

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: Come, people of God, to be refreshed and renewed for the journey of life.
All: **We come to embrace the one who embraces us.**
One: Come, people of God, to hear again the call to discipleship.
All: **We come to hear God speak and to relish the presence of the Lord.**
One: Come, people of God, come.
All: **We come in joy to worship the Lord.**

***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
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, who is faithful and just,
forgive us, for we are quick to forget
that all of life is in your hands.
We have failed to help those who have little
while we have much.
We have failed to appreciate the gifts you have given.
We are afraid for ourselves and our world,
and grasp for whatever security we can find.
We shake our heads at the evil around us
but do little to witness to a better way.
Your law is seldom consulted,
and your pathways of self-sacrificing love rarely explored.
Turn us around, God.
Forgive us,
and lead us to a humble path.
Renew our hope, increase our courage,
and keep us watchful for the signs
of your just and peaceful reign that is to come;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from I John 1)*

All: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."
All: **"If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all our wrongdoing."**
One: By confessing our sins we speak the truth, trusting in God's grace and mercy. So let us rejoice and give thanks for the goodness and mercy of God.
All: **For in Jesus Christ we are restored and forgiven. 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 READING Mark 13:1-11,21-37

MARK 13:1-11,21-37 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

¹ As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, “Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!” ² Then Jesus asked him, “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”

³ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴ “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” ⁵ Then Jesus began to say to them, “Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶ Many will come in my name and say, ‘I am he!’ and they will lead many astray. ⁷ When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸ For nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.

⁹ “As for yourselves, beware, for they will hand you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them. ¹⁰ And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations. ¹¹ When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak but the Holy Spirit. ...

... ²¹ “And if anyone says to you at that time, ‘Look! Here is the Messiah!’ or ‘Look! There he is!’—do not believe it. ²² False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. ²³ But be alert; I have already told you everything.

²⁴ “But in those days, after that suffering,
the sun will be darkened,
and the moon will not give its light,
²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven,
and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.

²⁶ “Then they will see ‘the Son of Humankind coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. ²⁷ Then he will send out the angels and gather the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

²⁸ “From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. ³⁰ Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Beware, keep alert, for you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ 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, ³⁶ or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Expectations? Beware!...and Keep Alert!” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Maybe they really thought things were ‘coming to a head’ there in Jerusalem.
I mean, from the very beginning, Jesus has been proclaiming the coming, and the nearness, of the kingdom of God.

His entry into Jerusalem sure had echoes of the coming of a king.

His ability to parry every attack by the religious authorities certainly had all the hallmarks of a rising leader of the people.

And then he talks about the destruction of the Temple as if it were a done deal. Does he know something we do not?

So Peter, James, John, and Andrew come to him to ask when all this will be, when all this will take place – the fulfillment of all things. “Is it now? Is it soon?”

“No,” the answer is. Not now. Not yet.

Maybe soon, but it depends upon what you mean by ‘soon’.

And it depends upon what you expect.

Remember, the initiating question responds to Jesus’ announcement of the coming destruction of the Temple: the structure that represented the very heart of their faith. Destroy that structure, and it would rock their world.

What about us?

What structure or institution, idea or ideal is foundational to our sense of identity and direction and purpose? Destroy it...and what happens then?

And how do we respond?

Think of someone experiencing divorce, or the death of a spouse. The world as you knew it, life as you knew it, has been changed...radically. The – or at least ‘a’ – focal point of who you are and what direction your life is taking and what your purpose in life is...that focal point that you depended on, that you were anchored to – and anchored by – is gone, shattered; the structure crumbled, the foundation cracked.

Now what? Is this the end of the world? or at least my world? Is this the end of life as we know it? How long will this tragedy go on?

They are deep, foundational questions, and concerns.

And Yes, they can also be cosmic questions, when addressed to the fate of the world in general.

Rocking your world.

Surely this is not what life is supposed to be, nor what God intends. Whatever the scope or dimensions of the question, be it personal or cosmic.

Is God doing anything about it?

Does God have a plan?

And what can we do to be a part of God’s plan?

And how can we survive the tumult?

What are you looking for?
What do you expect?

As Jesus is speaking, it is obvious that some people expect too much – or expect they know too much. “Here he is, the Savior!”: false christs. False prophets: “Now is the time!” And they know far less than they think they know. Not even the Son knows the timing, only the Father.

Some people expect too little. Though less is said in our passage about this aspect of expectations, you can read between the lines: in the image of waiting for the master to return. I imagine some of the servants kicking back: “Nothing to worry about here, it doesn’t need to concern me; I’ll be long gone before he returns.” Whatever we might expect does not seem to impact us.

Lamar Williamson notes our passage

speaks to those who expect too much and to those who expect too little.

But he goes on to say,

It is especially pertinent for those who have forgotten to expect anything at all. (Interpretation series, p.243)

Maybe that’s the deepest tragedy. For it seems that those who expect nothing at all have dismissed the notion that God might be at work at all. And if God is not at work, then no need to expect anything to change, anything new, any progress toward a better day, a better life, a better way, a better hope. There is nothing beyond all the finite, limited hopes that seek to entice us.

Yet one thing we definitely can take from all that Jesus says: God is still at work. It may not be by our time line. It may not be in the way we would like. But God is still at work.

Amid all the fantastic imagery, all the dire warnings, the purpose is to strengthen our discipleship here and now...

By affirming...

-Help is available – the Holy Spirit (v.11) – maybe not to go around the trouble, but to go through it.

-God understands. Do we not recognize in the imagery echoes of our own experience? God knows. God understands.

-And God is at work, and has a plan.

There’s a small Greek word – three letters only – that is used several times in the passage, that means “it is necessary.” A round about, indirect way of saying that God is doing it.

“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; it is necessary that this take place.”

“And the good news... it is necessary that this first be proclaimed to all nations.”

“It is necessary for this to happen. It is necessary for this to take place.” In other words, it is God’s plan, God’s work.

So, Yes, expect...something.

And there are some things we can clearly say about what to expect.
We can expect faithfulness from God.
We can expect encouragement, even in the worst of times.
We can expect a sustaining presence.
We can expect that God is at work – always.
Just maybe not according to your plan. Or mine.

So what do we do in the meantime? which can indeed be a mean time. What do we do in the here and now, where we are, in between...

-what has happened, with this story we have been reading these past months;
-and what we know, we affirm, we hope (even if only vaguely) – what will happen, however we might describe it: when Jesus returns; this final fulfillment by God; when life is renewed as God intends.

What do we do along with all this ‘expecting’?

We are to be alert. Not dim-witted; not unthinking, or uncaring. But alert: eyes open...and heart, too. Alert to what God is doing, and where God might be working, and how God might be inviting you to be involved and engaged in God’s plan.

We are to beware. For there are plenty of other options and opportunities; plenty of other invitations and paths we can choose. Many of them self-serving; some of them in the service of someone else’s ego or prestige.

But we are to be faithful to the path we have chosen...and the one who has chosen us.

And be discerning. For not everyone who says something, has anything to say. Not everyone who says they know, knows anything. Be discerning...and listen for the words of the one whose “*words will never pass away.*”

And so, be patient. God’s timing is not always ours.

And be hopeful. For God is working God’s purpose out – the crucifixion and the resurrection make that clear. God is working God’s purpose out, when we see signs of that clearly, and even when we do not.

And rest in the hands of God. For that is where you always are: in the midst of the turmoil, in the midst of the elation; in the midst of the uncertainty and doubt, in the midst of the determination and focus. Rest in the hands of God.

“*Do not be alarmed,*” Jesus says.

“*Do not worry beforehand,*” Jesus says.

They remind me of words we read in a different gospel, yet words still very appropriate, that seem to encapsulate this message:

“*Let not your hearts be troubled,*” Jesus says, “*and do not let them be afraid. Believe*” – trust – “*in God; believe*” – trust – “*also in me,*” Jesus says. (John 14:1,27)

May we hear his words, and take them to heart.

***HYMN** “Be Still, My Soul” GtG 819

1. **Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.**
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to thy God to order and provide,
who through all changes faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly Friend
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.
2. **Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake**
to guide the future surely as the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.
3. **Be still, my soul: the hour is hastening on**
when we shall be forever with the Lord;
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past
all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

Words: Katharina von Schlegel, 1752; trans. Jane Laurie Borthwick, 1855, alt.
Music: FINLANDIA, Jean Sibelius, 1899; arr. *The Hymnal*, 1933, alt.
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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from “*A Declaration of Faith*”)

**Jesus announced the coming of God's kingdom
and its hidden presence in the midst of the world's kingdoms.
He taught his disciples to seek God's kingdom first.
We believe Christ gives us and demands of us
lives in pilgrimage toward God's kingdom.
Like Christ we may enjoy on our journey
all that sustains life and makes it pleasant and beautiful.
No more than Christ are we spared
the darkness, ambiguity, and threat of life in the world.
We are in the world, but not of the world.
Our confidence and hope for ourselves and other people
do not rest in the powers and achievements of this world,
but in the coming and hidden presence of God's kingdom.**

(continued...)

**Christ calls each of us to a life appropriate to that kingdom:
to serve as he has served us;
to take up our cross,
 risking the consequences of faithful discipleship;
to walk by faith, not by sight,
to hope for what we have not seen.**

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Trusting in your mercy, O Lord...
All: ...hear us and receive us.

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*

**How can we thank you, O God, for all that you have done?
You give us life; you give us hope; you give us your very self.
Take our offerings – and our very selves – that your will may be done
 in our church, in our community,
 and throughout your wide and beautiful world.
In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “My Life Flows On” GtG 821

**1. My life flows on in endless song,
above earth’s lamentation.
I hear the clear, though far-off hymn
that hails a new creation.**

Refrain:

**No storm can shake my inmost calm
while to that Rock I’m clinging.
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,
how can I keep from singing?**

**2. Through all the tumult and the strife,
I hear that music ringing.
It finds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?**

Refrain:

**3. What though my joys and comforts die?
I know my Savior liveth.
What though the darkness gather round?
Songs in the night he giveth.**

Refrain:

**4. The peace of Christ makes fresh my heart,
a fountain ever springing!
All things are mine since I am his!
How can I keep from singing?**

Refrain:

Words and Music (HOW CAN I KEEP FROM SINGING): Robert Lowry, 1869
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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

(next page...)

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