

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 4, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

- One: Christ says, "Come away to a deserted place and rest a while."
We have come for relief from life's turmoil.
- All: We come to be strengthened in our inner being.**
- One: God gathers us as a shepherd gathers her sheep.
- All: God's steadfast love surrounds us here.**
- One: We are reminded of God's enduring faithfulness.
- All: God's presence evokes our joyous worship.**

***OPENING HYMN** "All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly" GtG 509

- 1. All who hunger, gather gladly;
holy manna is our bread.
Come from wilderness and wandering.
Here, in truth, we will be fed.
You that yearn for days of fullness,
all around us is our food.
Taste and see the grace eternal.
Taste and see that God is good.**
- 2. All who hunger, never strangers,
seeker, be a welcome guest.
Come from restlessness and roaming.
Here, in joy, we keep the feast.
We that once were lost and scattered
in communion's love have stood.
Taste and see the grace eternal.
Taste and see that God is good.**

(continued...)

3. **All who hunger, sing together;
Jesus Christ is living bread.
Come from loneliness and longing.
Here, in peace, we have been led.
Blest are those who from this table
live their days in gratitude.
Taste and see the grace eternal.
Taste and see that God is good.**

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**God of goodness and grace,
we confess that we can get so busy and distracted
that we lose sight of your love and care for us.
We forget to live in gratitude
and fail to embody lives of goodness and mercy.
Forgive us, heal us, and lead us down gentle paths
that restore our souls and our world. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(based on Psalm 103 & Ephesians 3)*

One: The river of God's mercy
runs deeper and wider than our sin.
All: **God removes our sins
as far as the heavens
are above the earth.**
One: Through the power of the Spirit that is at work within us
God forgives our sins and strengthens our inner beings.
All: **So now we live knowing the love of Christ,
which surpasses all knowledge
and fills us with the fullness of 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 6:30-44

MARK 6:30-44 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. ³⁴ As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ When it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is now very late; ³⁶ send them away so that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy something for themselves to eat." ³⁷ But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?" ³⁸ And he said to them, "How many loaves have you? Go and see." When they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." ³⁹ Then he ordered them to get all the people to sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and he divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² And all ate and were filled, ⁴³ and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. ⁴⁴ Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

The disciples have returned from their missionary journey: the journey, the task Jesus sent them on. They have returned and report to Jesus all they have done and taught.

And Jesus has compassion on them, for obviously that was a tiring journey, a difficult thing for them to do. And Jesus says, "Let's get out of here, get away, off to some deserted place, some isolated place, and rest awhile." For, as the passage says, things were so busy they didn't have time to eat. Though I suspect, they really just wanted to take a break, and they really needed to take a break. We all do sometimes. It's important to take note of that: Jesus affirms the need to take a break and take care of yourself.

So, they get in the boat and set off: they're going to find a nice secluded beach, off somewhere away from the "maddening crowd." And they're gonna lie on the beach and sip margaritas or martinis or whatever people drink lying on the beach; and chill.

Until they arrive where they were going...and the beach is taken. In fact, the beach is over-run with people, with a crowd...and the crowd is waiting for them! Or, more specifically, him: Jesus.

So much for taking a break. Better luck next time.

I can imagine the disciples were very disappointed. It had been a long journey, a hard journey. They were looking forward to that time away. And they weren't going to get it.

Jesus may have been disappointed, too. He needed breaks every now and then himself. We read that in the gospels. But he also saw the crowd – really “saw” them. He “saw” them and knew them and understood their need. *“Because they were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.”*

Now, those who first heard this story – whether told orally or read from the written word – those who first heard the story would have had their ears ‘stand up’ when they heard the phrase “sheep without a shepherd.”

That picture was all about them: shepherds, sheep, flocks. A sheep without a shepherd was lost, and helpless.

But that image was also commonly used to describe the relationship between a monarch and the people: a ruler, supposed to guide and protect and provide for the people. Like King David, plucked from the fields where he watched over his flock of sheep, to be shepherd over the people throughout the land.

And, as we all know – and they did too – the image of *“the Lord is my shepherd”* (Psalm 23), who guides and provides and protects.

So the people – the crowd – were like sheep without a shepherd. So, the “Good Shepherd” stepped up...and taught the people many things.

Now you might ask, What does “teaching them many things” have to do with caring for the people, with having compassion for them? (That’s what the passage says: *“he had compassion for them.”*)

How does “teaching them many things” demonstrate compassion for the people?

Could it be the guidance the people need?

Could it be the encouragement the people need?

Could it be the protection the people need?

Nurturing them with a word they don’t even know they hunger for...until they hear it.

Then later on, as the day wears on, the disciples demonstrate their own compassion for the crowd by reminding Jesus of the time of day: “It’s getting late. These people need to eat; we need to send them away to get some food.” Obviously they weren’t in an area that was too awfully deserted: the disciples knew there would be food around in the area.

And Jesus stops them up short: *“You give them something to eat.”*

[-looking around-] “You talking to me?”

They respond with obvious, and (seemingly) justified, exasperation. They respond that they do not have the resources to meet the need.

But Jesus responds, “What do you have? Go and see.”

And the response? Five loaves and two fish.

And Jesus TAKES the five loaves, and the two fish. He BLESSES them. He BREAKS the loaves. And he GIVES to the disciples to set before the people.

That progression echoing the Lord’s Supper.

“And all ate and were filled.” And then some.

And there were even leftovers. An abundance – more than enough. One basket of leftovers for each of the twelve disciples.

Now Yes, the focal point of this story – the reason Mark shares it – is to lift up the wondrous, mighty deeds of Jesus: his power and what he is capable of doing; wonderful things.

But I think there’s more to it than simply that. For not only did Jesus demonstrate that wondrous power. There’s this intersection – an intertwining – between Jesus’ power and the disciples. An intersection between Jesus’ power and us.

But they object, the disciples do: they don’t have the resources. But Jesus invites them into the process, invites them into what he is doing, and go see what resources they do have.

I suspect that Jesus has this hope that when they go out to find what they have, they will discover they have things they didn’t realize they had; they may discover some resources that, “I hadn’t thought about that; maybe this could be used.”

And maybe he’s challenging us to do the same. To take stock of the resources we have at our disposal, for us, for meeting needs, for living in community, for following. To open our eyes. To be aware of things we may not have thought of before, we may not have realized were available, were relevant to the need before us.

To open our eyes, and ourselves, to what indeed we do have to offer. So that Jesus can do wondrous things in our midst.

And let us not forget that crucial to the resources available to us is Jesus himself.

I picture Jesus telling the disciples, “Go see what you have available.” And in the back of his mind he’s wondering, “I wonder if they’re going to catch on that the crucial thing they have available to them is me,” he says to himself.

Maybe that’s part of the “teaching them many things” that he is doing. To open the disciples up, to open the crowd up, to open us up to see what we really have in front of us when we are faced with dire needs, like hunger or homelessness or deep loneliness amidst the people.

But remember – remember when these deeps needs are pointed out to us, remember when Jesus says to us, “You give them something to eat” – remember he never asks us to do something he doesn’t help us do as well. We are never simply on our own with our own resources. He is here with us, to enable us to do the task he sets before us.

But we also need to note – be alert to the fact – that the disciples thought this was an impossible task. We see so many impossible tasks before us as well. But remember Jesus didn’t ask the disciples to do every impossible task. He asks them to do one, in this case.

And you know there’s a lesson there for us as well.

Yes, we can look around us in our own lives, in our communities, in this world, and we see so many impossible tasks about us. If only God would wave a magic wand and take care of it all. But that’s not how God works.

But remember too, when we hear that, “You give them something to eat,” when we hear that, “You give them clothes to wear,” when we hear that, “You give them a place to live,” when we hear that, “You give them community in which to abide” – when we hear that call, when we

hear that task that seems impossible, we are not asked to do every single impossible one. We're called to discern the one we are called to do.

And I say that because it's too easy for us to get caught up in the spectacular things Jesus did. He fed 5000 people with five loaves of bread. We have one loaf here, that means we should be able to serve 1000 people.

We want to do the spectacular stuff. It's showy; it's wondrous. It calls attention to all that God can do, and all that we can do.

But the spectacular is not always the impossible task God calls us to do.

Maybe the impossible task God is calling us to do is much smaller, far less obvious, but just as hard, if not harder.

For maybe the impossible task God is calling us to do is to let go the grudge we have held for oh-so-many years, and actually forgive the person who hurt us and betrayed us long ago.

Maybe the impossible task God is calling us to do is actually to reach out to that person we see everyday and we avoid eye contact with them because they make us feel uncomfortable and we already know we disagree with them on every topic of consequence; but maybe what God is calling us to do is to reach out to them and care for them because no one else will.

Maybe the impossible task God is calling us to do is to actually be patient with others; not simply say it but actually be patient with others, and with God. Waiting for when the time is right. Like waiting for the fruit to ripen on the vine.

Maybe the impossible task God is calling us to do is to "keep on keeping on," even when we see no progress to what we are doing and it seem like drudgery, though we still sense this is what God wants us to do; but God calls us and says to us, "Yes; but even though you may not see progress, even though you may not see any fruit, I still want you to keep on keeping on." And that seems an impossible task.

Maybe what God calls us to do is actually to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

Maybe THE impossible task is to say with our whole hearts and our whole selves, "Not my will, but yours be done."

And then who knows what amazing things God can do through us.

Now I have to confess: there's a little something that still is hanging for me in this story. For it starts with the disciples coming to Jesus and Jesus recognizing their need. But even as Jesus seeks to meet their need for rest, that need goes unmet.

So does that mean that the disciples are just left hanging? They come back exhausted. They don't get a break. They continue exhausted?

We read that the loaves are passed, the fish are passed, and "*all ate and were filled.*" Surely that includes the disciples as well.

And not simply ate to satisfy the hunger in their stomachs, but ate to satisfy the need in their souls.

Because maybe in reality the deepest need the disciples had was not for the rest per se. Maybe the deepest need the disciples had was to obediently, willingly say 'Yes' to what Jesus was doing, and to meet the needs of others.

So in a strange way even as we give of ourselves, we receive. And that is what feeds us.

Sound impossible?

Seems to be that's what Jesus does.

***HYMN “Loaves Were Broken, Words Were Spoken” GtG 498**

**1. Loaves were broken, words were spoken
by the Galilean shore.
Jesus, Bread of Life from heaven,
was their food forevermore.
By your body broken for us,
by your wine of life outpoured,
Jesus, feed again your people.
Be our Host, our Life, our Lord.**

**2. Loaves were broken, words were spoken
in a quiet room one night.
In the bread and wine you gave them,
Christ, you came as Light from Light.
By your body broken for us,
by your wine of life outpoured,
Jesus, feed again your people.
Be our Host, our Life, our Lord.**

**3. Loaves are broken, words are spoken,
as in faith we gather here.
Jesus speaks across the ages:
“I am with you; do not fear!”
By your body broken for us,
by your wine of life outpoured,
Jesus, feed again your people.
Be our Host, our Life, our Lord.**

**4. By the loaves you break and give us,
send us in your name to share
bread for which the millions hunger,
words that tell your love and care.
By your body broken for us,
by your wine of life outpoured,
Jesus, feed again your people.
Be our Host, our Life, our Lord.**

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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.**

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
and binds us together with all believers
in the one body of Christ, the Church.**

**The same Spirit
who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
engages us through the Word proclaimed,
claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.**

**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!"**

(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 EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Gracious God, we thank you
for enriching our lives with all that is good
and for providing for us in times of trial.
Make us ever more mindful
of the blessings you grant us each day.
Help us to be good stewards of all you give.
And deepen our trust in your love and mercy.
Increase our thanksgiving
by guiding our offerings to help others in need,
as a witness to your love, peace and justice,
so that the world may more deeply know
fullness of life in you. Amen.**

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

One: The Lord be with you.
All: **And also with you.**
One: Lift up your hearts.
All: **We lift them to the Lord.**
One: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All: **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 Christ. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

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.**

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

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

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Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Hope of the World” [GtG 734] *[different tune]*

**1. Hope of the world, thou Christ of great compassion:
speak to our fearful hearts by conflict rent;
save us, thy people, from consuming passion,
who by our own false hopes and aims are spent.**

**2. Hope of the world, God's gift from highest heaven,
bringing to hungry souls the bread of life:
still let thy Spirit unto us be given
to heal earth's wounds and end our bitter strife.**

**3. Hope of the world, afoot on dusty highways,
showing to wandering souls the path of light:
walk thou beside us lest the tempting byways
lure us away from thee to endless night.**

**4. Hope of the world, who by thy cross didst save us
from death and deep despair, from sin and guilt:
we render back the love thy mercy gave us;
take thou our lives and use them as thou wilt.**

**5. Hope of the world, O Christ, o'er death victorious,
who by this sign didst conquer grief and pain:
we would be faithful to thy gospel glorious;
thou art our Lord! Thou dost forever reign!**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

(next page...)

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