

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 14, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, to celebrate the mighty acts God has done in our midst.
All: **We come to anticipate the call into God's future.**
One: Come, to participate in God's journey and work today.
All: **We come in faith to live in hope to be nurtured in love.**
Unison: **We come to join in the walk and work and worship of God.**

***OPENING HYMN** "Bless Now, O God, the Journey" StF 2191 *[tune 321]*

1. **Bless now, O God, the journey
that all your people make,
the path through noise and silence,
the way of give and take.
The trail is found in desert
and winds the mountain 'round,
then leads beside still waters,
the road where faith is found.**

2. **Bless sojourners and pilgrims
who share this winding way,
whose hope burns through the terrors,
whose love sustains the day.
We yearn for holy freedom
while often we are bound.
Together we are seeking
the road where faith is found.**

3. **Divine Eternal Lover,
you meet us on the road.
We wait for lands of promise
where milk and honey flow.**

(continued...)

**But waiting not for places,
you meet us all around.
Our covenant is written
on roads, as faith is found.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Merciful, steadfast God,
we present ourselves to you as we are,
aware that we have fallen by the wayside
and failed in your way.
We are like little children when it comes to following you:
we run ahead, expecting you to follow us down the path we choose;
or we lag behind, expecting you'll wait until we're good and ready.
Forgive us for not trusting that you know the way.
Forgive us for failing to rely upon your sustaining grace and steady presence.
Forgive us for not embracing your way of love that has already embraced us.
Forgive us, ever-loving God.
Fill us with your steadfast Spirit.
Guide us down your hope-filled, life-affirming path.
And renew us in the image of your Son,
our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,
by whose mercy we stand before you and offer our confession and ourselves.
Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: In the strength of the Lord Almighty we confide.
All: **In the mercy of God we trust.**
One: By the power of God we are restored.
All: **By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we are renewed.**
One: So rejoice and celebrate this day!
All: **For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved, we are given new life. 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 READINGS Isaiah 43:16-21
Hebrews 12:1-2

ISAIAH 43:16-21 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

¹⁶ *Thus says the Lord,
who makes a way in the sea,
a path in the mighty waters,*
¹⁷ *who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;
they lie down; they cannot rise;
they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:*
¹⁸ *Do not remember the former things
or consider the things of old.*
¹⁹ *I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.*
²⁰ *The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches,
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,*
²¹ *the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.*

HEBREWS 12:1-2 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

¹ *Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also
lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance
the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who
for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame,
and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Anniversary! Anniversary?” by Pastor Bill Vincent

I don't like anniversaries.

That may not be the best opening to a sermon for today.

But I'm hoping that maybe I've earned enough credit with you that you'll stick with me
and hear me out. (One can only hope.)

For you see, it's not so much that I don't like anniversaries at all, as it is I don't like a particular kind of anniversary: a church anniversary as a longing, pining for the good ole days; where we see the picture on the wall of all those people in the Sunday School class of 1922, and we say, "We want that again!"

An anniversary as wanting to reclaim and relive a time gone by.

And we bemoan life will never be the same again. And we don't like that: we want it to be the same as it was. But it can't be the same again. So we sit mournfully and look longingly at a past that is gone, a past in which we are stuck.

That's an anniversary as an end.

And that's not much of a celebration. That feels more like a dirge.

Now, before you accuse me of being insensitive, let me say: losing what used to be, and we can't go back...that's painful; we need to grieve that. And I hear that. I've had to do some of that grieving myself.

But that cannot be the end of the Anniversary, for that makes the Anniversary 'The End', and we stop living.

So maybe we need to see the anniversary not as an end, but a building block.

Or another way of saying it: the Anniversary not as, in and of itself, a destination, but a stepping stone.

So we arrive at this day, excited about what has gone before, excited about remembering what has happened, and celebrating what has been accomplished, what has been done and lived in the name of the kingdom of God, in the name of building community and building faith.

And that is good. And good to remember. Yes!

But it is not good to stop there, and only do that, and make that the end all and be all of the celebration.

For what we celebrate and what we remember is not the end, and it is not our destination. For we still have a race to run.

Remember:

run with perseverance the race that is set before us.

There is more to be done. We keep on keeping on.

And that race is set before us by the very one who pioneered the race, and the way: the very one who goes before us, and goes with us, even today.

It is something of a 'tricky' balance, this remembering...and still running the race.

And we see that in the words we read from Isaiah.

The very God who tells us to forget the past – for "*I am about to do a new thing*" – is the same God who reminds us of what God has done, alluding to that foundational memory of the people, the Exodus, with parting the sea and the chariots and all.

And the very God who lifts up God's saving acts in the past is the same God who says, "I am doing a new thing," with something of a new exodus, if you will.

So we remember and celebrate the good things of the past.

But this celebration is not the end: it is not the destination itself. Though, hopefully, it helps us along the way, along our journey.

And, just to be clear, I'm not, necessarily, saying that the journey is our destination either. Maybe the clearest way of saying it is that a relationship is our destination. And as anyone knows, a relationship is not static, it does not sit still; it continues to move and change and grow...or else it stagnates and dies. And if stagnation and death is what we want for our anniversary, then it's not much of a celebration.

It is too easy to remember what has gone on before and bask in the glow of what was, or even what might have been. That's why so many people do it: because it's easy.

But we must not stop living.

There is still more to do and more to accomplish and more to grow and more to be...especially if we remember that what we are doing and what we are seeking to accomplish and how we are seeking to grow and who we are seeking to be all has to do with the living, dynamic, faithful God, who is still among us, who is not done with us and is not done with this world, and is still living and still working and still loving.

So, **“how can I keep from singing?”** as the hymn asks (“My Life Flows On/How Can I Keep from Singing?” words by Robert Lowry, 1869). And how can we keep from growing? And how can we keep from doing? And how can we keep from our journey of hope and faith and love with our God?

We may pause, and appropriately so.

We may celebrate how so-and-so accomplished wonderful things to demonstrate God's work and love in our community. We may rejoice that such-and-such was faithful and carried on in difficult times.

But let us not idolize them as a “deer in the headlights” crowd that does nothing but stare at the past and admire things gone by.

Let us remember, Yes! Let us be inspired, Yes! And energized. For if they can do great things, so can we...in our own way and in our own time and in our own situation.

And let us be encouraged as we remember...and go on. For if God was faithful to them – AS God was faithful to them – so God is, will be, has promised (and is good for the promise) to be faithful to us now, and in the days and weeks and months and years and life to come...come what may.

So today's celebration – this anniversary celebration – serves as a stepping stone on our journey of faith and life and love with God.

A celebration of all that is good that has brought us to this time and this place on our journey and our relationship with God: for those people and those incidents and those memories. And for that we give thanks for it all. Amen!?

Today some of the specifics we lift up and remember may have to do, specifically, with the Pacific Presbyterian Church. But this is not to overlook or ignore other people and other memories that are part of our heritage, whether it be my own personal heritage or the heritage of another community of faith.

But this is also a celebration in anticipation – a celebration of all that is good that will come from this day: all that we will do and accomplish and be because we re-commit ourselves to this journey and this relationship, to this growth and this God; and we re-dedicate ourselves to the work and will and service and love that God seeks to do in and through us as we give ourselves to God faithfully and willingly and lovingly.

And so we picture that cloud of witnesses of which we read.

And we look at them and celebrate what they have done, and how God's grace and love and hope has been made manifest in them.

But then I invite you to look again: look again at that cloud of witnesses, and see how they are looking at you.

And picture that cloud of witnesses not as welcoming us home because somehow we're done and finished and we have arrived at the stadium and crossed the finish line. No. That may be for another, different kind of service of worship, but not today's.

Today we picture that cloud of witnesses as cheering us on, encouraging us, pulling for us. Because this 'race' – this journey of life – continues for us. And we will continue, and not give up. And these we remember cheer us on, because they've been this way before, and they know it's hard sometimes, and they know it seems impossible sometimes. But they also know it's exhilarating sometimes, and beautiful sometimes. And they know – for certain – that, by God's grace, they made it...and we can too. By God's grace, they made something beautiful and loving and faithful on their journey. And, by God's grace and God's power and God's presence and God's encouragement and God's love working in and through us, we too can make something beautiful and loving and faithful on our journey, as our journey continues this day and the next and the next and the next; for God's goodness, for God's glory, for God's will and purposes.

Thanks be to God!

***HYMN "God of Our Life" GtG 686**

- 1. God of our life, through all the circling years,
we trust in thee.
In all the past, through all our hopes and fears,
thy hand we see.
With each new day, when morning lifts the veil,
we own thy mercies, Lord, which never fail.**

- 2. God of the past, our times are in thy hand.
With us abide.
Lead us by faith to hope's true promised land.
Be thou our guide.
With thee to bless, the darkness shines as light,
and faith's fair vision changes into sight.**

(continued...)

**3. God of the coming years, through paths unknown
we follow thee.
When we are strong, Lord, leave us not alone.
Our refuge be.
Be thou for us in life our daily bread,
our heart's true home when all our years have sped.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** *(The Apostles' Creed)*

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*(Today's translation of the Apostles' Creed is reprinted by permission from *Book of Common Worship*, copyright 1993 Westminster/John Knox Press.)*

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: God of our life...
All: ...hear our prayer.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Traditional)

(next page...)

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**God of grace and embrace,
we thank you for walking with us
and providing for us
and loving us all along the way.
We bring these offerings to you
as tokens of our gratitude
and symbols of the offering of our lives
to share the joy of your kingdom,
the peace of your presence,
and the grace of your good news,
all to your glory.
In Christ's name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "This Is a Day of New Beginnings"

**1. This is a day of new beginnings,
time to remember and move on,
time to believe what love is bringing,
laying to rest the pain that's gone.**

(continued...)

~ 8 ~

**2. For by the life and death of Jesus,
love's mighty Spirit, now as then,
can make for us a world of diff'rence,
as faith and hope are born again.**

**3. Then let us, with the Spirit's daring,
step from the past and leave behind
our disappointment, guilt, and grieving,
seeking new paths, and sure to find.**

**4. Christ is alive and goes before us
to show and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
Our God is making all things new.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

All: ...Amen.

***RESPONSE "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me"**

**1. I'm gonna live so
God can use me
anywhere
and anytime!
I'm gonna live so
God can use me
anywhere
and anytime!**

Words and Music (I'M GONNA LIVE): African American spiritual.
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POSTLUDE

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