

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

REFORMATION SUNDAY
THIRTIETH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, to celebrate the mighty acts God has done in our midst.
All: **We come to anticipate the call into God's future.**
One: Come, to participate in God's journey and work today.
All: **We come in faith to live in hope to be nurtured in love.**
Unison: **We come to join in the walk and work and worship of God.**

*OPENING HYMN "Come, Great God of All the Ages" GtG 309

1. **Come, great God of all the ages;
make your earthly mission known;
speak through every deed and person;
let your way and will be shown.
Guide the church to true commitment;
give direction now, we ask;
fit us for the work of building;
dedicate us to the task.**
2. **Come, Christ Jesus, flesh and spirit,
sure foundation, cornerstone;
help us form the church eternal;
may your vision be our own.
Send a message to each follower;
lead all people to your way;
urge us to strong faith and action
as we build the church today.**

(continued...)

3. **Come, great Spirit, in and with us,
tune our ears to hear your call;
through the moving of your presence,
let redeeming love recall
ministry in dedication,
love embodied in our deeds;
challenge us to do your bidding,
see your purpose, fill all needs.**

4. **Come, O come, in celebration,
household of the one true God;
in commitment and rejoicing
let us go where Christ has trod;
as we act in faith and reverence,
let us, Lord, the future see;
place us in the church triumphant,
now and for eternity.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Merciful, steadfast God,
we present ourselves to you as we are,
aware that we have failed you when it comes to following you.
We are like little children,
running ahead, expecting you to follow us down the path we choose;
or we lag behind, expecting you'll wait until we're good and ready.
Forgive us for not trusting that you know the way.
Forgive us for failing to rely upon your sustaining grace and steady presence.
Forgive us, ever-loving God.
Fill us with your steadfast Spirit.
Guide us in your loving, hope-filled way.
And renew us in the image of your Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,
by whose mercy we stand before you
and offer our confession and ourselves.
Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Let us rejoice in the goodness and grace of the Lord!
All: **Through the death of Christ we are forgiven. By the resurrection of Christ we are given new life.**
One: So rejoice and be glad, and celebrate the good news!
All: **For by the grace of God we are loved and accepted, forgiven and restored through Jesus Christ our Lord. Alleluia! Amen.**

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 READINGS Isaiah 42:5-9
Hebrews 12:1-2

ISAIAH 42:5-9 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

⁵ *Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:*

⁶ *I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,*

⁷ *to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.*

⁸ *I am the Lord; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.*

⁹ *See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.*

HEBREWS 12:1-2 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

¹ *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance*

the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Remember: Don’t Play with Fire...Yet Do” by Rev. Bill Vincent

I don’t like ‘remembering’.

Seems only fair that I should say that. I splashed water on Pacific’s anniversary by saying I didn’t like anniversaries. Seems only fair that I splash water on Union’s anniversary and remembering, by saying I don’t like ‘remembering’.

Yes, I speak of a particular kind of remembering.

‘Remembering’ that is, quite honestly, maudlin.

‘Remembering’ that weeps and wails and acts as if its world and life have come to an end with the loss of some-one or some-thing, or some event that marks a change in life, and “Life is not what it used to be!”

Now, before we go any further: please don’t think me insensitive. That’s not the intent at all.

Grief and sorrow are necessary in our losses. But also, grief – good grief – leads to adjustments in life, re-orienting ourselves, and moving on.

But the kind of remembering I mention gets lost in a past that is...well, past. Gets lost in the past, and even stuck there, as if there is no hope for moving on.

The Apostle Paul addresses this situation when he writes to the Christians in Thessalonica,

We want you to be quite certain, brothers [and sisters], about those who have died, to make sure that you do not grieve about them, like the other people who have no hope. (I Thessalonians 4:13 - Jerusalem Bible)

Like those whose remembering is gripped with fear, thinking that the life of those we remember is snuffed out forever, dead and gone.

And that’s it: dead and gone, lifeless, hopeless.

And I’m not talking about the person who died. I’m talking about the person who remembers in this way: that they, in their grief and mourning and ‘remembering’ are dead and gone, lifeless and hopeless.

But we are NOT “like those who have no hope.”

We do have hope. We proclaim that hope every week. We affirm that hope with every proclamation that “Jesus is Lord!”

And the life of those we remember – our ancestors, those ‘saints’, as we often call them – they may be dead and gone, and so too may a particular way or aspect of life as we know it.

But that spark that sustained their life is not snuffed out. It still burns...in us.

And one good thing to remember: **“it only takes a spark to get a fire going”** (“Pass It On” by Kurt Kaiser, 1969).

The spark of love, of faith, of hope – of God – that flickered in those we remember – that *“cloud of witnesses”* – that spark lives in us.

That is why we remember – and try to remember well.

For we are grateful and give thanks for those who have gone before us, who shared that spark with us and nurtured that spark within us. You and I both know people like that, and we can speak their names and recount their stories, and claim what they have done for us and meant to us. And we celebrate them; and give thanks to God for them, and for God’s work in and through them: work that has touched us and nurtured us and influenced us.

But we do not stop there. We do not stop with staring longingly at the life that has gone before, at that spark that went before us.

For we treasure that spark we received, and we vow to pass that spark on to others.

I have to make a confession.

All of this – with both Union’s (today’s) anniversary celebration and Pacific’s a couple of months back – all of this, bottom line, is an attempt to nurture a healthy relationship between the past, the present, and the future.

Healthy, because too often I have seen – and I bet you have too – I have seen, and experienced, an unhealthy relationship.

We cannot live in the past. Though there are some who try to – we often call them ‘stuck’, clinging to a past that is long gone. They may deny it; but every word and movement and decision shouts their yearning to go back and reclaim (and relive) some long lost past, whether real or imaginary.

By the same token, we cannot live in the future. Though there are some who try to: who jump ahead of everyone to live a life that does not exist, with their ‘head in the clouds’.

But we can and we do live in the present, here, now. In fact, it’s the only place we can live.

And in the present – here and now – we can remember and celebrate and lift up the best of the past: to learn from it, to be inspired by it, even to be guided by it. We just cannot live there – in the past – we have to live in the present. And the present is never exactly like the past. And so the past can never be perfectly re-created in the present, and we should not try to. But we can live informed by the past.

And in the present – here and now – we can look forward to and plan for the future: envision a better world, work toward a better life. We just cannot live there – in the future (science-fiction stories notwithstanding) – we have to live in the present. And the future will never be exactly like the present, or like the future we may imagine. It shouldn’t be, for we’re supposed to grow, even in our vision for the future. And that necessitates change: change that often is never what we anticipate. And that growing needs to happen and be nurtured now.

Last year, we had a chance to visit Montreat, North Carolina. Yes, the same area of North Carolina devastated by recent rains from Hurricane Helene. In front of Anderson Auditorium, there's a plaque on the back of a bench "In Memory Of Fanny B Jones 2004." And the plaque reads:

"For yesterday is but a memory and tomorrow a vision. But today well lived makes every yesterday a memory of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope."

You know, that's a spark for living.
And that's the spark we fan.

Not like we're playing with fire irresponsibly.
But having the torch passed on to us. And our passing the torch to others.

We have been touched by, we have received this precious spark of faith and love and hope: a flame that nurtures and sustains us, the fire that gives us life and meaning and purpose. And we celebrate having received this from others: others having shared this spark and passed this fire on to us.

What can we do to continue to nurture this spark, this fire, this life within us?

- as we join in worship today;
- as we lift up our prayers to God and wait expectantly for God to respond;
- as we delve into the biblical story and listen for God's voice;
- as we live and work together in community, loving one another, forgiving one another, learning and growing together;
- as we reach out to serve, offering ourselves – our time and energy, our resources and our lives – to do justice and love kindness and share our humble walk with God.

And so pass on this spark to others

- in the words of kindness we speak,
- and the loving deeds we undertake;
- in the faithful choices we make,
- and the very example that we are.

In that light, and with that spark, the question for us – even for this Anniversary celebration, in the midst of all this 'good' remembering – the question for us is, How will I let my light shine?

How will I let Christ's light in me shine through me for others?

For, yes, I can affirm and celebrate my debt to those who have gone before me. I affirm how Christ's fire burned in them. I celebrate how their spark fueled my spark.

But at the end of the day, the question is not about the fire and spark of our ancestors. The question is, How will Christ's fire burn in me? How will his spark fuel my passion and my ministry, my service and my life? How will his light in me touch others? ...both as an individual, and as a community.

May our answer to that question be the torch we bear...and share.

***HYMN** “Pass It On”

**1. It only takes a spark
To get a fire going
And soon all those around
Can warm up in its glowing
That's how it is with God's love
Once you've experienced it
You spread God's love to ev'ryone
You want to pass it on**

**2. What a wondrous time is spring
When all the trees are budding
The birds begin to sing
The flowers start their blooming
That's how it is with God's love
Once you've experienced it
You want to sing it's fresh like spring
You want to pass it on**

**3. I wish for you my friend
This happiness that I've found
On God you can depend
It matters not where you're bound
I'll shout it from the mountain-top
I want my world to know
The Lord of love has come to me
I want to pass it on**

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A SHARING by Rev. Linda Maconochie

CELEBRATING THE SAINTS “For All the Saints” StF 2283

**1. For all the saints who've shown your love
in how they live and where they move,
for mindful women, caring men,
accept our gratitude again.**

-Lighting a Candle for Family-

**2. For all the saints who loved your name,
whose faith increased the Savior's fame,
who sang your songs and shared your word,
accept our gratitude, good Lord.**

-Lighting a Candle for Friends-

**3. For all the saints who named your will,
and showed the kingdom coming still
through selfless protest, prayer, and praise,
accept the gratitude we raise.**

-Lighting a Candle for Others-

**4. Bless all whose will or name or love
reflects the grace of heaven above.
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,
your life through theirs has hallowed ours.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *(The Apostles' Creed)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.**

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

(next page...)

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

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: "God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale" Choir

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**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**God of grace and embrace,
we thank you for walking with us
and providing for us
and loving us all along the way.
We bring these offerings to you as tokens of our gratitude
and symbols of the offering of our lives
to share the joy of your kingdom,
the peace of your presence,
and the grace of your good news,
all to your glory.
In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” GtG 730

1. **I sing a song of the saints of God,
patient and brave and true,
who toiled and fought and lived and died
for the Lord they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor, and one was a queen,
and one was a shepherdess on the green:
they were all of them saints of God, and I mean,
God helping, to be one too.**

2. **They loved their Lord so dear, so dear,
and God's love made them strong;
and they followed the right, for Jesus' sake,
the whole of their good lives long.
And one was a soldier, and one was a priest,
and one was slain by a fierce wild beast:
and there's not any reason, no, not the least,
why I shouldn't be one too.**

3. **They lived not only in ages past;
there are hundreds of thousands still;
the world is bright with the joyous saints
who love to do Jesus' will.
You can meet them in school, or in lanes, or at sea,
in church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea;
for the saints of God are just folk like me,
and I mean to be one too.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

***RESPONSE** “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me”

(words found on next page...)

- 1. I'm gonna live so
God can use me
anywhere
and anytime!
I'm gonna live so
God can use me
anywhere
and anytime!**

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POSTLUDE

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