

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 2, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**FIFTH SUNDAY of EASTER**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: In the wilderness, water brings life.  
**All: Seek us out, O God, and take us to the water.**  
One: In the Word of God, the good news gives light.  
**All: Seek us out, O God, and fill us with understanding.**  
One: In the bread and the cup, the body of our Savior nourishes everyone.  
**All: Seek us out, O God, and give us yourself.**  
One: Here is the water of life, the word that feeds, the food of eternity.  
Come and praise the vine that gives all goodness.

**\*OPENING HYMN** “At the Font We Start Our Journey” SF 2114

One: At the font we start our journey,  
**All: in the Easter faith baptized;**  
One: doubts and fears no longer blind us,  
**All: by the light of Christ surprised.**  
One: Alleluia!  
**All: Alleluia!**  
One: Hope held out  
**All: and realized.**

One: At the pulpit we are fashioned  
by the Easter tale retold  
into witnesses and prophets,  
**All: by the power of Christ made bold.**  
One: Alleluia!  
**All: Alleluia!**  
One: Faith proclaimed,  
**All: yet still untold.**

One: At the table we are nourished  
with the Easter gift of bread;  
**All: in our breaking it to pieces  
see the love of Christ outspread.**

One: Alleluia!  
**All: Alleluia!**  
One: Life embraced,  
**All: yet freely shed.**

One: At the door we are commissioned,  
now the Easter victory's won,  
**All: to restore a world divided  
to the peace of Christ as one.**  
One: Alleluia!  
**All: Alleluia!**  
**Unison: Easter's work must still be done.**

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#### **\*UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**We come together, O Lord. We come to you. We come in need. For though we have started the journey, we have not followed through very well. When your way becomes difficult, we fall to the wayside. When your word is unclear, we choose another. When your voice is hard to hear, we don't even listen. Forgive us, gracious God. Lift us up and restore us by your grace. Nourish and strengthen us by the presence of your Spirit. And renew our commitment to follow in your way and walk by your side. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

#### **\*SILENT CONFESSION**

#### **\*ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: The Lord hears our confession and is eager to forgive. Take to heart the good news; believe it, live it.

**All: In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Alleluia! Amen.**

#### **\*THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

**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 John 15:1-8

JOHN 15:1-8 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>1</sup> *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup> My Father removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit my Father prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”*

### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

#### SERMON “Cling and Cut” by Pastor Bill Vincent

You can experience the phenomenon driving on the highway – or riding as a passenger.

You get a call from a friend and start a nice conversation. But as you travel, the signal gets weaker and weaker, and finally drops.

You’ve lost the connection.

The branches of the vine need to be connected to be nourished, to have life.

And Jesus says, *“Abide in me.”* “Remain in me.” Remain connected.

Now, it’s not typical that the cell phone tower moves closer to us.

Typically it’s the other way around: we move closer to it...or further away.

Someone once noted,

**If you are not as close to God as you used to be, you don't have to guess who moved.** (“Our Daily Bread”)

We move: we wander; we stray; we lose the connection.

For it’s all about connection.

What can we do? ...to maintain the connection. ...to strengthen the connection. ...to nurture the connection.

Well, like so many other relationships that we have, we can engage in conversation. In other words, prayer.

Prayer is conversation with God.

Some people think they can only pray if they use fancy words or the right phrases.

But prayer isn't fancy language. It's conversation, like we'd have with anyone. Though it is important to remember to whom we're talking.

But talk with God. Share about your life and your hopes and your dreams and your trials and your problems.

And remember conversation involves not only talking but also listening. If we listen – sincerely listen – we will hear God 'speak', in a manner of speaking: through that inkling we have, through that voice of conscience, through that insight.

And prayer can also be a simple awareness. Looking for it. Being attuned to it. Being aware of God's presence with you throughout the day.

And talk about listening. We can nurture that connection by listening to God's Word in the scriptures.

We can hear specific words of guidance and direction. We hear and learn about the story of God and God's people, a story of which we are a part.

But there is also a sense in which we can read the Bible and hear a familiar voice.

Have you ever been in a crowd of people whom you don't know, feeling out of place, alone. Until you overhear a voice you recognize: the voice of a friend talking to others. And though you may not fully understand the conversation taking place, just hearing that familiar voice puts you more at ease and helps you feel like you belong. And you know something of that joy that uplifts and feeds the soul, and the connection.

And we can do something for someone else, put love in action. Like we talked about last week: not simply speak about love, but actually do love.

We say God is love. And where love is, God is.

And there's a kind of back and forth experience. Reaching out and showing love to someone helps nurture a closer relationship with God. And a closer relationship with God helps encourage love in action, showing love to someone else. And back and forth.

And Jesus said, "*Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.*"

Now note that the fruit is not the cause of the connection, but evidence of it.

So the Apostle Paul says,

*Live by the Spirit ... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. ... If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.* (Galatians 5:16,22-23,25 NRSV)

And guidance is what pruning is all about.

Even the best branch gets out of hand and needs to be pruned.

Someone once told me real vines are very unruly. Does that describe us as well?

We once lived in a house with a tall oak tree in the front yard. Every Spring and Summer I'd have to mow the grass, including the grass underneath the oak tree. But first, to prevent my eyes getting poked out, I'd have to trim off all the branches that had grown down and low under

the tree. So I'd cut those low branches off, and then I could mow under the tree. At the start of the next season, more branches would have grown down under the tree. So I'd have to trim the branches so I could mow underneath the tree. I wanted the tree to grow up, not down.

The vinegrower seeks to guide, to shape the growth of the vine by pruning it. And note, this is the vinegrower's prerogative as to how and where to prune.

How do we experience this shaping of our lives, this coaxing in the right direction, this molding into the proper shape and form?

Once again, we have to look to the Word. Jesus himself says it, "*You have already been cleansed [or pruned – same Greek word] by the word that I have spoken to you.*"

The Word – a key tool in pruning. If we will take it seriously, it will convict us of the wrong direction we are going and show us the right direction for our lives.

So we hear the word, "*Love your enemies*" (Matthew 5:44 NRSV). And we realize we haven't really been doing that. So we are nudged in the right direction.

We hear the call to justice for the poor, to mercy and compassion for all. And we are convicted in our hearts. And nudged, and shaped, and guided in our living.

And I also believe some of our pruning comes through the community...or it can.

In his play "Our Town," Thornton Wilder shares the story of life in the fictional town of Grover's Corners. In a flashback, we see two of the major characters, Emily and George, talking after class in High School. Emily and George have been neighbors and friends, growing up together. Now we begin to see the budding of a new chapter in their relationship. Emily speaks of a change she has noted in George lately, since he has become something of a local baseball star; he has seemed "conceited and stuck up." Now, she regrets having said that. But George, though stung by her words, also takes them to heart; and he invites her to join him for an ice cream soda at the local drugstore. There he wants to celebrate. Celebrate what?

**I'm celebrating because I've got a friend who tells me all the things that ought to be told me.** (Our Town, Thornton Wilder, 1938, Act II)

Do we have a friend like that?

Are we a friend like that?

Now a precaution is in order. This is not license to spout off when we disagree about just anything or someone simply rubs us the wrong way.

For how we say it makes a difference. "*Speaking the truth in love*" (Ephesians.4:15 NRSV) out of a deep care and concern for the well-being and good of the other person.

And how we hear it makes a difference, too. For it takes the ability, and the willingness, to discern God speaking to me through the words of others – in itself a 'pruning'.

And it speaks of the importance of that relationship: affirming our connection with each other through Christ.

For it's all about connection.

At the font (baptism) we signify our connection to each other: a reminder of our connection with the source of life...and with each other.

At the table (Lord's Supper) we celebrate that connection. For as we commune with the Lord, we commune with each other. As we are connected with the Lord, so we are connected with each other.

And so he says to us once again, *"I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me. And bear much fruit."*

#### **\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,  
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.  
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,  
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,  
and binds us together with all believers  
in the one body of Christ, the Church.  
The same Spirit  
who inspired the prophets and apostles  
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,  
engages us through the Word proclaimed,  
claims us in the waters of baptism,  
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,  
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.  
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!"**

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

#### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

**Pastor:** Hear our prayer...  
**People:** ...God of love and life.

## THE EUCHARIST

### OFFERING

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**For your grace in sustaining us, we give you thanks, O God. For the mercy of your forgiveness and embrace, we give you thanks. For walking with us all our days and teaching us your ways, we give you thanks. We give ourselves to you in thanksgiving for your giving of yourself to us. Use us, and these gifts we bring, to share your word and embody your love. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

### SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

*Invitation to the Lord's Table*

*Prayer of Thanksgiving*

Leader: The Lord be with you.

**People: And also with you.**

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

**People: We lift them to the Lord.**

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**People: It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

*(The prayer continues...)*

*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.**

*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.)*

“Bread of Heaven, on Thee We Feed” GtG 496

One: Bread of heaven,

**All: on thee we feed,  
for thou art our food indeed.**

One: Ever may our souls be fed  
with this true and living Bread,

**All: day by day with strength supplied  
through the life of Christ who died.**

*(Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)*

One: Vine of heaven,

**All: thy love supplies  
this blest cup of sacrifice.**

One: 'Tis thy wounds our healing give;

**All: to thy cross we look and live.**

One: Thou our life!

**All: O let us be  
rooted, grafted, built on thee.**

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*Prayer*

**SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts” GtG 494

One: Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts,

**All: thou fount of life, thou light of all,**

One: from the best bliss that earth imparts

**All: we turn, unfilled, to heed thy call.**

One: Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;

**All: thou savest those that on thee call;**

One: to them that seek thee thou art good,

**All: to them that find thee, all in all.**

One: We taste thee, O thou living bread,  
and long to feast upon thee still;

**All: we drink of thee, the fountainhead,  
and thirst our souls from thee to fill.**

One: Our restless spirits yearn for thee,  
where'er our changeful lot is cast,

**All: glad when thy gracious smile we see,  
blest when our faith can hold thee fast.**

One: O Jesus, ever with us stay;

**All: make all our moments calm and bright.**

One: O chase the night of sin away;

**All: shed o'er the world thy holy light.**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**People: ...Amen.**

**POSTLUDE**

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