

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 117)*

One: "Praise the Lord, all nations!"
All: "Give praise to God, all peoples!"
One: "The Lord's love for us is strong."
All: "God's faithfulness is eternal."
Unison: We come to worship and praise the Lord!

***OPENING HYMN** "Lift High the Cross" GtG 826 *(Verses 1-3)*

Refrain:

**Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim
till all the world adore his sacred name.**

- 1. Come, Christians, follow where our Savior trod,
the Lamb victorious, Christ, the Son of God.**
(Refrain)
- 2. All newborn servants of the Crucified
bear on their brow the seal of Christ who died.**
(Refrain)
- 3. O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree,
your death has brought us life eternally.**
(Refrain)

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

You have called us, O God,
and we have refused to listen;
you have stretched out your hand
and we have not taken it.
We have not loved you and our neighbors as we ought.
We have taken what you have given us
and used those gifts to hurt others and defy you.
Forgive us for living in opposition to your will.
Forgive our inability to recognize you
and live out the reality of your gospel.
Lead us away from this grief and sorrow
we bring upon ourselves and upon you.
Give us the insight and the heart we need
to understand your place in our lives
so that our words and actions might reflect
your glory in the lives of others.
In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from Psalm 103)*

One: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in
steadfast love."
All: "As a parent has compassion for the children, so the Lord has
compassion for those who revere the Lord."
One: As the shepherd searches for the lost sheep, so the Lord seeks us out.
All: **The One who is the Way comes to show us the way.**
One: So rejoice and be glad, and give thanks for the grace of God.
All: **For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Alleluia! Amen!**

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 8:22-9:1

MARK 8:22-9:1 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition+)

²² They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. ²³ He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?" ²⁴ And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking." ²⁵ Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again, and he looked intently, and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. ²⁶ Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸ And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Humankind must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ For what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ For those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Humankind will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

^{9:1} And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

In the big picture of Mark's gospel, this passage -- Peter's confession -- is a pivot point in the story. A turning point. A turning point that in many ways is mirrored in the story that immediately precedes it: the story of the blind man.

You see, the disciples are finally at the point where, having heard Jesus and seen Jesus and been with Jesus -- the disciples are finally at the point where they can rightly identify Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the Savior that God has sent for the people.

Yes! That's a good thing.

But they still do not know what it means to call him Messiah. And they still do not know -- even less so -- what it means to be a disciple, a follower of this Messiah. And not just any Messiah, but this Messiah, this Jesus.

But maybe Peter -- as he responds so strongly -- maybe Peter has a clue, has an inkling. And so maybe sometimes in our response we have a clue, an inkling, too.

It's almost as if the disciples are very much like that blind man, and they are to a point where they can see people, but they are like "*trees, walking.*" They kind of understand, they kind of get it; but they don't really, not fully, not clearly.

You see, maybe it's a matter that they may get the words right, but what is needed now is not so much right words as it is a right relationship. Not simply being able to call Jesus by the right title, but knowing who he is and what his mission is and how that impacts us.

So we start with a new chapter in this story of Jesus and the disciples, which is also our story. The words, even though we may have them printed on the bulletin and outside on the church sign -- the words may not be so much the point, and at times may be inadequate.

It's the relationship that matters. And that takes time. To talk with him and to be with him and to work with him -- that simply takes time.

And please note that the only one who can truly direct us in that relationship, in that learning, in that growth, is the very one we seek to be in relationship with.

So maybe to begin with the question becomes, Will we take that time? Will we put forth that effort? Will we pay -- and I do mean 'pay', because it will cost us; it will cost us our time and our effort, our energy and our focus, it may even cost us some of our dearest held dreams -- but will we pay attention and spend the time and give ourselves to the relationship, give ourselves to him?

But at the very start, when Jesus begins to say what it really means to be a Messiah, what it really means to be a Savior for the people, he talks about suffering and rejection and death.

And Peter doesn't like what he hears. So Peter rebukes Jesus. And Jesus in turn rebukes Peter.

And don't think that we are off the hook. For how many times do we not like what we hear? How many times do we not like this understanding of what it takes to follow Jesus? And we want to use our own agenda, and put it in place of Jesus'. How many times do we hear the call but instead we want to do it our way, and not Jesus' way. We try to hijack the call of Christ: take it over, and we want to be in charge.

And that is precisely what Jesus is saying No to. That's why he rebukes Peter. No, Peter is not the one in charge. No, Peter is not the one to define who Jesus is. No, Peter is not the one to define this way.

Jesus is.

And we have to hear that truth, too.

For we really do want to do it our way. We want to be the center. We think we know best. We think we've heard enough that we've got this all figured out, if Jesus would just fall in line with us.

But the answer is "No!" "*Get behind me, Satan!*"

Now those words sting, as the truth often does. But it's the truth that we must face up to. That when we want to take over and we want to be in control, that what we are following is not the divine things but our own human things.

And Jesus says, “No! You must deny yourself.”

Not deny yourself as in a sort of masochism. Where we’re going to punish ourselves and go without eating, and forget to sleep; we’re going to run ourselves into the ground. No, no. To do that is to abuse the very gift of life God gives us.

But when Jesus says we are to deny ourselves, he’s calling us to take ourselves out of the spotlight, off of center stage, and put Jesus there instead.

John Calvin seeks to outline what this self-denial means when he writes these words:

We are not our own;

therefore neither our reason nor our will should predominate in our deliberations and actions.

We are not on our own;

therefore let us not propose it as our end, to seek what may be expedient for us according to the flesh.

We are not our own;

therefore let us, as far as possible, forget ourselves and all things that are ours.

On the contrary, we are God’s;

to [God], therefore, let us live and die.

We are God’s;

therefore let [God’s] wisdom and will preside in all our actions.

We are God’s;

towards [God], therefore, as our only legitimate end, let every part of our lives be directed.

(Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 7; found in Lamar Williamson, Jr., *Mark* (Interpretation series) (John Knox Press, 1983), p.156-157)

We are called not to follow our will, but God’s. Not to walk the path we want, but to walk the path Christ walks and Christ chooses.

So we are to take ourselves out of the forefront of our minds so that we can concentrate on and focus on and invest ourselves in something else, or someone else, and God’s will and God’s direction and God’s leading.

You know, I wonder. I think on most mornings we wake up and one of the very first things that happens is we give a prayer that goes something like this: “God, I really need you to help with this, with that, with whatever; I need you to do this for me.” And so this first thought is our agenda: my plans, what I want -- me.

Now, let me be clear. This is not to deny that I have needs in my life. God knows I have needs, and, so often, God knows my needs better than I do. And, yes, God even invites us to lift up our cares and concerns and our needs to God in prayer.

But I wonder. What would happen if we flipped the script. What would happen if one morning we woke up and -- in a very genuine way, from our heart -- we woke up one morning and said, “God, what can I do for you today? What would you have me do? Who would you have me serve? To whom would you have me reach out with a call or a letter or an email or a phone call or a ‘How ya’ doing?’ How would you have me choose today? How would you like me to invest my time, my energy, my focus? What path would you choose for me today? Show me, and I’ll take it.”

Now I have no doubt that each of us has had some experience with that take on life. Where we have gotten so lost in a project or a person -- lost in a good way -- that we lose ourselves in the effort and the work, the caring and the service.

So what if we could take that approach and make it the norm, and not the exception; make it our habit, and not simply a fluke.

“God, what can I do for you today?”

If we could embrace that approach, we might begin to experience what Paul meant when he said, “*It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.*” (Galatians 2:20-NRSVue)

Christ in me. Christ in control. Christ calling the shots. Christ directing the script. Christ in charge. Christ in me.

And yes, that’s hard. For it goes against our natural inclination, our me-centered tendency.

And please as I talk about this, don’t get the idea that I have this all figured out. “I do this so well, everybody should follow me.” No! We’re supposed to follow Christ. That is the call. That is the whole purpose. My confession is to you is simply that I don’t do that very well.

Because it is hard.

And yes, it can be scary. For it might lead me down a difficult path: a path of resistance and opposition. A path where I come to that intersection that’s precisely the point where this human thing and this divine thing collide.

And yes, following in this path may take my time, my energy, my focus away from things I’ve cherished for so long.

But the purpose of all this is not for me to choose a dangerous path or a perilous situation simply in order to proclaim my commitment: “Look at me! I’m walking into the face of danger. Aren’t I good?” Isn’t that a failure from the get-go? Because I’m putting myself once again back in the spotlight.

Choosing this path, choosing Christ’s way, and choosing this way in particular situations, yes, can be dangerous, and it takes sacrifice. Like a cross.

And it’s not something that’s simply thrust upon us. As one person tried to make clear, we’re not talking about some of those

unpredictable tragedies that occur to people regardless of their commitments. (Charles Cousar, in *Texts for Preaching: A Lectionary Commentary Based on the NRSV - Year B* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), p.513)

It’s a matter of my choosing this way -- dangerous as it may be -- choosing this way because I know it’s the right way, it’s God’s way, it’s the way Christ calls me to. It’s the way of service to God and service to others; even though some of those same others might persecute me because of that choice I make and that path I take, that decision I opt for and that life I choose to give.

But it’s a call for me to say Yes to this path. And Yes to the paradox: that even though it appears that I’m giving up my life -- and I’m going from life to death -- Jesus affirms for us that in reality it is a choice to go from death to life. Because it is a choice for life that is true life in communion with God on God’s way, in tune with God’s will and purposes.

And so it’s choice and a chance to say Yes. To say Yes to Christ’s path and Christ’s way and Christ’s manner of living.

And to say Yes because Christ said Yes to me...on a cross. He said Yes to his love for me. He said Yes to my life and my worth as his disciple, his companion, his friend even, his partner in this work and love, this purpose and this life.

Christ said Yes to me on the cross.

Now he turns and asks me: Will I say Yes to him on mine?

***HYMN** "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" StF 2129

- 1. I have decided to follow Jesus,
I have decided to follow Jesus,
I have decided to follow Jesus
no turning back, no turning back.**

- 2. The world behind me, the cross before me,
the world behind me, the cross before me,
the world behind me, the cross before me
no turning back, no turning back.**

- 3. Though none go with me, still I will follow,
though none go with me, still I will follow,
though none go with me, still I will follow,
no turning back, no turning back.**

Words: Anonymous

Music: ASSAM, Folk melody from India

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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.**

(continued...)

**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.**

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Lord, who gives us everything we have,
we return with joy a portion of our bounty,
giving to the work of your church and your world
what is already yours: ourselves, our lives, and our means.
May this offering serve
as a powerful witness
to this world in need.
Teach us to use what we have with wisdom and compassion.
for the building of your kingdom.
In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.**

HYMN “Lord, We Have Come at Your Own Invitation” GtG 503

(next page...)

1. **Lord, we have come at your own invitation,
chosen by you, to be counted your friends;
yours is the strength that sustains dedication;
ours, a commitment we know never ends.**

2. **Here, at your table, confirm our intention;
give it your seal of forgiveness and grace;
teach us to serve without pride or pretension,
Lord, in your kingdom, whatever our place.**

3. **When, at your table, each time of returning,
vows are renewed and our courage restored,
may we increasingly glory in learning
all that it means to accept you as Lord.**

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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 (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.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please partake of each element as you are served, remembering Christ comes to you and Christ calls you.)

Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN “Will You Come and Follow Me” GtG 726
(The Summons)**

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?”**
2. **“Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?”**
3. **“Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean 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.
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.**

(next page...)

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Music: KELVINGROVE, Scottish melody; arr. John L Bell, 1987
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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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