

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY
TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP (*based on Luke 13*)

- One: "People will come from East and West, from North and South."
All: They will come at the gracious invitation of the Lord.
One: The invitation is to all of us to join around the table and enjoy the feast
Christ sets before us...
All: ...The feast at which he is host and we are the guests.
One: So come, to celebrate God's presence in our midst.
All: Come, to offer ourselves in service to the Lord.
Unison: Come in celebration, to worship the merciful Lord our God.

***OPENING HYMN** "In Christ There Is No East or West" GtG 318

1. **In Christ there is no east or west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.**
2. **In Christ shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find;
his service is the golden cord
close-binding humankind.**
3. **Join hands, disciples of the faith,
whate'er your race may be.
All children of the living God
are surely kin to me.**
4. **In Christ now meet both east and west;
in him meet south and north.
All Christly souls are one in him
throughout the whole wide earth.**

Words: John Oxenham, 1908, alt.

Music: ST.PETER, Alexander Robert Reinagle, 1836
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious and merciful God,
We often wonder what we must do to be right with you.
The gospel tells us what you have done for us in Jesus Christ
to make us right with you.
We establish rules and try to follow them to win your love.
You call us to trust in your grace and promises in Jesus Christ.
We strive for security by piling up the things of this life.
Jesus says, "Come, follow me."
Lord, forgive our self-centeredness
that seeks our well-being while we ignore the needs of others.
Forgive our relying on ourselves
rather than accepting fully Jesus's call to discipleship.
Help us to seek your kingdom and righteousness first in our lives.
Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(based on 1 Timothy 1:15)*

One: The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance,
that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.
All: **Jesus is not ashamed to call us his beloved siblings and family.**
One: Children of God, hear and believe the good news:
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!
All: **we are made one with Christ and with each other. 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 10:17-31

MARK 10:17-31 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition+)

¹⁷ As he was setting out on the way a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁸ Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except the one God. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. You shall not defraud. Honor your father and mother.'" ²⁰ He said to him, "Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth." ²¹ Jesus,

looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”²² When he heard this, he was dismayed and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

²³ Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”²⁴ And the disciples were amazed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God!²⁵ It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”²⁶ They were even more astounded and said to one another, “Then who is able to be saved?”²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, “For human beings, it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”

²⁸ Peter began to say to him, “Look, we have left everything and followed you.”²⁹ Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the good news³⁰ who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age – houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields (along with persecutions) – and in the age to come eternal life.³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “In Your Way? On the Way” by Pastor Bill Vincent

This story is hard. It even seems harsh. At the very least, it is a splash of cold water in the face.

Yet it is a story of grace.

Now, we think of grace as good news. And indeed, it is good news.

Yet there are times when there is nothing good about the news of grace.

Nothing good: like that first splash in the face – the most fundamental – where we hear that we cannot earn our way into the kingdom. We cannot work our way into “God’s good graces,” to earn “eternal life.”

“*What must I do to inherit eternal life?*” the man asks. What actions, behaviors are most crucial? How good do I have to be? And this guy was pretty good: “*all these since my youth.*”

We want to earn it by our own efforts. We think we should be able to earn it by our own efforts. We want to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps.

We expect to be able to do it on our own.

The world assumes that we can do it on our own, as long as we just work harder.

But our bootstraps are neither long enough for this goal nor strong enough for this load.

We cannot grasp, we cannot earn this kingdom by ourselves. It is not within us.

But it is within God.

So we can receive it. But as a gift.

Still there is nothing good about this news of grace: for we have to give up in order to gain; we have to let go in order to receive.

Especially in our story, we have to let go of what we possess, or what we think we possess – or does it actually possess us? We have to let go our grip on them in order to know freedom from their grip on us.

Yet all too often we are so focused on what we can get and gather and surround ourselves with – the wealth, the possessions, the things. They provide us security, we think; safety, we think; a sense of fulfillment and self and worth, we think.

But the message is clear: our worth is not found in those things; our safety, our security, our life is not found in those things.

We have to let go of them: of anything and everything that stands in the way of God's sovereignty over our lives (Nontombi Naomi Tutu, *Connections*, p.388b); God's sense of purpose and peace and life for us.

Let go of everything else, that we might receive that peace, that life, that security in God.

Now it's interesting that as Jesus responds to the man, he mentions a "*treasure in heaven.*" We have heard the phrase before. Jesus has spoken of working to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, "*for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" (Matthew 6:21 NRSVue)

But if our treasure is far too much focused on what we have, what we look like, what we possess – or who we possess – then that's where our heart will be. And that's not where our heart needs to be.

So this man who asks what he can do to grasp this possession of the kingdom, goes away empty-handed.

It is, as some note, the only time in the Gospel when Jesus calls someone to follow him, and they do not.

It is a reminder to us of the insidious possessiveness of our possessions over us.

But then when Jesus speaks about how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God, the disciples are amazed, precisely because they assume that someone who is blessed with such wealth and such possessions is certainly blessed by God. It is the disciples' assumption, and it is all too often our own assumption – and a false one at that, so a shaky foundation upon which to build our life.

But Jesus, in essence, says No, that is not the case. And he continues to remind the disciples how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God.

Which brings them to that key question:

"Then who is able to be saved?"

That really is the crux. That question, and Jesus' response – with that splash of cold water in the face – that "You can't do it...but God can."

And that's the grace that we hear.

It even reminds me of another story that we have dealt with and heard about before: the father who comes with the son who is sick and hopes that Jesus can do something, and Jesus

says, “If you are able? Everything can happen for those who believe.” And the father says, “*I believe; help my unbelief!*” (9:24).

I wonder if, in the back of their minds, the disciples are having something of that same discussion: this gift of the kingdom is not possible for us to grasp but only for us to receive from the God who gives it. “That’s incredible” – not believable – “God, help us indeed to believe that truth.”

And then Peter responds about all that they have left behind.

This man who comes who has all these possessions, who goes away empty-handed because he has too much.

And Peter says something about all that they have left behind, and it’s something else of that ‘nothing good’ that comes from this news of grace. They left everything.

But then there’s that wondrous message, that wondrous word about receiving 100-fold. All these things that they left – family, friends, their livelihood. And yet they receive it 100-fold in return.

Now it’s important for us to note, this is not some word that’s like a carrot on a stick: “Oh, if we respond properly, we get the carrot.” No.

We need to remember also what Jesus said: those who give up everything “*for his sake and for the sake of the good news.*” That’s our motivation.

The goodness and grace of God as we experience it in Jesus Christ – that is our motivation.

But the promise is that, even as we do leave all these things behind – all these things that we thought we needed, we thought were essential to our life, for our livelihood, to our peace – after we leave them all behind, we receive a 100-fold in return.

In many ways it’s a word that reflects the experience of the early church – the first Christians – so many of whom actually did give up their families (or did their families give up on them?) and their way of life, and yet they discovered in the church a community that more than made up for that which they had sacrificed and left behind.

The fact that we receive this entrance into the kingdom – this gift of grace – does not absolve us of responsibility; that does not mean we can sit back and do nothing: “God’s gonna take care of it; I’m good; I’m just gonna sit here and relax.” If anything, as Lamar Williamson reminds us, it

demands our best obedience and all we have. (*Mark*, Interpretation series, p.185)

We receive it as gift.

But it demands our all nonetheless.

And another interesting thing to note:

When the man comes to Jesus and asks what he can do to inherit life, Jesus’ first response is to list off all these commandments of what he’s supposed to be doing.

Is it by accident that the ones he mentions all have to do with how we relate with one another?

Is it by accident that what we will receive 100-fold has mostly to do with relationships, with people?

We rejoice in this gift of grace and the kingdom of God.

But are we not also called to rejoice in how we are part of that gift: how we participate in that gift, not only in how we receive that gift, but also how we offer that same gift to others?

So when we hear of the devastation in the mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee, what does it mean about how we might respond for them? How we might be a part of the 100-fold for them? How will we claim them and embrace them as part of our World Communion community?

Or when we hear of bombs flying and terrorists kidnapping and all the devastation and conflict in the Middle East, what does it mean about how we might respond for them? How we might be part of the 100-fold for them? How we might claim them and embrace them as part of our World Communion community?

Not that by our efforts we are trying to earn the grace of the kingdom – or kin-dom, as some are inclined to call it – not that we are trying to earn that grace, but that we seek to extend that grace as it has been extended to us.

“Enter into the kin-dom of God” – the family, the fellowship, the community, the realm of grace

But note that as we hear that phrase – “entrance into the kingdom of God” – throughout the gospel, all the times when Jesus calls someone to follow him, every time that he suggests a course of action in someone’s life – *the kin-dom of God is at hand*” – are we to see those responses encouraged, those actions invited as ways of seeking to work (or worm?) our way into the realm of God’s grace?

If so that might suggest a certain contradiction with the message we discern in this passage.

Or maybe, when Jesus calls us to follow, maybe when he invites us to give up our life in order to receive it, maybe when he challenges us to repent and believe the good news – maybe that call is far more an invitation to receive the kin-dom as it is already given: to receive it as it is already present in his presence.

To receive it as the gift that it is: a gift impossible for us to earn or grasp on our own; but a gift more than possible for God to offer, as God does in Jesus Christ.

Will we let go our lives – and all those other things that stand in our way – and open our hearts, and say with all we are, “Thank you!”?

***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.**

(continued...)

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** (*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 mercy...
All: ...be gracious to us.

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection Choir: "Come Down, Lord"

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

Generous and merciful God, we thank you for your indescribable gift of Jesus Christ. As we present our offerings today, give us grateful and generous hearts, that we may always follow Jesus in what we say and do. May the gifts we offer sow the seeds of your peace and justice. Use them according to your will, until all of creation is healed and reconciled to 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

(You will be invited by the ushers to come forward to receive Communion.
Those who choose not to come forward will be served at their seats.)

Sing “One Bread, One Body” GtG 530

Refrain:

**One bread, one body,
one Lord of all,
one cup of blessing which we bless.
And we, though many,
throughout the earth,
we are one body in this one Lord.**

**1. Gentile or Jew,
servant or free,
woman or man, no more. *Refrain***

**2. Many the gifts,
many the works,
one in the Lord of all. *Refrain***

**3. Grain for the fields,
scattered and grown,
gathered to one, for all. *Refrain***

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Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “I Come with Joy” GtG 515

**1. I come with joy, a child of God,
forgiven, loved, and free,
the life of Jesus to recall,
in love laid down for me,
in love laid down for me.**

(continued...)

2. **I come with Christians far and near
to find, as all are fed,
the new community of love
in Christ's communion bread,
in Christ's communion bread.**

3. **As Christ breaks bread and bids us share,
each proud division ends.
The love that made us, makes us one,
and strangers now are friends,
and strangers now are friends.**

4. **The Spirit of the risen Christ,
unseen, but ever near,
is in such friendship better known,
alive among us here,
alive among us here.**

5. **Together met, together bound
by all that God has done,
we'll go with joy, to give the world
the love that makes us one,
the love that makes us one.**

Words: Brian Wren, 1968; rev. 1993
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Music: DOVE OF PEACE, American folk melody; arr. Austin C.
Lovelace, 1977
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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

***RESPONSE** "Go with Us, Lord" GtG 748

**Go with us, Lord, and guide the way
through this and every coming day,
that in your Spirit strong and true
our lives may be our gift to you.**

(next page...)

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POSTLUDE

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