

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRTY-SECOND SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on Exodus 17 and Psalm 78)*

- One: Come, all who are anxious or burdened.
This is a time to experience good news.
- All: Praise the Lord who is our provider.
The Lord is our hope. Our trust is in God.**
- One: Come with expectancy and anticipation.
God is present to greet you and change your life.
- All: God brought us out of bondage and has made us free.
The Lord is our hope. Our trust is in God.**
- One: We are here to remember the ministry of Jesus.
We have come to be equipped for our ministry.
- All: Glorious are the deeds of our God, and mighty are God's acts.
The Lord is our hope. Our trust is in God.**

***OPENING HYMN** "God of Grace and God of Glory" GtG 307 *[Verses 1, 3, & 4]*

1. **God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power;
crown thine ancient church's story;
bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.**

3. **Cure thy children's warring madness;
bend our pride to thy control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.**

(continued...)

4. **Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore.
Let the gift of thy salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving thee whom we adore,
serving thee whom we adore.**

Words: Harry Emerson Fosdick, 1930, alt.
Music: CWM RHONDDA, John Hughes, 1907
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Your holiness, O God, commands that we confess:
We have neither loved our neighbors as ourselves
nor honored ourselves as your beloved creation.
We have judged unjustly,
regarded others ungenerously,
profited at the losses of those near and distant,
borne grudges, desired vengeance,
and kept silence in the face of wrongdoing.
Forgive us, O Lord; love us, and guide us.
Help us give our hearts and lives fully to you
so our hearts and lives may be open to our neighbors,
especially those in need.
Help us to live in accord
with your way of compassion, kindness, and honesty;
and turn us toward lives of peace.
Through Jesus Christ. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(based on I Thessalonians 2)*

One: Beloved ones,
believe again the gospel, that in Christ we are accepted as we are.
Believe that we are forgiven,
loved with the delight of a nursing mother cherishing her child.
Believe that we are the church, the body of Christ,
called to love one another as gentle children of God.

All: **People of God, the Lord is loving, our sins are forgiven,
and we are reconciled to God.
Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift!**

One: In that promise is the power to love our neighbors and ourselves
as those beloved of 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 READINGS Mark 11:27-33
Mark 12:35-37

MARK 11:27-33 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

²⁷ Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders came to him ²⁸ and said, "By what authority are you doing these things? Who gave you this authority to do them?" ²⁹ Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. ³⁰ Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me." ³¹ They argued with one another, "What should we say? If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?'" ³² But shall we say, 'Of human origin?'"—they were afraid of the crowd, for all regarded John as truly a prophet. ³³ So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

MARK 12:35-37 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

³⁵ While Jesus was teaching in the temple, he said, "How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David? ³⁶ David himself, by the Holy Spirit, declared, 'The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.'"³⁷ "David himself calls him Lord, so how can he be his son?" And the large crowd was listening to him with delight.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Whose Authority?" by Pastor Bill Vincent

By whose authority?

They ask their question...and come away dissatisfied with the answer – or non-answer. Or maybe dismayed by the answer.

Whatever their thinking, whatever their understanding – whatever they will allow themselves to think and understand – what seems clear is this: Jesus' authority – in word and deed and life – is beyond their control. That is significant when you consider that the makeup of

the group asking the question – “*the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders*” – precisely mirrors the makeup of the Sanhedrin: the chief council of the people, “**the highest Jewish civil and religious court**” (Paul J. Achtemeier, *Invitation to Mark*, p.167-168). They may not know – or be willing to acknowledge – the source of Jesus’ authority, but it is beyond their control and far greater than theirs. And yes, that is threatening: threatening to their position and their prestige and their authority.

Now, there may come a time when they may think it is under their control, especially, later that week, when he stands convicted before them. They may think he is under their control, especially when he hangs from a cross by the brute force of Rome.

But an empty tomb will prove them all wrong.

They may not see it, they may not hear it, or they may not want to hear it. But the truth that is heard in their “*We do not know,*” the truth that is heard in their ‘otherwise’ silence, the truth that is heard in Jesus’ question, is that his authority is by far – by leaps and bounds – infinitely greater than theirs.

Then there is the question of the Messiah as David’s son.

The story is confusing, no doubt about that. There is no agreement on exactly what he says and means. Is the Messiah a descendant of David, or not? Or is the Messiah a descendant of David...plus something else, in addition or over and above that?

But what does seem to be clear is this: the Messiah – the Christ – is Lord over the people’s greatest king. The Messiah – the Christ – is greater than their greatest king ever. In fact, is greater than any monarch ever, greater than any power ever...or to come.

As Jesus tells it, David himself proclaims that the Messiah – we know who the Messiah is, don’t we? – David acknowledges that the Messiah is greater than David himself.

And this is the one we are called to follow. This is the one who calls us to walk in his way. We work by his design, under his guidance. We rest under his gaze.

But there may also be an important qualification to that affirmation that Messiah is Lord, even over David himself. A qualification not to the power and might itself, but to the way and expression of that power and might.

The Messiah’s way – as defined by Jesus – is not that of the militarily powerful David, or of Rome...or of any other empire or dominating power. Jesus’ way is not that of the Davidic king as most people understood it: a new king to come in and overthrow the Romans and drive them out of Judea and establish – or re-establish – the glory of the people.

Jesus’ way is of the Son of Humankind, the suffering Servant, the suffering – and loving – Son of God.

It is what Jesus has been trying to prepare his disciples for, for a while: a redefinition of the “Davidic king,” the Messiah.

A redefinition that is – again – beyond our control, or the Sanhedrin’s, or anyone else’s, for that matter. And a redefinition, and a new way, that may appear to be weaker than our understanding and less than what we want, but that in reality is infinitely more powerful than we typically know, for it has power over death itself. For love is the most powerful force in the universe.

And the world can tell the power – and the way, and the presence – of this Jesus, this Messiah, this Lord, by the fruit borne by his followers.

Remember the acted out parable of the fig tree? The tree that bore no fruit, reflecting the Temple – and its way, and its leaders – that bore no fruit...or at least the wrong kind of fruit.

What about the right kind of fruit for life? What is that right kind of fruit, seen in Jesus himself? And who – as those who claim Jesus as Messiah and Lord – who will bear this fruit now?

“And the large crowd was listening to him with delight”...though not necessarily with full understanding – sometimes not even by us.

Think of the various levels at which we might hear these words.

-Listening with those who may indeed have been present when Jesus said these words – or some such conversation as this. Listening and delighting in Jesus’ authoritative teaching. Like at the beginning of his ministry, when the people

were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. (1:22)

– a kind of authority the people yearned for and hungered for and longed for. And we do, too? If so, what does it mean for us to hear him and understand him (as best we can), and claim him as Lord, even as he claims us as his own? What does it mean for us to hear his claim to authority, to hear of his greater-than-David Lordship; to hear his call, to see his way, to hear his claim, and to seek to follow?

-How are we listening as that first community of people who knew the end of the story? who knew that Jesus was crucified and buried...and left the tomb empty. A community who affirmed already that “Jesus is Lord!” and understood that Lordship (and that Messiah-ship) in terms different from a violent, militaristic, powerful, triumphalistic posture; and so knew that the Lordship of Christ – the way of Christ – was that of a servant, and a suffering one at that.

-How are we listening as a community committed to this non-traditional Messiah? A community that lived – then and now – in the context of an Empire that did not value such suffering or such service: an Empire that indeed – in its own lived-out values – contradicted a way and life of such suffering and service. Yet listening as a community committed to this non-traditional Messiah, and so also committed to his non-traditional and counter-cultural way of life that stands toe-to-toe in the face of a cultural and societal context that resists and even persecutes Christ’s way of life and living, and giving...which is to be our way of life and living, and giving.

Because in the face of all other powers and authorities, all other voices and influences, all other calls and pulls on our lives, Jesus’ call to follow him supersedes any other call from any other source.

His way, his life, and his values supersede the agenda or platform of any other individual or institution, including any errant religious group.

And No, it is not lost on me the irony of this message following our national election.

I did not plan this. I don’t remember planning, thinking, “Let’s do a sermon on ‘authority’ following the election.”

And there are implications of this message that make me somewhat uncomfortable with this message.

Nevertheless, the message seems clear and plain as it stares us in the face.

We are called, as followers of Christ, to be engaged in the life of our communities: to nurture faithful relationships, to support just processes, to work for grace-filled policies. None of that work will ever be perfect, because we are not perfect, either in our actions or our motivations. And so, Yes, in our working together we need to be willing to affirm that compromise is not a dirty word but a necessary component in our community together; and a necessary theological component, because no one of us perfectly discerns the will of God, so we need to do this work faithfully, sincerely, together.

But we do that work, always remembering our ultimate loyalty belongs to no one else than the God we see and hear and come to know in Jesus Christ: he whose authority is of heavenly origin; he who is Lord over the great King David, and Lord over any other power or group or institution that seeks to capture our allegiance.

And Yes, such a stance can be interpreted as radical, as revolutionary, as political.

But I read these passages and can arrive at no other conclusion than this: Jesus' authority is higher than any other. Period. Jesus is Ruler over the greatest ruler we may ever know. Period.

So, as it says in our confessions, **“In life and in death, we belong to God”** (“A Brief Statement of Faith” PCUSA). Period.

In politics and in households, we belong to God. Period.

To follow and to live this way, we focus on God and we belong to God. Period.

And so we continue on, encouraged – whether we consider the results of this election a setback or a step forward – we continue on, encouraged, because he know the authority of the one who calls us and guides us is greater than any election can dictate or any governmental entity can demand.

We are engaged in the life of our communities.

But we are not defined by the finite and fallible values of those communities, even our own.

We are defined by the God who calls us and claims us. And thus we seek to live and act and decide and choose.

As we sang last week, **“They will know we are Christians by our love”** (words by Peter Scholtes, 1966).

Yes.

They will know we are followers of Christ in how we continue to engage our communities, in the values we exemplify and the way we live, and in the God we trust and serve.

It is the way of love.

And the way of love is long, hard, slow.

But the only way to be effective in love is to be all in: heart, soul, mind, strength (see Mark 12:28-34).

Not piecemeal. Not sometimes in and sometimes out. Not only today but maybe not tomorrow.

But all in. All the time. Everywhere. With everyone. In every place.

All in.

Just like God is, with us. Just as Christ was – is – for us...even on a cross.

Some may not see this as a very comforting message at a time like this.

But it can be encouraging, and, in that way, comforting.

For we serve a God who cannot be defeated, at the polls or on the battleground.

We follow a Lord who knows no equal, in the board room or the courtroom.

We give ourselves to the One who lays claim to us in life and in death, and will never let go.

Let that faith be the basis for our work.

Let that hope be the ground of our being.

Let that love – and that way – be the foundation of our grace and courage.

This day and everyday.

***HYMN** “O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee” GtG 738

1. **O Master, let me walk with thee
in lowly paths of service free;
tell me thy secret; help me bear
the strain of toil, the fret of care.**
2. **Help me the slow of heart to move
by some clear, winning word of love;
teach me the wayward feet to stay,
and guide them in the homeward way.**
3. **Teach me thy patience, still with thee
in closer, dearer company,
in work that keeps faith sweet and strong,
in trust that triumphs over wrong.**
4. **In hope that sends a shining ray
far down the future's broadening way;
in peace that only thou canst give,
with thee, O Master, let me live.**

Words: Washington Gladden, 1879

Music: MARYTON, Henry Percy Smith, 1874

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**In life and in death we belong to God.
Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**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!"**

**With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

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

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

**One: God of might and mercy...
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*

**Almighty God,
we give you thanks and praise for Jesus Christ our Lord.
As you have so freely given your love in him,
may we freely share your love with others
through these gifts we offer today.
Bless them, that through them
the needs of this world can be met.
And accept the offering of our lives
in union with Christ's offering for us;
and make us humble and obedient servants
to do your will in the world
and prepare for your coming kingdom.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN "Take My Life" GtG 697**

- 1. Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days;
let them flow in ceaseless praise;
let them flow in ceaseless praise.**
- 2. Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee,
swift and beautiful for thee.**
- 3. Take my voice and let me sing
always, only, for my King;
take my lips and let them be
filled with messages from thee,
filled with messages from thee.**

(continued...)

4. **Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect and use
every power as thou shalt choose,
every power as thou shalt choose.**
5. **Take my will and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne,
it shall be thy royal throne.**
6. **Take my love; my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure store;
take myself and I will be
ever, only, all for thee,
ever, only, all for thee.**

Words: Frances Ridley Havergal, 1874
Music: HENDON, H.A. Cesar Malan, 1827
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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.**

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Music: TALLIS’ CANON, Thomas Tallis; adapt. Parker’s *Whole Psalter*,
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POSTLUDE

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