

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 28, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: In days of joy and tenderness,
All: **we lift up our eyes, seeking you.**
One: In days of anger and frustration,
All: **we lift up our eyes, seeking you.**
One: When we suffer injustice and oppression,
All: **we lift up our eyes, seeking you.**
One: When we sing and clap with joy
All: **we lift up our eyes, seeking you,**
One: We have gathered that our daily witness might be empowered.
All: **We are here to be equipped for the journey of life.**
One: Great is our God and greatly to be praised.
All: **We worship the One whose grace covers all our needs.**

*OPENING HYMN “We Bring Our Weakness” *[tune GtG 32]*

1. **We bring our weakness, God, to you,
for you can make us strong.
Our needy boasting you subdue,
and turn us from our wrong.
Accept, we pray, our urgent plea
for grace amid our trials.
And, in our blindness, help us see
beyond the world’s denials.**

2. **We gather to express our praise,
for you are great and good.
Your works continue to amaze,
where love is understood.**

(continued...)

**Our guide and shepherd you have been,
through journeys that you grant.
Your word equips us deep within
to live in covenant.**

**3. You send us out, good news to share
with all the doubting world,
for Christ has taught us how to care
despite invectives hurled.
We seek not honor or acclaim
but only to extend
the service done in Jesus' name,
more broken lives to mend.**

Words: Lavon Bayler. Used by permission of United Church Press from
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Music: ELLACOMBE, *Gesangbuch der Herzogl. Wirtembergischen
Katholischen Hofkapelle*, 1784; alt. 1868. *Public Domain*.

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Gracious God,
you call us to be your beloved children
and to care for one another,
yet we fail to love others and ourselves.
So we live in the tension
of what we are called to be
and our lived reality.
We are more in touch with the pangs of our weakness
than we are with the power of your love.
In fear, we worship idols;
in despair, we collapse in hopelessness;
in rage, we seek to dominate others.
We fall far short of the good we want,
and our growing in the likeness of Christ is painfully slow at best.
Helpless and ashamed, we turn our hearts to you.
Forgive us,
and then tenderly teach us
to stand strong and courageous in the fullness of your love.
Help us to know your peace that passes all understanding
as we claim your forgiveness and begin anew.
In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Hear the Good News!
The old life is gone, a new life has begun.
You are not who you were; may you live into who you can be.

All: **God's grace and mercy are never ending.**

One: Rejoice in God's grace.
Know you are forgiven
Claim your forgiveness,
and be at peace.

All: **Thanks be to God!**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you all.

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 6:1-30

MARK 6:1-30 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

¹ He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.
² On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!" ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown and among their own kin and in their own house." ⁵ And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their unbelief.
Then he went about among the villages teaching. ⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.
⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff: no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.
¹⁴ King Herod heard of it, for Jesus's name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead, and for this reason these powers are at work in him." ¹⁵ But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a

prophet, like one of the prophets of old.” ¹⁶ But when Herod heard of it, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.”

¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because Herod had married her.

¹⁸ For John had been telling Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.”

¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to kill him. But she could not,

²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²² When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests, and the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.” ²³ And he swore to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.” ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother,

“What should I ask for?” She replied, “The head of John the baptizer.” ²⁵ Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” ²⁶ The king was deeply grieved, yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John’s head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON [Framing Our Story] by Pastor Bill Vincent

Ever notice how a frame can change the way you view a picture?

We’ve done this a couple of times over the years: gone to the store to pick out a frame for a picture. You use a frame that looks like wood taken from an old barn, and it brings out the rustic flavor of the picture. Or you take a silver frame, simple and straight, and it brings out the structure of the picture.

Same picture. But the frame invites you to see different nuances in the picture.

We have mentioned before Mark’s use of ‘bracketing’: one story inserted in another, where each story helps to interpret the other, lends context to the other.

We have some complicated intertwining of stories in what we have read this morning.

And the choosing of the frame is important. It makes a difference in how we hear the story and understand the story: the highlights, the nuances; the focus, the meaning.

We start with the picture itself: Jesus sends out the twelve, two by two. They are to travel about the neighboring area. There is a sense of urgency about what they are doing: they are to

keep their focus. There is also a sense of simplicity invited in what they are doing and how they are doing it.

They are to proclaim/preach repentance, to cast out demons, to heal, to teach.

And when we look at the fuller story, we recognize that what the disciples are called to do is exactly what Jesus has been doing.

Jesus sends out the twelve (disciples) to continue the very ministry he himself has been doing: to proclaim repentance, to cast out demons, to heal, to teach.

It is the same call extended to us – we who are also disciples, followers –

-to proclaim a different direction in life

-to seek to rid ourselves, and our community, of unhealthy influences

-to bring wholeness and renewal to life

-to teach and guide in this way of life, even as we ourselves continue to learn and to grow.

And that calling, that ministry – that picture – is framed by a dose of reality that serves as a slap in the face.

For Jesus has been to his own hometown, his own people. And he has taught, and people have been amazed...and yet they reject him. They will not receive his message; they will not welcome him. And that almost comes as a surprise to us. Those who should have known him the best, turn away from him.

Then on this other side of the calling and sending of the disciples, we have this other story. It is a unique story in the Gospel of Mark, for it is the longest story that involves everyone else...but Jesus.

John the Baptist: arrested by King Herod, who enjoys hearing John, and is intrigued and concerned and not quite sure what to do with it all; but who protects John, for Herod's own wife is out to get him. And finally does, even in some ways using and manipulating Herod himself. Herod, who may have wanted to protect John, but who now, because of oaths made and guests there in front of him, sends and gives the order to have John the Baptist's head brought on a platter.

Some will not hear the word at all. Some will not respond well to any ministry of this sort, and will even strike back and strike out. Because the good news that we hear is not always heard as good news by others, due to self-serving motivations or values or priorities – we're not always sure why.

Now yes, it must be pointed out there is evidence that some are hearing it well and responding positively.

But this bigger picture, where Jesus' own hometown rejects him, and where John the Baptist – who is the precursor to Jesus, who points the way to Jesus, who was also preaching repentance like Jesus – John is violently killed...foreshadowing much of what's going to happen to Jesus himself.

All of this provides a context that is...well, it's a downright 'downer'.

We are called to this ministry – to share this good news, to share this life – and this is what might happen? It's downright depressing. We can do all this work, we can try all this

ministry, we can offer all this good; and it can be so easily rejected, and even twisted around in such a way as to cause harm instead of the good we intend.

Does all of this sound familiar?

A wondrous, varied, complicated picture of a field sown with seed. And the divergent responses to the word, to the seed that is sown.

-Where some seed on the path is snatched up by the birds.

-And other seed springs up quickly, but doesn't last, for it has no depth.

-And other seed is choked by the thorns and thistles.

That parable of the sower and the seeds.

That parable that warns us, that cautions us, that alerts us that, Yes, some will respond positively to the news, but some will not.

That reminds us clearly that some will receive this goodness, and some will not.

But as we hear about Jesus' hometown and Herod and John the Baptist, maybe there's a heightened concern raised. For now we hear that sometimes the thorns and thistles may not simply choke the word, they may choke us...and even cut off our heads – literally.

And that's depressing. That knocks us for a loop. And can take the wind out of us as well.

But hear that frame; see that frame: the frame of that parable and that seed and that sower. And remember that there is a promise, too: there will be a harvest.

Yes, we acknowledge, we face up to the reality that not everyone will receive the word. We hear that truth about reality, that some might respond very negatively to this ministry.

But we also hear that word – that promise – that there will be a harvest. We may not know where or how or when. But there will be a harvest.

And we hear that promise, not only in the words of that parable, but also in a larger frame even now. We hear that promise not only in the words of the parable, but also in the words of the angel at the tomb: *"He has been raised; he is not here."* (16:6 NRSVue)

The bigger frame, the fuller – fullest – frame.

Curious: *"he has been raised."*

The same word Herod uses when he thinks Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead. Herod may have been on the wrong track. But maybe he had the right idea: resurrection.

We may experience obstacles to our work and our ministry. There may be disappointments in our calling and life.

But this kingdom of God's of which Jesus speaks and lives – this kingdom marches on...with resurrection power. Whether we recognize it as that, or not.

The kingdom will come – it is coming...it is near...it is here – by the power of the resurrection. By the power of God's life and love and grace.

And so we still have work to do. Whether two by two, or one on one, or congregation to community.

And we still have a calling and a purpose...and a promise.

And in light of all of that, we have a joy to share, and a seed to sow.
We have a story to tell, and a life to share.
We have a Lord to serve, and a Lord who goes with us, through the thorns and thistles of life, and through the harvest.
And that too is a crucial part to the story we tell.

And we see all of that only by viewing our lives in the fullest frame: in the context of “*the good news of Jesus Christ*” (1:1) – the very first words of the gospel.

The context of “*the good news of Jesus Christ*,” and the context of the words, “*he has been raised; he is not here.*”

That frame gives us clarity to our calling, and “**courage for the present struggle**” (“A Declaration of Faith,” Ten(1)13; PCUSA).

For God’s reign over life, and goodness and grace in life, is coming, and is here.
For we proclaim, we know, we live: “He is risen; he is risen indeed!”

Amen! Thanks be to God!

*HYMN “O Jesus, I Have Promised” GtG 724

1. **O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end;
be thou forever near me, my Master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway if thou wilt be my guide.**
2. **O let me feel thee near me! The world is ever near:
I see the sights that dazzle; the tempting sounds I hear.
My foes are ever near me, around me and within;
but, Jesus, draw thou nearer and shield my soul from sin.**
3. **O let me hear thee speaking in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen, thou guardian of my soul.**
4. **O Jesus, thou hast promised to all who follow thee
that where thou art in glory there shall thy servant be.
And, Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end;
O give me grace to follow, my Master and my friend.**

Words: John Ernest Bode, 1866, alt.

Music: ANGEL’S STORY, Arthur Henry Mann, 1881

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from “*A Declaration of Faith*”)

**In forming his people and sending them into the world
Jesus called individuals to be disciples.
They were to share the joy of his companionship,
to understand and obey his teachings,
and to follow him in life and death.
We confess that Christians today are called to discipleship.
Life shared with Christ and shaped by Christ
is God's undeserved gift to each of us.
It is also God's demand upon every one of us,
never perfectly fulfilled by any of us.
Like Christ we may enjoy on our journey
all that sustains life and makes it pleasant and beautiful.
No more than Christ are we spared
the darkness, ambiguity, and threat of life in the world.
Our confidence and hope for ourselves and other people
do not rest in the powers and achievements of this world,
but in the coming and hidden presence of God's kingdom.
Christ calls each of us to a life appropriate to that kingdom:
to serve as he has served us;
to take up our cross,
risking the consequences of faithful discipleship;
to walk by faith, not by sight,
to hope for what we have not seen.
Forgiven by God and supported by brothers and sisters,
we strive to become more faithful and effective
in our daily practice of the Christian life.**

“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: God of glory..
All: ...grant us your grace.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Traditional)

**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*

**Most generous God,
you have blessed us with a life to live
and gifts to serve and share.
We offer these gifts to you as signs of our gratitude,
and as tools in the ministry of the church.
Use them and us to make known the good news
of your healing love and renewing power,
in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “God of Grace and God of Glory” GtG 307

1. **God of grace and God of glory,
on thy people pour thy power;
crown thine ancient church's story;
bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.**

2. **Lo! the hosts of evil round us
scorn thy Christ, assail his ways!
From the fears that long have bound us
free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days,
for the living of these days.**

3. **Cure thy children's warring madness;
bend our pride to thy control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal,
lest we miss thy kingdom's goal.**

(continued...)

**4. Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore.
Let the gift of thy salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
serving thee whom we adore,
serving thee whom we adore.**

Words: Harry Emerson Fosdick, 1930, alt.
Music: CWM RHONDDA, John Hughes, 1907
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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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