

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Our hope is in God who made heaven and earth.
All: **All creatures of the land and sea come from God.**
One: We will praise God as long as we live.
All: **We will sing of God's glory all through our lives.**
One: God is here!
All: **We are here!**
Unison: **Together, let us join in the worship of God.**

***OPENING HYMN** "God Is Here!" GtG 409

1. **God is here! As we your people
meet to offer praise and prayer,
may we find in fuller measure
what it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us,
all our varied skills and arts
wait the coming of the Spirit
into open minds and hearts.**
2. **Here are symbols to remind us
of our lifelong need of grace;
here are table, font, and pulpit;
here the cross has central place.
Here in honesty of preaching,
here in silence, as in speech,
here, in newness and renewal,
God the Spirit comes to each.**

(continued...)

3. **Here our children find a welcome
in the Shepherd's flock and fold;
here as bread and wine are taken,
Christ sustains us as of old.
Here the servants of the Servant
seek in worship to explore
what it means in daily living
to believe and to adore.**
4. **Lord of all, of church and kingdom,
in an age of change and doubt
keep us faithful to the gospel;
help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication,
all we have to give, receive:
we, who cannot live without you,
we adore you! We believe!**

Words: Fred Pratt Green, 1979; rev. 1988 © 1975, 1994 Hope
Publishing Company.
Music: ABBOT'S LEIGH, Cyril Vincent Taylor, 1941 © 1942,
ren. 1970 Hope Publishing Company
*Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 &
#20702248 / #2457662 & #20854354.*

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Holy God, we come before you a broken people in a broken world.
We confess we have ignored, yet again, your assured presence.
We have forged our own paths and charted our own waters.
In the name of independence
we have ignored your aid, your comfort, and your peace.
We have called upon you in desperation
rather than recalling your mighty and faithful acts in all times and places.
Forgive us, O God.
Turn us back to you,
and by your grace
restore in us the image and work of your grace;
through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Hear the good news! The Lord is loving, merciful, and just.
All: **Through grace Christ gives us eternal comfort and good hope.**
One: Be assured: in Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.
All: **Therefore, we are reconciled to God and to one another,
that we might walk in peace and love.**

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 12:13-34

MARK 12:13-34 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

¹³ Then they sent to him some Pharisees and some Herodians to trap him in what he said. ¹⁴ And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere and show deference to no one, for you do not regard people with partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? ¹⁵ Should we pay them, or should we not?" But knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, "Why are you putting me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me see it." ¹⁶ And they brought one. Then he said to them, "Whose head is this and whose title?" They answered, "Caesar's." ¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "Give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." And they were utterly amazed at him.

¹⁸ Some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question, saying, ¹⁹ "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, leaving a wife but no child, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. ²⁰ There were seven brothers; the first married and, when he died, left no children, ²¹ and the second married the widow and died, leaving no children, and the third likewise; ²² none of the seven left children. Last of all the woman herself died. ²³ In the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had married her."

²⁴ Jesus said to them, "Is not this the reason you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? ²⁵ For when people rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven. ²⁶ And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the story about the bush, how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? ²⁷ – God not of the dead but of the living; you are quite wrong."

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is

one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” ³² Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘God is one, and besides God there is no other’; ³³ and ‘to love God with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Questions! Questions?” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Questions are the backbone of learning and growth.
But how you ask those questions makes all the difference in the world.

The Pharisees and Herodians come with the intent to trap Jesus.
But Jesus knows their “*hypocrisy*” – their “two-faced-ness.” They talk with flattery, but they have an ulterior motive.

They ask about the poll-tax (the word is singular – ‘tax’ – not plural – ‘taxes’). The head tax levied by the Romans on every single person. The tax had to be paid with a particular kind of Roman coin. And when Jesus asks about the image on the coin, the question is reminiscent of the image of God in which we are made.

Now the trap laid for Jesus is this: If he says “Yes” to paying the tax, he will disappoint the crowd, for they hated the tax. If he says “No,” he could be accused of insurrection against Rome.

Yet Jesus deftly maneuvers around, through, over and above the trap.

And the Pharisees and Herodians leave “*utterly amazed*” ... and foiled in their plan to trap him.

The Sadducees are also hypocrites, as they don’t believe in the resurrection, but nevertheless they ask a question about the resurrection. What would they care? except maybe to try to show the absurdity of a belief in resurrection, as they thought of it.

But Jesus also says they are ignorant, “*knowing neither the scriptures nor the power of God.*” For God is God of the living (not the dead). And, oh by the way, God’s power is such as to lift us up and re-create a new life above and beyond the absurdities of their question.

Their question – which was supposed to illustrate their wisdom, instead – demonstrates their ignorance.

And they too leave confounded in their plan.

Then, there is the scribe.

Nothing is said about his motivation – certainly not any nefarious one – only that “*seeing that Jesus answered them well.*”

“Answered them well”: Is that the evaluation of the narrator only? Or is that also the evaluation of the scribe himself? that “*Jesus answered them well.*”

“*Which commandment is the first of all?*” he asks. A probing question, to be sure. But also, it seems, very sincerely asked.

And certainly, when he responds to Jesus’ answer, there is no malice in the scribe’s voice. “*You are not far from the kingdom of God,*” Jesus says.

“*After that no one dared to ask Jesus any question.*”

That’s a good thing, I suppose, especially when it comes to certain of the religious leaders: they who “*kept looking for a way to kill him*” (11:18), who “*wanted to arrest him*” (12:12), but were prevented because “*they feared the crowd*” (12:12; cf. 11:18) – for now, at least.

A good thing, because – at least for the moment – it appears Jesus has defeated their plan to get rid of him.

However, maybe it’s not such a good thing – “*that no one dared to ask him any question*” – when it comes to...others.

For questions are the backbone of learning and growth...when asked genuinely, sincerely. When asked out of genuine curiosity and a sincere yearning to learn and grow.

“*You are not far from the kingdom of God,*” Jesus says.

How close – or far – are we? with the questions we ask, and the manner in which we ask them.

Do we ask our questions with the intent of gaining ammunition, or the upperhand, over our “enemies”? those who oppose us and our perspective; those who have a different ‘take’ on life, or even a different ‘take’ on faith itself?

Do we ask our questions in order to trick another, or trip them up? make them fall flat on their face and appear the fool, so that we appear better.

Do we ask our questions in order to show off our supposed wisdom? how smart we are – “Smarter than you, I’d wager” – how much we know – “More than you, I bet.”

So that we have the smug satisfaction of looking good in other people’s eyes...or at least better than ‘you-know-who’.

Or do we ask our questions in order to learn, to grow...to understand better? even ourselves, let alone another.

That can be a tough one, in some circumstances.

Do I really want to understand the perspective – the line of thinking – of my political opponent? How they got where they are in their thinking. What they value. What they hope for. What they fear.

Do I really want to understand the way of life that challenges my own?

Do I really want to hear, and understand, the word that draws into question the very basic assumptions of my life?

Do we ask questions in order to dismiss the other, to get them out of the way; to crush the opposition, to crucify them?

Or do we ask questions in order to learn and dig deeper, to love and engage life, and to know the God of life?

And which line of questioning, which way of asking a question, which question, do you suppose, moves us closer to the kingdom of God?

Now, I do not intend to squelch questions with this line of inquiry. I don't want to make us fearful that we're asking the wrong question, or asking in the wrong way, so that we don't ask any questions – which, quite honestly, I am certain is not Jesus' intent. Remember: he responds – encouragingly so – to many other questions...and questioners.

But I do want to direct questions, and their use:

-not as weapons to be used against others;

-but as tools...especially, perhaps, as keys to open doors, not close them.

“What is the greatest commandment,” the question is asked.

And the answer is not about taxes – though we may have plenty of questions about taxes: for whom, how much, their impact on our lives.

And it's not about “Who gets the girl” – or the guy – in this life ... or the life after, for that matter.

It's about love.

Love, which nurtures relationships, and those in them.

Love, which doesn't tear apart, but brings together; doesn't tear down, but builds up.

Love, which is committed to the well-being of 'the other'.

Love, which opens the door – all kinds of doors – and the heart to...

Well, let's be honest: sometimes love open us up to all kinds of pain and rejection and sorrow.

But let's go deeper in our honesty, for love also opens the door – and the heart – to joy, to others; to hope, to possibility; to that which is real, to life itself ... to God.

“You are not far from the kingdom of God,” Jesus says.

So, what's your question?

And where might it take you?

*HYMN “More Like You” StF 2167 & “Love the Lord Your God” GtG 62

**More like you, Jesus, more like you.
Fill my heart with your desire
to make me more like you.
More like you, Jesus, more like you.
Touch my lips with holy fire
and make me more like you.**

**Love the Lord your God
with all your heart.
Love the Lord your God
with all your soul.
Love the Lord your God
with all your mind.
Love the Lord your God
with all that you are.**

“More Like You” - Words and Music: Scott Wesley Brown ©
1997 Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publishing, Inc.
“Love the Lord Your God” - Words and Music (GREAT
COMMANDMENT): Jean and Jim Strathdee, 1991 © 1991
Strathdee Music (admin. Desert Flower Music)
*Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 &
#20702248 / #2457662 & #20854354.*

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

**We acknowledge one God alone,
whose demands on us are absolute,
whose help for us is sufficient.
That One is the Lord,
whom we worship, serve, and love.**

**We must not set our ultimate reliance on any other help.
We must not yield unconditional obedience to any other power.
We must not love anyone or anything more than we love God.**

**To worship God is highest joy.
To serve God is perfect freedom.**

“A Declaration of Faith” is Copyright 1977, 1991, the Office of the General Assembly,
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); adopted (1977) “as a contemporary statement of faith, a
reliable aid for Christian study, liturgy, and inspiration, with the clear understanding that”
it is not approved as a part of the *Book of Confessions*.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: O Lord, we lift up our prayer to you...
All: ...answer us and guide us by your presence.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Bless these gifts, O Lord,
from your unfailing care for your people.
Let them be a sign of our gladness
for all that we have
and all that we may offer to others;
in Jesus' name. Amen.**

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

One: The Lord be with you.
All: **And also with you.**
One: Lift up your hearts.
All: **We lift them to the Lord.**
One: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All: **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

(Please hold the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

Sing “In the Singing” GtG 533

**1. In the singing, in the silence,
in the hands expectant, open,
in the blessing, in the breaking,
in the Presence at this table
Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ,
be the wine of grace:
Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ,
be the bread of peace.**

**2. In the question, in the answer,
in the moment of acceptance,
in the heart’s cry, in the healing,
in the circle of your people
Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ,
be the wine of grace:
Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ,
be the bread of peace.**

Words: Shirley Erena Murray, 1994

Music: Carlton R. Young, 1996

Text and Music © 1996 Hope Publishing Company, All rights reserved.

*Reprinted / Podcast / Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE
#A-739819/#A-739796. All rights reserved.*

Prayer

SENDING

*CLOSING HYMN “We Are One in the Spirit” GtG 300

**1. We are one in the Spirit;
we are one in the Lord;
we are one in the Spirit;
we are one in the Lord,
and we pray that all unity
may one day be restored:**

Refrain:

**And they'll know we are Christians
by our love, by our love;
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.**

**2. We will walk with each other;
we will walk hand in hand;
we will walk with each other;
we will walk hand in hand,
and together we'll spread the news
that God is in our land:**

(Refrain)

**3. We will work with each other;
we will work side by side;
we will work with each other;
we will work side by side,
and we'll guard human dignity
and save human pride:**

(Refrain)

**4. All praise to the Father,
from whom all things come,
and all praise to Christ Jesus,
God's only Son,
and all praise to the Spirit,
who makes us one:**

(Refrain)

Words and Music (THEY'LL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS):
Peter Scholtes, 1966 © 1966 F.E.L. Publications, assigned 1991
to The Lorenz Corp. (admin. Music Services, Inc.)
*Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 &
#20702248 / #2457662 & #20854354.*

***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

The Call to Worship is reprinted by permission of United Church Press from *Led by Love* by Lavon Bayler. Copyright 1996 by United Church Press.

The Prayer of Confession, 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 2013, 2014, 2015.

The Assurance of Pardon and Prayers of the People (adapted) are written by Carol Holbrook Prickett and used by permission. © Presbyterian Outlook, 2023.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving is used by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Connections Worship Companion: Year B Volume 2*. Copyright 2024.