of life now and forever.

We must not distort the gospel

**by weakening its promises or demands,
by identifying it with oppressive structures,
by pointing to ourselves instead of Christ.**

We must not restrict our proclamation

to persons just like ourselves.

We invite people everywhere

to believe in Christ and become his followers.

We urge them to join us in telling others the good news

and in struggling for justice, compassion, and peace.

(next page...)

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Hear us, O God...
All: ...for your mercy is great.

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 because you have been generous to us, gracious God.
We give because we need to give in order to realize your image within us.
We give to feed the hungers of body and soul
that are all around us and deep within.
With our voices we will sing your praises;
with our hands we will care for the suffering.
With our feet we will seek to walk faithfully;
with our hearts we will love you completely.
Accept the offerings we bring,
for the sake of those in need
and for the furtherance of your witness in this world.
In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

SENDING

*CLOSING HYMN “Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service” (*Tune 490*)

1. Lord, whose love through humble service
bore the weight of human need,
who upon the cross, forsaken,
offered mercy's perfect deed,
we, your servants, bring the worship
not of voice alone, but heart,
consecrating to your purpose
every gift that you impart.

2. Still your children wander homeless;
still the hungry cry for bread;
still the captives long for freedom;
still in grief we mourn our dead.
As, O Lord, your deep compassion
healed the sick and freed the soul,
use the love your Spirit kindles
still to save and make us whole.

3. As we worship, grant us vision,
till your love's revealing light,
in its height and depth and greatness,
dawns upon our quickened sight,
making known the needs and burdens
your compassion bids us bear,
stirring us to tireless striving,
your abundant life to share.

4. Called from worship to your service,
forth in your dear name we go,
to the child, the youth, the aged,
love in living deeds to show;
hope and health, goodwill and comfort,
counsel, aid, and peace we give,
that your servants, Lord, in freedom
may your mercy know and live.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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