

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on Psalm 103)*

One: Praise God, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless God's holy name!
All: **Praise God, O my soul, and forget not all God's benefits.**
One: Let us worship God.

***OPENING HYMN** "O My Soul, Bless Your Redeemer" GtG 439 *(Verses 1, 2, & 6)*

**1. O my soul, bless your Redeemer;
all within me bless God's name;
bless the Savior, and forget not
all God's mercies to proclaim.**

**2. God forgives all your transgressions,
all diseases gently heals;
God redeems you from destruction,
and with you so kindly deals.**

**6. Bless your Maker, all you creatures,
ever under God's control,
all throughout God's vast dominion;
bless the Lord of all, my soul!**

Words: *The Book of Psalms*, 1871, alt.
Music: STUTTGART, Witt's *Psalmodia Sacra*, 1715;
harm. William Henry Havergal, 1847, alt.
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Merciful God,
your love for us is undivided,
but we confess that we have been unfaithful
in our devotion to you.**

(continued...)

**Our affections stray to false gods of money and power.
Our commitments fracture among the demands of work and family.
Our loyalties spread across the obligations of social class and nation.
Forgive us, we pray.
Heal us, for we have sinned against you.
Reconcile our wandering hearts and restore us to faithfulness.
In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(based on Psalm 103)*

One: The Lord is merciful and gracious, Ps. 103:8
All: **slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.**
One: In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.
All: **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 2:1-17

MARK 2:1-17 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

¹ When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door, and he was speaking the word to them. ³ Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves, and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'? ¹⁰ But so that you may know that the Son of Humankind has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic—¹¹ "I say to you, stand up, take your mat, and go to your home." ¹² And he stood up and immediately took the mat and went out before all

of them, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this!”

¹³ Jesus went out again beside the sea; the whole crowd gathered around him, and he taught them. ¹⁴ As he was walking along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

¹⁵ And as he sat at dinner in Levi’s house, many tax collectors and sinners were also sitting with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. ¹⁶ When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, they said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹⁷ When Jesus heard this, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Through the Roof...to Levi’s Dining Room” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Forgiveness. That’s what it’s all about.

Though maybe in a broader sense than might first come to mind.

“Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Who indeed.

So the scribes – and everyone else, for that matter – are faced with the prospect that somehow, this Jesus can forgive sins.

That’s what that *“Son of Humankind”* wording is all about: he’s talking about, referring to himself.

Jesus, somehow, has both the power and the authority to forgive sins. Something the scribes note is the prerogative of God.

Now, Mark does not lay out a precise, reasoned theology of how Jesus might be God or is authorized by God or whatever. Still, he does make it clear through this story, and the dialogue with the scribes, that Jesus has the power and authority to forgive sins.

“Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Precisely.

So the scribes and the people are faced with this prospect that somehow, in this Jesus, they come face to face with the power and authority of God.

A prospect that the scribes dismiss.

A prospect that amazes the crowd, even though they may not fully understand it.

Is it a prospect that we grasp? Is it a prospect that we will embrace?

And note the result of encountering this Jesus who has the power and authority to forgive sins. The result is...the man gets up and walks.

The one who was paralyzed – by some physiological disease or some psychological dysfunction or some spiritual malady, or some combination of the three, we do not know – the

one who was paralyzed can now stand up and walk. He is healed. He is transformed. He is made whole.

That's a good thing!

Then we find Jesus walking along the shore, and the crowd is with him, and he is teaching them.

And he comes upon one Levi, a tax collector.

We're familiar with that terminology. We've heard the phrase "sinners and tax collectors" before, and we know being a tax collector – or being called a tax collector – is not a good thing...in this historical context, I would add. In this historical context, it strongly suggests corruption, dishonesty, "only looking out for oneself," someone willing to cheat and even betray his own people; not a good person – in other words, a sinner.

And Jesus says to this sinner, "*Follow me.*" And he does. Just like Simon and Andrew, James and John, who were called, and followed.

Jesus says to this sinner, this Levi, "*Follow me.*"

"*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news*" (1:15), Jesus proclaimed.

Repent: turn around. Stop going in the wrong direction, and follow Jesus in the right direction.

Repentance. And forgiveness. And wholeness. And walking...with Jesus.

A life turned around.

Is not Levi something of a mirror of the paralyzed man? And vice versa?

Now, yes, nothing is mentioned about the paralyzed man – once he is healed and forgiven – following Jesus. But he does get up and walk. Something he could not do before. Something had paralyzed him and prevented him from 'walking': a word often used to refer to living, to a way of life.

And when he is forgiven, and healed, his life is turned around.

And, yes, nothing is mentioned about Levi being paralyzed...by anything. But it is suggested that he was a sinner – he was, after all, a tax collector – that he was heading in the wrong direction, that he needed to repent, and therefore needed to be forgiven. And somehow, did he not experience that repentance, and forgiveness, that renewal and healing, in hearing and responding to Jesus' call?

And his life is turned around.

The paralyzed man is healed and forgiven. And he walks into a new chapter of life; he stands up and embraces a new life. All by the power and authority – and compassion – of Jesus.

Levi has his own paralysis, frozen in a life that degrades others and demeans himself. And Jesus invites him to change course – to "*change his heart and mind,*" as one version translates it – and Levi begins to walk into a new chapter of life, to embrace a new direction and new way of life. All by the authority of Jesus' voice and the power of his person...and the compassion of his call.

And notice, the crowd is amazed at the new walk of life for the previously paralyzed man.

We like it when someone who seems to have gotten the short end of the stick of life gets a break, a fresh start.

But no one is celebrating the new walk of life of Levi – except maybe some of his old cronies who are like him. No one is amazed that Levi, the ‘tax collector’, has a new lease on life.

For we are not always thrilled when someone who may have cheated us or hurt us, gets, not their comeuppance (which is what we think they deserve), but a fresh start, and a new lease on life when they hear and see a new direction to life and a new purpose for life, and they embrace that grace that is offered.

We like the idea of forgiveness...for ourselves. Just not necessarily for the neighbor we think is a cad.

And, of course, the scribes of the Pharisees don’t like it either, this offer of new life and a fresh start and a new lease on life to others they perceive as sinners and...well, tax collectors.

I mean, those sinners and tax collectors have done wrong, regardless of whether they’ve done wrong to me or not. They’re really not good people. They’ve made poor choices and wrong decisions. They’re going in the wrong direction in life. They don’t worship God the way they’re supposed to. They don’t do a very good job obeying God’s Torah: God’s instruction, God’s way of life.

But note: Jesus agrees.

“Those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick.”

In essence, Jesus says, “I know. They haven’t done a very good job. They’re not living the way God wants them to live. They’re not making good choices or good decisions. They’re not living, and walking, the right way. But that’s what I came to deal with. So, as the Great Physician, I go to those who need to be fixed and healed, to be re-directed and re-aligned, to be redeemed and forgiven and restored. *‘That is what I came out to do’ (1:38).*”

Which, of course, begs the question if anyone is not in need of his help. And the scribes don’t appear to believe they do; which, of course, means precisely that they do!

Do we know our need for him? Our need for forgiveness? Our need for his healing touch, in all its varied nuances?

Do we know how we are paralyzed in life? how we are dis-eased in life? how we are turned around in the wrong direction in life?

Now a clarification.

This story makes, obviously, a connection between sin and illness.

It is not an easy connection. It’s not cut-and-dry, but complex. It’s not a one-to-one correspondence. And sometimes, there’s not a connection at all.

No one needs to say – and I am not intending to say – that, “Because you are sick, you have sinned.” Not true.

Yes, there are times when things we do and choices we make have consequences that include sickness and ill-health. Like when we don't take care of ourselves, or we push the envelope of safety.

And, while we're at it, there are times when it is something someone else does and a choice someone else makes that leads to our lack of health. Like a drunk driver that hits my car.

And there are times when, for example, I can be so wracked with guilt and shame because of something I have done, that the stress and emotion paralyze me, and I cannot function.

But sometimes – many times!?! – I simply (and innocently) wind up exposed to a virus that ravages my body. Or a tornado demolishes my house, with rafters falling on my body and breaking my spine and leaving me paralyzed.

The point is that Jesus came to restore us in the face of the sin that ravages us, and the disease and brokenness that diminish us, whether those two are connected in a particular instance, or not.

And we look to him – to his power and authority, and compassion – to restore us and renew us and make us whole, even though our full experience of that renewal, and healing, may have to wait until the final fulfillment of all things.

But what may be a bigger hurdle for us: What are ways that we resist the idea of someone else being forgiven, or healed, or being the recipient of God's grace?

And the response to that concern must always be an honest appraisal of our own life. Where we have to acknowledge that we have been forgiven and have received God's grace. That we have experienced the power and authority of Christ's forgiveness and renewal. And that a paralysis – of whatever sort – in our lives has been broken, and we've been restored.

Then part of the question for us is, What are ways we can offer the grace and forgiveness of God in Jesus Christ? Is it only something we say – and say rotely – on Sunday mornings? Or is it more? Does it include giving someone a second chance?...and a third, and a fourth, and a fifth? Does it include giving of ourselves in order to bring restoration – or at least hope – to someone else's life?

Remember: Jesus is in Levi's house, with all those tax collectors and sinners, all those sick and in need of a physician; and we are called to follow him. Are we going where Jesus goes? To those who need forgiveness and need a second chance and need healing – from who knows what ails them – and need the renewal and restoration of life? Because that's where Jesus is. Are we following him...there? Because we've been there ourselves, and perhaps we'd like to share that good news with someone else. Because we've had the experience of someone else sharing that grace, that good news – that Jesus – with us.

As our story vividly illustrates.

This power and this authority – this presence and this person – we can be introduced to him by the ministration of friends who are willing to tear through a roof or break through some glass ceiling or defy the walls of cultural assumptions, to bring us to him. And for that we should be grateful – as I'm sure the previously paralyzed man was for the friends who brought him – grateful for the friend who is willing to go against the current, or defy the odds, to introduce us to grace.

But note also: This power and this authority – this presence and this person – might just as easily be found in our own dining room, around our own table, in the everyday and ordinary, and the needful things of life, calling us to follow, calling us to turn our lives...to him.

Do we hear that call of grace?

Levi did.

And it's almost as if Jesus said to him, "Come on, Levi. I know that you are a sinner: broken, facing the wrong way. But I want you to be with me, and I want to be with you. Follow me."

And he comes into his life, and comes into his home, and lives that forgiveness and life, that welcome and reconciliation, that fellowship and that relationship, in Levi's own home...all in order to welcome him to his real home.

Where have we had some paralysis in our lives healed?

Do we see the release and renewal that comes from hearing, "Your sins are forgiven," and knowing the one who says it really means it?

Have we heard his call to change our direction and change the way we are facing, and the way we are walking, to follow him?

Do we see him going to those who are so like us – in need of healing and forgiveness and restoration in life – and, in our following him, will we follow him there: to those people...to one another?

Perhaps then we can tell them our story, and how he has released us from our paralysis and freed us from the grip of our broken ways and given us a renewed sense of purpose in life and a restored way to walk this life. And perhaps that will be our way of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ.

***HYMN** "Will You Come and Follow Me" GtG 726 (*Verses 1, 4, & 5*)

1. **"Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown;
will you let my name be known;
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?"**

4. **"Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?"**

5. **Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.**

(continued...)

**In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.**

*Words by John L. Bell and Graham Maule.
Music: KELVINGROVE, Scottish melody; arr. John L. Bell.
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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from “*A Declaration of Faith*”)

**God sent God's Son
to proclaim release to those who are bound,
to announce that God's promised kingdom is at hand,
to urge everyone to repent and believe the good news.
The Lord is moving toward the time
when the glorious liberty of the children of God
will be manifest throughout the whole creation.
We testify God is at work here and now
when people obey Christ's commission
to witness to him and make disciples of all nations,
when they spread the good news by their words
and embody it in their lives.
We believe that God sends us
to tell all nations
that Christ calls everyone to repentance, faith, and obedience.
We are to proclaim by word and deed
that Christ gave himself to set people free
from sin and self-hatred,
from ignorance and disease,
from all forms of oppression,
and even from death.
We are to offer them in Christ's name
fullness of life now and forever.
We must not distort the gospel
by weakening its promises or demands,
by identifying it with oppressive structures,
by pointing to ourselves instead of Christ.
We must not restrict our proclamation
to persons just like ourselves.
We invite people everywhere
to believe in Christ and become his followers.
We urge them to join us in telling others the good news
and in struggling for justice, compassion, and peace.**

(next page...)

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: God, in your mercy...
All: ...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*

O God of new life, you restore us with the hope of the gospel; you bind up our wounds and make us whole once again. You enliven us with the gift of your Spirit. Accept the gifts we offer, and transform their worth to accord with your will. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Go, My Children, with My Blessing” GtG 547 (*Verses 2-3*)

**2. “Go, my children, sins forgiven,
at peace and pure.
Here you learned how much I love you,
what I can cure.**

(continued...)

**Here you heard my dear Son's story;
here you touched him, saw his glory.
Go, my children, sins forgiven,
at peace and pure."**

**3. "Go, my children, fed and nourished,
closer to me.
Grow in love and love by serving,
joyful and free.
Here my Spirit's power filled you;
here my tender comfort stilled you.
Go, my children, fed and nourished,
joyful and free."**

Words by Jaroslav J. Vajda.

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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