

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JUNE 23, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TWELFTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: The Lord our God, creator of night and day, calls us to come.
All: **Our Lord and Master, Jesus the Christ, invites us to join in the song.**
One: Our Guide and Sustainer, the Holy Spirit, beckons us to listen and rejoice.
All: **So come, let us worship in song and praise, in prayer and thanksgiving.**
Unison: **Come, let us worship the Lord.**

***OPENING HYMN** “God, You Spin the Whirling Planets” GtG 23

1. **God, you spin the whirling planets,
fill the seas and spread the plain,
mold the mountains, fashion blossoms,
call forth sunshine, wind, and rain.
We, created in your image,
would a true reflection be
of your justice, grace, and mercy
and the truth that makes us free.**
2. **You have called us to be faithful
in our life and ministry.
We respond in grateful worship
joined in one community.
When we blur your gracious image,
focus us and make us whole.
Healed and strengthened as your people,
we move onward toward your goal.**
3. **God, your word is still creating,
calling us to life made new.
Now reveal to us fresh vistas
where there's work to dare and do.**

(continued...)

**Keep us clear of all distortion.
Polish us with loving care.
Thus, new creatures in your image,
we'll proclaim Christ everywhere.**

Words: Jane Parker Huber, 1978
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Music: PLEADING SAVIOR, American melody, 1830; harm. Richard T.
Proulx, 1986
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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 have not followed your will,
instead heeding other voices
and pursuing our own desires at the expense of others.
We are so misguided
that we cannot discern good from evil,
making the wrong choice,
choosing the wrong side.
Forgive us, redeem us, transform us.
In steadfast love, look upon us
and reclothe us in your grace.
Take away the sin that burdens us,
and restore us to the people you would have us be,
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: God does not forsake us. We are the work of God's hands, the object of steadfast love.
All: **Our sins are forgiven. Our lives are cleansed.**
One: The One who raised Jesus from the dead offers us new life today.
All: **So we believe and so we proclaim:**
One: We are being renewed day by day through the grace of Christ extended to us.
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 3:20-35

MARK 3:20-35 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition+)

²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for they were saying, "He has gone out of his mind." ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." ²³ And he 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 indeed the house can be plundered.

²⁸ "Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin"—³⁰ for they had said, "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, "Your mother and your brothers are outside looking for you." ³³ And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "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 "What Do You See? Unclean? Or Holy?" by Pastor Bill Vincent

No one (or almost no one) comes up smelling like roses in these verses...except Jesus himself.

No one (or almost no one) ends up looking good in these verses...except Jesus himself.

A number of years ago, Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder sang,

**Ebony and ivory
live together in perfect harmony
side by side on my piano keyboard,
oh Lord why don't we?**

(Paul McCartney, 1982)

It was a critique of that time – and our own – in terms of race relations.
But all too often, we can't see it – or won't.
So, we're blind.
Or, we're color blind (so to speak).
Or, better, we're heart blind.
Or, the deeper truth: We're heart hardened. Hard-hearted. Hard of heart. Heart of stone, and not flesh.

Remember our story from last week: Jesus in the synagogue; the Pharisees watching to see what he'll do so they can accuse him. And he asks,

"Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?"
(3:4)

And when their answer is silence, Jesus is angered, and grieved, at the hardness of their hearts (3:5).

Which actually summarizes the rest of chapter three pretty well, including our verses for today.

Let me explain.

Jesus' family hears about all that's going on with Jesus and the disciples: the crush of the crowd, how they hardly have time to eat.

And *"they were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'"* He's crazy.

The word used paints a vivid picture, combining the word for 'standing' with the word for 'outside'. Jesus 'stands outside of himself'. He's 'beside himself', we would say.

"Yep. He's crazy."

So they go to restrain him, to take control of him. For his own good? Or because he's staining the family reputation?

For the moment, we pause that part of the story.

It is a narrative tool Mark is fond of using. Called bracketting: inserting one story inside of another to illuminate both.

So, we've heard from the family.

Cut to the next scene: *"The scribes who came down from Jerusalem"* – in other words, the head honchos of scribedom – claim Jesus is casting out demons in the name of the ruler of demons.

How crazy is that?

Actually, in essence, that's exactly what Jesus says: "A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. Everyone knows that. That's crazy to think that's what I'm doing."

In fact, he goes so far as to suggest that line of thinking is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit. In other words, being so mixed up and twisted in one's thoughts and view and perspective that one considers the benevolent work of the Holy Spirit to be the malevolent work of an unholy spirit: considering that which is true, a lie; calling that which is holy, unclean; calling that which is good, evil; considering that which is the will of God, to be the work of the devil.

Then we catch up with his family. Or they catch up with him.

They find Jesus with a crowd around him, and they send in a message: "Hey, Jesus! Your mom and siblings are outside, and they're looking for you!"

And he turns and looks at those sitting around him and says, "Who are my mother and my brothers and my sisters?"

And everyone there would have known the answer to that question...or at least known how to arrive at the answer to that question. "Well, his father is such-and-such, therefore..."

Except that Jesus gives a different answer than they would have expected: "Those who do the will of God, these are my brothers and sisters and mother."

Yes, Jesus, in that moment, turns the understanding of 'family' on its head: not those to whom one is related by blood, but those to whom one is related by doing the will of our one true and only Father, in heaven.

Now, Paul Achtemeier points out, the

point is not so much the exclusion of his relatives as the wider inclusion into his family of all who follow him. (*Invitation to Mark*, Image Books, 1978, p.65)

How true.

But note: the real contrast, in the context of the passage as a whole, is not primarily between Jesus' definition of family and his family's understanding of family. In other words, Jesus is not saying his family's understanding of family is 'evil'.

Remember how the family started out "*to restrain him*"? They thought what he was doing was 'crazy'.

So, by association with the story of the scribes, Mark is identifying the family's thinking Jesus is crazy as the same as the scribe's thinking his work is the work of the devil

And that is a hard, sharp critique of both groups.

So, what is truth? What is real? What is holy?

And how do we discern that...aright?

For his mother and siblings thought they knew: "This just isn't right; this is crazy!"

And Jesus just told them they didn't know.

And the scribes – the religious authorities – thought they knew, in terms of who's on whose side.

And Jesus just told them they didn't know.

They thought they knew.

But, it turns out, what they saw as wrong was really right. What they called unrighteous was really righteous. What they considered evil was really good.

And that's what they all just did...except Jesus.

His family: the very ones who should have known him the best, knew him very little.
For they called "crazy" the very one who is more sane than the rest of us put together.

And the religious authorities: the very ones who should be able to discern (at least something of) the will of God and the workings of God – they missed the boat...completely.
For they called demonic the very one who is more filled with the Spirit of God than all the rest of us put together.

They called the right, wrong.
They called the truth, a lie.

And we are left to wonder: Can we discern the difference?

There are plenty of conversations going on around us that raise this same issue.
Not to make an easy association between 'fake news' and evil.
But the whole discussion around what is 'fake news' and what is 'real news' does raise the question – not just for those within the church, but for all of us – of how we discern the difference between what is true and what is not, what is real and what is not, what is God's will and work and what is not.

And when Jesus speaks of the sin against the Holy Spirit, that raises the stakes all the more.

Now let us be clear at this juncture: when Jesus speaks of the sin against the Holy Spirit, he is not addressing the experience of sincere and "**honest doubt and [even] disbelief**" (D.E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St Mark*, Penguin Books, 1963, p.122).

But warning that those who see the gracious, benevolent, compassionate work and will of God, and call it the work of the devil – they have their heart and their perspective and their standards and their life so turned and so twisted that it is debatable that they may ever see the good for what it is.

Are they capable of being turned around aright? That's a question that is left up to a far better authority than you or I.

Can I help change one whose heart is so twisted?

I have a hard enough time changing my own heart, let alone trying to change the heart of another.

So it seems to me the question for us is: What can we do to refine our sights and sharpen our 'instincts' and hone our discernment? so that we are better prepared to see the truth aright?

And at this point it may be important to make the distinction between the position we, as readers, are in and the position those in the narrative are in. For as Mark portrays it, no one can truly understand Jesus apart from the cross. So, those in the narrative cannot understand Jesus fully, even if they wanted to, until the end of the gospel. But we have the advantage of our perspective taking place after the event of the cross. So, we have a chance at understanding

Jesus and his work and his will...at least to a degree. So that when we don't understand Jesus, what's our excuse? and what can we do about it? presuming we sincerely want to understand and discern aright.

And I believe we are pointed in the right direction by the very thing Jesus lifts up: doing the will of God.

Perhaps it is as we see Jesus doing the will of God, and see, in him, what that looks like; and we follow him and his way, and emulate his path and life of compassion and mercy and love and embrace – perhaps it is as we do that, that our hard hearts will begin to soften, and even turn to hearts of flesh; and our eyes will open and see aright for we have seen the right in him.

But we have to be willing to see that he is doing the will of God, and affirm that. We have to be open to that. Which may mean we have to give up and let go of our own way of viewing the world, including even our very own family.

But notice, too, another part (related) of the key: positioning ourselves like those Jesus addresses; i.e., as one of those who 'sit around him', like the twelve themselves who were invited 'to be with him' (3:14). What N.T. Wright calls **“the call to be ‘around’ Jesus”**: to **“stick with Jesus,”** to be in his company and his presence (*Mark for Everyone*, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 2004, 2023; p.29 & 30).

You see, it is not enough for us to pontificate from afar: “I like this; it must be good. I disagree with that; it must be evil.”

We have to engage with the very one who is the good, who is the truth, who is the will of God.

And if we were able to do that – to focus on being with Jesus, following him; and seeing in him the will of God, and doing that – if we were able to do that, we might be able to see how ‘the ebony and the ivory’ go together to produce a wondrous harmony. And, by the way, we can and should join in and be a part of that.

And if we were able to do focus on Jesus and follow him and see in him the will of God and do that, we might better discern and distinguish the true spirit among us from the wrong one.

This does not easily answer every question (or situation) as to what is truth, and what is not; what is fake, and what is not; what is good, and what is not; what is the will of God, and what is not.

But it does place us in a better position to be able to distinguish and discern the difference – to be able to see aright. Because we are in a posture to have God show us the right, and the good, and the compassionate, and the true.

And we pray that God's own Spirit will help us to do just that.

***HYMN “Breathe on Me, Breath of God” GtG 286**

(next page...)

1. **Breathe on me, Breath of God;
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.**
2. **Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will,
to do and to endure.**
3. **Breathe on me, Breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.**
4. **Breathe on me, Breath of God,
so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life
of thine eternity.**

Words: Edwin Hatch, 1878
Music: TRENTHAM, Robert Jackson, 1888
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***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.**

**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!"**

(continued...)

**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

One: Lord, 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*

Thank you, God, for your faithfulness. We bring ourselves and our offerings to praise you and do the work you call us to do. Fulfill your purpose for this church as you enlist our offerings and our lives. In amazement at the work of your hands, we reach out our hands to help others, and invite them to join us in extending your grace to more and more people, for your glory, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "Take Thou Our Minds, Dear Lord" GtG 707

(next page...)

1. **Take thou our minds, dear Lord, we humbly pray;
give us the mind of Christ each passing day;
teach us to know the truth that sets us free;
grant us in all our thoughts to honor thee.**

2. **Take thou our hearts, O Christ; they are thine own;
come thou within our souls and claim thy throne;
help us to shed abroad thy deathless love;
use us to make the earth like heaven above.**

3. **Take thou our wills, Most High! Hold thou full sway;
have in our inmost souls thy perfect way;
guard thou each sacred hour from selfish ease;
guide thou our ordered lives as thou dost please.**

4. **Take thou ourselves, O Lord, heart, mind, and will;
through our surrendered souls thy plans fulfill.
We yield ourselves to thee: time, talents, all;
we hear, and henceforth heed, thy sovereign call.**

Words: William H. Foulkes, stanzas 1-3, 1918, stanza 4, ca. 1920

Music: HALL, Calvin Weiss Laufer, 1918

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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