

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(from Psalm 118)*

One: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."
All: **We praise the Lord who blesses us.**
One: We come in thanksgiving.
All: **We come with song.**
One: We come in anticipation of the Lord's coming to us.
All: **"Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"**

***OPENING HYMN** "Hosanna, Loud Hosanna" GtG 197 *(Verses 1 & 3)*

1. **Hosanna, loud hosanna,
the little children sang;
through pillared court and temple
the joyful anthem rang.
To Jesus, who had blessed them,
close folded to his breast,
the children sang their praises,
the simplest and the best.**
3. **"Hosanna in the highest!"
That ancient song we sing,
for Christ is our Redeemer;
the Lord of heaven, our King.
O may we ever praise him
with heart and life and voice,
and in his blissful presence
eternally rejoice.**

Words: Jennette Threlfall, 1873, alt.
Music: ELLACOMBE, *Gesangbuch der Herzogl:
Wirtembergischen Katholischen Hofkapelle*, 1784; alt.
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God,
we confess that we have often acted out of selfish ambition and vain conceit.
We have allowed envy and self-interest to guide our actions,
rather than the wisdom and care that comes from above.
Forgive us for the times we have caused conflicts and quarrels
among ourselves and others.
Take from us all the bitterness, envy, and anger
that stands in the way of your reign.
Forgive us,
and call us to faithfulness.
Nurture us with your love and forgiveness,
that we might submit ourselves to you,
draw near to your grace, and
share what we have been given,
for the common good of all your children. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(based on Psalm 8)*

One: What are we that God is mindful of us?
Who are we that God should care for us?
Yet God now calls us beloved children.
All: **Jesus embraces us in grace
and comforts us with mercy.
Jesus now claims us as sisters and brothers.**
One: This is the good news of God's grace:
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.
All: **In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.
We are children of God!
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 READINGS Mark 9:30-37
Mark 10:13-16

MARK 9:30-37 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

³⁰ They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it, ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Humankind is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." ³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³ Then they came to Capernaum, and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them, and taking it in his arms he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

MARK 10:13-16 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

¹³ People were bringing children to him in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Receiving What? ... or Whom?" by Pastor Bill Vincent

It's hard to be last.

You can't see over everybody else's heads.

You're left to pick up after everyone else: kind of like the "pooper scoopers" at the end of the parade, cleaning up after the horses.

In today's stories, various things are being received, welcomed (same word in the Greek).

-receiving (or welcoming) the kingdom

-welcoming (or receiving) Jesus

-welcoming (or receiving) the one who sent Jesus

-welcoming (or receiving) children: the small ones, little ones.

And this is certainly something of what it means to be "great," as Jesus re-defines greatness.

What it means to follow this one who will be betrayed, killed...and rise again.

What it means to be "first"; to receive the children. What it means to "be last of all and servant of all."

It's a lot harder to be servant than to be self-serving, to toot your own horn: "I am the greatest! I am first! I am right!"

But in Jesus' way of thinking, the way of life is not to brag about or seek my own status; but to affirm the value of others, and live that out.

Nowadays, we tend to have an endearing attitude towards children: "Ah! Isn't that sweet!" Maybe in many ways influenced by this picture of Jesus welcoming the children.

But when he did welcome them, when he said these things, in that day and time, children were not considered to be worth much at all. They were insignificant, powerless, nobody, a nuisance.

So the disciples tried to shoo them away: "Don't bother the Master!" And the children themselves were powerless to resist that – and voiceless.

Until Jesus gave them a voice, and spoke up for them.

The irony of this story is that, in the disciples' shooing the children away, they are precisely contradicting what Jesus had already told them: Welcome the children, receive them; be a servant; be last.

Be last. Receive the children.

To be willing to change and clean their diapers...metaphorically speaking, of course...though sometimes, quite literally.

Be last. Welcome the children.

Stoop down to listen to them, to engage with them, at their level. Rather than remain standing – taller than they are – and "lording it over" them, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Or maybe a better image: kneel before them, even to wash their feet.

Yes, to be last – to be a servant – is often to be made to feel small, worthless.

And though I doubt seriously that's how Jesus thinks of us – he who thought we were worthwhile enough to die for us – it does maybe help us identify with 'the children': the lowly, those who feel small and insignificant, who have been told by others that they are not worth anyone's while, "So shut up and do as you're told!"

What does it mean to receive 'the children'? to welcome the unseen ones among us? to serve those "shooed away" by the rest of society?

The picture that I kept coming back to was that of a CASA volunteer: Court Appointed Special Advocates. Adults appointed by the court to be an advocate for a child directly affected by a court case. Someone to stand by the child, to work with them, to understand them, to help them; to exercise one's own power and voice on behalf of another, for their welfare, for their good.

I think of that other story that Jesus told about the sheep and the goats: about those that helped (or did not help) those who were hungry, or thirsty, or naked; visited (or did not visit)

those who were sick or in prison. And the Lord said, “As often as you did it to the least of these, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Ministering to the people that others do not value, do not pay attention to, do not concern themselves with. Serving those at the bottom of the heap, the bottom rung of the ladder.

And in doing so, to be last yourself.

But being last is hard.

So why would we be motivated to do it?

1. The most obvious answer seems to be because it seems the right thing to do.

Jesus said it. We’re to follow and obey him – do what he says to do.

It’s the right thing to do.

2. But also when we do it – and follow through – we have seen the difference it can make in another’s life: when the “worthless” have their worth affirmed; when the “voiceless” have their voice heard; when the “powerless” have their power restored and are able to live life to the fullest, to blossom.

And that’s a good feeling to be a part of that: a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment of purpose.

3. But maybe a deeper motivation – the deepest motivation – is that we know the grace and the love and the life from Christ’s becoming last for us. He who

emptied himself,

taking the form of a servant, ...

[who] humbled himself

and became obedient to the point of death –

even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:7,8)

He became last and least for us, for our sakes: served us in mercy, in love, for life.

With that picture in mind, let us welcome the children – receive the last, serve the least – just as Christ did us.

***HYMN** “like a child” StF 2092

**1. like a child love would send
to reveal and to mend,
like a child and a friend,
Jesus comes.
like a child we may find
claiming heart, soul, and mind,
like a child strong and kind,
Jesus comes.**

(continued...)

2. like a child we will meet,
ragged clothes, dirty feet,
like a child on the street,
Jesus comes.
like a child we once knew
coming back into view,
like a child born anew,
Jesus comes.

3. like a child born to pray
and to show us the way,
like a child here to stay,
Jesus comes.
like a child we receive
all that love can conceive,
like a child we believe,
Jesus comes.

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from "*A Declaration of Faith*")

**Christ calls us to live for our neighbors.
Jesus broadened the definition of neighbor
to include those ordinarily despised and excluded.
His life in behalf of others
led to persecution and death.
He commanded his disciples to live the same way.
We believe Christ gives us and demands of us
lives that recognize all people in all cultures
as our neighbors on this planet.
Christ teaches us
to go beyond legal requirements
in serving and helping our neighbor,
to treat our neighbor's needs as our own,
to care passionately for the other's good,
to share what we have.
It is part of our discipline
to live in simplicity,
avoiding greed and luxury
that threaten our neighbor's survival.**

(continued...)

**We are obligated to speak the truth in love,
to listen with patience and openness,
to love our enemies,
to accept the risk and pain
which love involves.**

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Lord, in your mercy...
All: ...hear our prayer.

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*

**We thank you for the wealth you shower on us daily, O Lord,
and we witness the marvelous goodness that comes from you.
Transform these gifts into signs of welcome
for all who are touched by their use.
And transform us into people
who embody the spirit of humility and service
that Christ himself has witnessed among us.
In his name we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love” GtG 203

Refrain:

**Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love;
show us how to serve the neighbors we have from you.**

1. **Kneels at the feet of his friends,
silently washes their feet,
Master who acts as a slave to them.**
(Refrain)
2. **Neighbors are wealthy and poor,
varied in color and race;
neighbors are near us and far away.**
(Refrain)
3. **These are the ones we should serve;
these are the ones we should love;
all these are neighbors to us and you.**
(Refrain)
4. **Loving puts us on our knees,
willing to wash others' feet;
this is the way we should live like you.**
(Refrain)

Words: Tom Colvin, 1969; rev. 1997, alt.

Music: CHEREPONI, Ghanaian folk melody; adapt. Tom Colvin, 1963;
arr. Jane Marshall, 1982

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

***RESPONSE** “Make Me a Servant” StF 2176

**Make me a servant,
humble and meek,
Lord, let me lift up
those who are weak.**

(continued...)

**And may the prayer of my heart always be:
Make me a servant,
make me a servant,
make me a servant today.**

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POSTLUDE

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