

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 2, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**NINTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: Sing to the Lord, all you people!  
All: **For the Lord has done marvelous things!**  
One: From morning to evening, God showers us with blessings.  
All: **From evening to morning, God blesses us with rest.**  
One: So come this day to rejoice in God's goodness.  
All: **We come to worship the Lord.**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies" GtG 662 (*Tune 150*)

1. Christ, whose glory fills the skies;  
Christ, the true, the only light;  
Sun of Righteousness, arise;  
triumph o'er the shades of night;  
Dayspring from on high, be near;  
Daystar, in my heart appear.

2. Dark and cheerless is the morn  
unaccompanied by thee;  
joyless is the day's return  
till thy mercy's beams I see;  
till they inward light impart,  
cheer my eyes and warm my heart.

3. Visit then this soul of mine;  
pierce the gloom of sin and grief;  
fill me, radiancy divine;  
scatter all my unbelief;  
more and more thyself display,  
shining to the perfect day.

Words: Charles Wesley, 1740  
Music: DIX, Conrad Kocher, 1838; abr. William Henry  
Monk, 1861; harm. *The English Hymnal*, 1906  
*Public Domain*

## UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, in Jesus, we have seen your glory. Yet our sinfulness often blocks out the light of Christ. We are quick to accuse and slow to confess. We find faults easily in others while ignoring our own shortcomings. We protect what is familiar and reject what is unknown. We admire those with courage but excuse ourselves when we falter from the truth. Have mercy on us, compassionate God. Pour out your Holy Spirit and cleanse us with your grace, that day by day we might move closer to the people you would have us be. Amen.

## SILENT CONFESSION

### ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: The God who made you and knows your every thought hears you now and forgives you all your sin.

All: **Relentlessly God seeks us out with abundant grace and boundless mercy.**

One: This is the good news in which we have been redeemed!

All: **In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! 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 1:21-39

Mark 1:21-39 (New Revised Standard Version, update edition+)

<sup>21</sup> They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. <sup>22</sup> They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. <sup>23</sup> Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, <sup>24</sup> and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God." <sup>25</sup> But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet and come out of him!" <sup>26</sup> And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. <sup>27</sup> They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching! With authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." <sup>28</sup> At once news about him began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

<sup>29</sup> As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. <sup>30</sup> Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever,

and they told him about her at once. <sup>31</sup> He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

<sup>32</sup> That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed by demons. <sup>33</sup> And the whole city was gathered around the door. <sup>34</sup> And he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out many demons, and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

<sup>35</sup> In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. <sup>36</sup> And Simon and his companions hunted for him. <sup>37</sup> When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." <sup>38</sup> He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do." <sup>39</sup> And he went throughout all Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Those Pesky Unclean Spirits!" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Showing up in the midst of worship, in the midst of the community of faith?  
How rude!  
And yet...how real!?

An "*unclean spirit*." Such conversation, such a topic may make us nervous. "OK, where is Bill going to go with this one?"

But let us admit: we feel very comfortable talking about a spirit of family, of welcome; a spirit of unity and community in our midst.

Should it not also be just as comfortable to mention a spirit of disunity, a spirit of conflict, a spirit of disruption in our experience?

Or someone having about them a spirit of compassion, of joy, of welcome. Or another, a spirit of deception, of downright meanness; a disagreeable spirit.

We do not know exactly what happened that sabbath day. "*A man with an unclean spirit...cried out*," Mark says.

Lamar Williamson notes that the term "unclean spirit" – as well as "evil spirit" and "demon" ("Now you've really got me nervous, Bill") – are used synonymously in Mark. And though there may be different nuances, depending upon the context,

**All three terms denote an invisible spiritual being, [of some sort] neither human nor divine, alienated from and hostile to God.** (*Mark*, Interpretation series, p.51)

"Alienated from and hostile to God." Why wouldn't it show up in the middle of worship? What better place to be "hostile to God." To be disruptive of God's way. To alienate God, and alienate others from God.

Now, whether you consider such an evil spirit as personal – a separate entity capable of literally possessing someone – or consider an evil spirit to be a metaphor for speaking of the experience of evil in our midst...I'm not sure such a distinction matters all that much in how we experience such evil and hostility and disruption in our lives.

Evil exists. How we picture it need not diminish its existence, or our need to take it seriously and resist it.

So a man with an unclean spirit cries out in the middle of worship, disrupting the praise of God.

It might just as easily have been someone spreading vicious rumors amongst the community.

A man with an unclean spirit cries out in the middle of worship.

And Jesus, with a firm, clear word, rebukes the spirit and commands it to leave the man.

And – showing off somewhat by convulsing the man, but still, obviously having to obey Jesus' authority – the spirit "*came out of him*" and leaves.

And the people were amazed.

But note: the people do not say, "Wow! Jesus got rid of that unclean spirit!" (At least, that's not the first thing they say.) They say, "*What is this! A new teaching! With authority!*"

"A new teaching!" "*The kingdom of God has come near,*" Jesus "*came...proclaiming.*" (1:14-15)

"With authority!" "*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased,*" the voice "*from the heavens*" proclaimed at his baptism. (1:11)

A teaching, an authority, a presence, a person with the power to cast out the evil in our lives, to combat that which is hostile to God, to reverse that which alienates us from God.

And the list of those evil, alienating, disruptive things is long. And sometimes clear and in your face – like someone crying out in worship. But sometimes far more subtle.

In considering this story – especially here at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry – I couldn't help but wonder: Is casting out demons a way of "*preparing the way of the Lord*"? (1:3)

You know, get the demons, the unclean spirits, the evil spirits out of the way so the Lord can come in.

We can see such demonic influences in what we might call distractions, or other priorities we have, or idols.

An unclean spirit crying out in worship is certainly a distraction.

But are there more 'demons' here in our passage than we at first notice?

Jesus had a busy day. The next morning, he gets up early and goes away by himself to pray. Simon and the others "hunt him down" and tell him, "*Everyone is searching for you.*" It's as if Simon and the others are saying, "Let's go back to Capernaum where you're popular and everyone likes us!"

But Jesus says no, “That’s not my purpose, that’s not why I came out.”

*“Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also, for that is what I came out to do.”*

Yes, even the well-intended can be “demonic”...if it distracts us from our calling. Remember, Simon and Andrew, James and John were engaged in a needed, helpful, life-sustaining work: they fished. But Jesus called them to a different task; and to have denied that call would have been to cast their fishing in the role of the demonic.

Jesus’ healing of others certainly met real needs of many people, and was obviously popular. But he also realized that was not his primary purpose. His primary purpose was to “proclaim the message” and to do so in other places as well. The healings were not frivolous, but they were not the focus.

And Jesus is able to maintain his focus and claim his commission through prayer...and taking time out.

What does that say about us?

Is not one of the unclean spirits we could do without, that one whose voice whispers to us constantly, “You have to be moving, you have to be doing; all the time, all the while; you can’t slow down, you have to go, go, go. You have to be doing – otherwise, you’re worthless.”

Busy-ness: in order to feel good about ourselves, even in order to have others pat us on the back and tell us how successful we are.

Maybe, with that demon “exorcised” from us, we might hear the invitation from Christ himself, to come and sit awhile – just with him – to pause, to go away to a quiet place, and lay our heads on his chest and hear the heartbeat of his love for us.

And in that heartbeat, to have our hearts cleared and our vision clarified.

So that we might be able to discern the right voice and the right direction for us.

We might be able to distinguish between a very legitimate calling...and the one intended for me.

We might know how to say ‘No’ to that which is even good and noble and helpful...when I detect a nudge suggesting a different direction for me and my life and my choices and my resources.

And we can learn that and discern that in and through prayer.

But we also recognize the need to do that discerning in conversation with others, in community, in relationship with others who are also on this journey.

And especially in conversation and relationship with, in the presence of Jesus himself.

Simon and the others sought out Jesus. That was a good thing: to be with him. But trying to foist their agenda on him and his life – that was not a good thing.

But remember, too, that Jesus is teaching in the synagogue when confronted by the unclean spirit. And so we note that it is in the presence of Jesus and his teaching – his word – that the unclean spirit is defeated. Will we listen to that word, get to know that word, heed that word, that it might ‘clean out’ the unclean in us?

So that we might not be distracted from our focus, our purpose, our calling.

And could it be that Simon's mother-in-law points us in the right direction?

She has a fever, Jesus heals her, "*and she began to serve them.*"

Now, before we go any further: this is not a justification for "the woman should serve the men." This service refers to us all. It is the same word Jesus uses when he affirms, I came "*not to be served but to serve.*" (10:45) That service is a calling for us all.

But could it be that the fever is something of an unclean spirit preventing her from her serving? There certainly was some thought that illness itself (or at least some illnesses) was the work of evil forces.

So, could it be said that the fever stood in the way of her serving?

What are some of the fevers in our lives that stand in the way of our calling, our purpose, our serving? The fever of partisanship? The fever of "my status and my power"? The fever pitch of "my way or the highway"?

How do we – what can we do to – 'cast out', root out; resist, oppose; diminish and defeat the evil – the evil, unclean spirits; the demonic forces, the feverish – and their influence and temptation, allure and control, power and lies?

How do we cast them out – or allow them to be cast out – and so prepare the way for the Lord to come in?

We can use prayer.

And presence – the presence of others, the presence of the Lord.

And the word of the Lord.

So that in that hearing and in that presence and in that prayer...they may work to diminish the evil influence within us, and cast it out, that the Lord might come in.

With a final note and word of caution:

I can be uncomfortable with the charge to us to go and cast out, root out the evil in the world.

For we can all-too-easily detect the evil in others, and all-too-readily overlook the evil in ourselves.

And that tendency is an evil spirit in itself, which has led to some truly dark spots on the history of the church and of individuals who did horrendous things, all in the name of 'rooting out evil'.

Now let me be clear: We do not deny the existence of evil in this world, or in ourselves. We do not diminish its power and influence.

But we do need to wield – with great humility – the influence and resources available to us to cast out and combat such evil. We need to wield that power with great humility...lest we end up further perpetuating the very evil we seek to oppose.

So it helps to remember – and remember always – that, ultimately, it is not we who defeat evil; it is God.

So we need to humbly place ourselves at God's disposal for God to direct us and use us as God wills...to prepare the way for the Lord to come in and shine through us.

**\*HYMN** "Silence! Frenzied, Unclean Spirit" GtG 181

1. "Silence! Frenzied, unclean spirit,"  
cried God's healing, Holy One.  
"Cease your ranting! Flesh can't bear it.  
Flee as night before the sun."  
At Christ's voice the demon trembled,  
from its victim madly rushed,  
while the crowd that was assembled  
stood in wonder, stunned, and hushed.
2. Lord, the demons still are thriving  
in the gray cells of the mind:  
tyrant voices, shrill and driving,  
twisted thoughts that grip and bind,  
doubts that stir the heart to panic,  
fears distorting reason's sight,  
guilt that makes our loving frantic,  
dreams that cloud the soul with fright.
3. Silence, Lord, the unclean spirit,  
in our mind and in our heart.  
Speak your word that when we hear it  
all our demons shall depart.  
Clear our thought and calm our feeling;  
still the fractured, warring soul.  
By the power of your healing  
make us faithful, true, and whole.

*Text by Thomas H. Troeger, 1984. Copyright 1986, Oxford University Press, All rights reserved. Reprinted / Podcast / Streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE #A-739819/#A-739796. All rights reserved.*

*Music: EBENEZER, Thomas John Williams, 1890. Public Domain*

**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from "A Declaration of Faith")

**God called all God had made good.  
We declare that the universe of matter, energy, and life  
is God's good creation in all its parts.  
Even though evil has emerged within God's creation,  
we may work and play in it  
and explore it with wonder and joy.  
Evil is whatever works against the loving purpose of God  
for human beings and all creation.  
Natural forces may have evil effects.**

*(continued...)*

**Sinful human choices produce evil results.  
Evil may become institutionalized in our social structures.  
The power of evil to hurt and destroy,  
to cut off the possibilities of full human life,  
calls into question the power and goodness of God.  
Whether we understand evil personally or impersonally,  
we cannot explain how it originated in a world made good.  
But we can affirm that evil is God's enemy as well as ours.  
In Christ, God shared our agony over evil  
and broke the back of its power  
by bearing the worst it could do.  
God works continually to overcome evil.  
In the end it will be utterly defeated.  
Therefore we have courage to endure evil,  
to learn from it, and combat it.**

“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:** Hear us, O God...  
**All:** ...your mercy is great.

## **THE EUCHARIST**

### **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**O God, with faith and hope, we offer our gifts. Use them, even as you use us, to accomplish your purposes of healing and renewal in Jesus Christ, your Son, our Savior; in whose 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 in unity with Christ.)*

**Sing:** "Feed Us, Lord" GtG 501

**1. Feed us, Lord.  
Feed us, Lord.  
In the broken bread,  
be revealed again.  
Come and feed our hearts, O Lord.**

**3. Fill us, Lord.  
Fill us, Lord,  
with the bread and wine  
of the risen Christ.  
Come and fill our hearts, O Lord.**

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

**2. Quench us, Lord.  
Quench us, Lord.  
On this thirsty ground,  
may your love flow down.  
Come and quench our hearts, O Lord.**

*(continued...)*

**4. Lead us, Lord.  
Lead us, Lord,  
nourished here by Christ,  
given strength for life.  
Come and lead our hearts, O Lord.**

Words and Music (FEED US): Greg Scheer, 2007. © 2007 Greg Scheer  
*Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.*

*Prayer*

### **SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “Lord, We Have Come at Your Own Invitation” GtG 503

- 1. Lord, we have come at your own invitation,  
chosen by you, to be counted your friends;  
yours is the strength that sustains dedication;  
ours, a commitment we know never ends.**
- 2. Here, at your table, confirm our intention;  
give it your seal of forgiveness and grace;  
teach us to serve without pride or pretension,  
Lord, in your kingdom, whatever our place.**
- 3. When, at your table, each time of returning,  
vows are renewed and our courage restored,  
may we increasingly glory in learning  
all that it means to accept you as Lord.**

Words: Fred Pratt Green, 1977, alt. © 1979 Hope Publishing Company.  
*Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434 / #2457662.*  
Music: O QUANTA QUALIA, Paris *Antiphoner*, 1681; harm. La  
Feillee’s *Methode du plain-chant*, 1808. *Public Domain*

**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

**POSTLUDE**

The Prayer of Confession, Assurance of Pardon, Prayer for Illumination, Prayers of the People (adapted), and Prayer of Dedication are written by John Wurster and Teri McDowell Ott and used by permission. © Presbyterian Outlook, 2024.

The Prayer of Confession, Assurance of Pardon, 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 2014.

The Prayer of Thanksgiving is used by permission from *Book of Common Worship*, © 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.