

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 18, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: O come, let us worship the Lord our God.
All: **Let us give thanks and glory to the giver of all good gifts.**
One: Let us rejoice in the Lord's wonderful love and care.
All: **Let us worship the Lord our God.**

***OPENING HYMN "For the Beauty of the Earth" GtG 14**

One: For the beauty of the earth,
All: **for the glory of the skies,**
One: for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:
All: **Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.**

One: For the wonder of each hour
of the day and of the night,
All: **hill and vale,**
One: and tree and flower,
All: **sun and moon,**
One: and stars of light:
All: **Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.**

One: For the joy of ear and eye,
All: **for the heart and mind's delight,**
One: for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight:
All: **Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.**

One: For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
All: friends on earth, and friends above,
One: for all gentle thoughts and mild:
All: Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

One: For thyself, best gift divine
to the world so freely given;
All: for that great, great love of thine,
One: peace on earth and joy in heaven:
All: Lord of all, to thee we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Gracious God, have mercy on us,
for we have failed to be faithful to you,
though you have been faithful to us.
You show us your wisdom,
but we prefer to go our own way.
We have not followed your will,
but instead heed other voices
and pursue our own desires at the expense of others.
Our broken relationships with you and one another
have created poverty in us and our neighbors.
We are so misguided that we cannot discern
good from evil,
making the wrong choice,
choosing the wrong side.
We ask for the courage to tell you truthfully
what we have done.
We pray for forgiveness
so that we can live with ourselves,
with others,
and with you.
You alone can restore us.
In steadfast love, look upon us
and re clothe us in your grace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: Sisters and brothers, do not lose heart.
When we call, God hears us; when we confess,
God forgives us.
All: **We believe and so we proclaim: In Jesus Christ,
we are forgiven.**
Unison: **Thanks be to God!**

***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 Mark 3:20-35

MARK 3:20-35 (various)

²⁰ Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. ²¹ When his family heard about it, they set out to take charge of him. They were saying, "He's out of his mind!"

²² And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." ²³ So Jesus called them to him and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then he can plunder his house. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, the children of humanity will be forgiven all their sins and all the evil things they may say. ²⁹ But whoever says evil things against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of a sin with consequences that last forever" – ³⁰ for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit."

³¹ Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. ³² A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Look, your mother, brothers, and sisters are outside looking for you." ³³ And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ Looking around at those seated around him in a circle, he said, "Look, here are my mother and my brothers. ³⁵ Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Inside or Outside? Upside-Down or Right-Side-Up?” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Inside? Or outside?

No, it's not a question about whether you like the weather today.

But it is a question that we wrestle with in many ways.

Who's in and who's not?

Are you part of Jesus' family?

Are you?

Are you?

Am I?

Oh sure, we have our suspicions about certain people and certain groups.

And of course we're sure we are part of Jesus family: that we're on the inside.

But remember: so did his mother and his brothers and his sisters. They were certain, too.

And look where it got them.

Now the distinction between the inside and the outside may not appear as clear in the English as it does in the Greek.

Jesus' family hears about what's going on: that things are so busy that they don't even have time to eat. So they want to “take charge of him” because they think “*he's out of his mind.*” The Greek literally means “to stand outside oneself.” We would say, “He's beside himself.” Yeh, he's crazy.

But then notice. When the family arrives to “*take charge of him,*” now who's on the outside?

The family stands outside the crowd and has to send word inside.

Those who thought Jesus ‘stood outside of himself’ now stand ‘outside’ themselves.

And when he gets the message, he asks that question:

“*Who is my mother and my brothers?*”

What? Doesn't he know?

Maybe he really is out of his mind!

But then he says,

“*Here are my mother and my brothers and my sisters.*”

And it's almost as if he turns things upside-down.

Or has he turned things right-side-up?

We think we are so clear; we are so sure we know who's in the know, who's part of the group.

But maybe we're off base.

Jesus tries to define it very clearly:

“*Whoever does the will of God...*”

They are the family. They are the ones on the inside.

And his actual family were standing on the outside. They were in the wrong. They were not in the know but actually outside of it. And you could say it was because they were upside-down.

Just like the teachers of the law.

They were saying he was possessed, casting out demons by the prince of demons.
Well, his family thinks he's crazy, but who's really crazy?

The teachers of the law think he's controlled by Satan, but who's really controlled by evil?

There's a dire warning here.

When we are so certain about things, when we perceive life and look at it and make our decisions, and we come to the point that we have decided that right is wrong and wrong is right; that reality is illusion and illusion is reality; that good is evil and evil is good.

If that is the case, then indeed someone who is not looking at life upside-down but right-side-up might appear to us to be crazy. And he will turn our world upside-down.

But how do we discern? How do we know? How do we see?

One author talked about telling a lie to yourself for so long that you actually come to believe it, and it shapes and forms your reality.

And I must confess: there are times when I would like to have taken that quote and thrown it at some people, for I think it describes them very well.

But who am I to say that?

As soon as I am so confident that I am right in judging someone else, I fall into a dangerous hole.

As one person has noted, "We are most dangerous when we are most certain that we are right."

Remember: the very people who should have understood Jesus, who should have discerned him correctly – his own family, the teachers of the law (of the word of God) – these are the very people who got him wrong.

And if they were wrong, why might not I also be wrong?

Which, quite honestly, does not leave you and me in a very favorable position.

One writer spoke about all the healings taking place. That's what drew people to Jesus.

Could that be a helpful lens for us in our discerning? That when we see that healing taking place, maybe that's a pretty good indication of God's will being done, maybe in our lives and in the lives of others; that's a pretty clear indication of what's on 'the inside', of what's 'right-side-up'.

And words from an old hymn came to mind: "Turn your eyes upon Jesus."

But as soon as I say that, I know that's not as clear an answer as it appears to be. It's not as simple as that, or as simplistic. For there are plenty of different people who claim to be doing just that – claim to be turning their eyes upon Jesus – who end up with wildly different takes on what's in and what's out, and what the right-side-up actually looks like.

So where does that leave us?

Perhaps two things will help.

As we look at our story, we hear about the family at the beginning and we hear about the family at the end. We hear about the teachers of the law next and the teachers of the law next to last.

And right there in the middle we have Jesus' statements about a kingdom divided against itself.

Jesus has been accused of using Satan to throw out Satan, using evil to cast out evil.

But if that kingdom is divided against itself, it cannot stand.

And then he uses that wonderful image of the strong man and his house, a house that cannot be plundered until you first tie up the strong man.

And when we think about it, who is the strong-er one in this picture?

If Jesus is casting out demons, if Jesus is providing this wondrous healing against what evil desires, then who is the stronger one?

John the Baptist said,

"The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thongs of his sandals." (Mk.1:7-NRSV)

John the Baptist, who is portrayed as the return of the great prophet Elijah, is not worthy to untie the thong of the sandals of...Jesus, the coming one, the one who truly does have the power, the one who truly does have authority; and he's demonstrating that all over the place, as he casts out demons here, and provides healing and strength and renewal there.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus"? Indeed, it's on target.

He is the lynchpin to understanding, to learning, to discerning.

Especially if we see it in the full context.

As Mark tells the story, he makes it clear that, yes, these are wonderful things taking place in casting out demons and healing and teaching.

But Jesus cannot be fully understood apart from the crucifixion and the resurrection.

When we see that wonder, when we see that grace, when we see that power – power over death itself – then we begin fully to understand who Jesus is and what he says.

As he comes to offer himself, to give of himself, not for his own self and his own purposes; not for his own gain, but for others' good.

Surely that gives us some sense of understanding of him and his work and what he calls us to do.

And notice another piece: maybe a corrective lens found at the very end of the story.

Where Jesus *"looks around at those seated around him in a circle"* and says, *"here are my mother and my brothers."* These are the ones who are on the inside, these are the ones who see things right-side-up: those who do the will of God; who are there with Jesus, who see him and hear him and learn from him and sit around him and are in his presence and pay attention to him.

Again, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus"? Yes!

So where do we find ourselves? Where will we place ourselves? Around Jesus in a circle, listening to him, learning from him, being with him.

In worship. In prayer. In study and conversation together in the community.

Being in a circle – being in *his* circle. And the only way to do that is with him at the center.

The very definition of a circle: all the points equidistant from a particular point, the center.

A circle is defined by its center, and so is a life.

Who is our center?
Where is our center?
How will we focus ourselves and place ourselves in those positions and those times and those postures so that Jesus is the center of our life?
Perhaps that's the question more to the point.
It's not a matter of who's inside and who's outside.
But the question is: what – who – is the center of my life?

***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.**

**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!"**

**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

Pastor: Lord, in your mercy...
People: ...hear our prayer.

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

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**In the spirit of faith, Great God, we come before you to offer our gifts
and ourselves, ready and eager to extend your grace to others. In
amazement at the work of your hands, we reach out our hands to help others
and invite them to join us. Continue to fashion us until we conform to your
will for us. Equip us through Christ, and make us useful as agents of your
all-embracing love. In his name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Who Is My Mother, Who Is My Brother?” StF 2225

**1. Who is my mother, who is my brother?
All those who gather round Jesus Christ:
Spirit-blown people, born from the Gospel
sit at the table, round Jesus Christ.**

**2. Differently abled, differently labeled
widen the circle round Jesus Christ:
Crutches and stigmas, cultures’ enigmas
all come together round Jesus Christ.**

**3. Love will relate us – color or status
can’t segregate us, round Jesus Christ:
Family failings, human derailings –
all are accepted, round Jesus Christ.**

**4. Bound by one vision, met for one mission
we claim each other, round Jesus Christ:
Here is my mother, here is my brother,
kindred in Spirit, through Jesus Christ.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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