

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2025

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on Luke 11 and Psalm 121)*

One: We have come to meet the God who welcomes us.
We have gathered to experience God's steadfast love.
All: We come asking, searching, and knocking.
God will answer us and will give what is good.
One: Listen, for God will speak to those who want to hear.
Turn your hearts toward the one who saves.
All: For our help is in the name of the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
Unison: Let us worship God.

***OPENING HYMN** "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy" GtG 435

1. **There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.
There's a kindness in God's justice,
which is more than liberty.
There is no place where earth's sorrows
are more felt than up in heaven.
There is no place where earth's failings
have such kindly judgment given.**
2. **For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind.
And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful,
we would gladly trust God's Word,
and our lives reflect thanksgiving
for the goodness of our Lord.**

Words: Frederick William Faber, 1854, alt.

Music: IN BABILONE, Dutch melody; arr. Julius Rontgen, ca. 1906
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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy One, although we come to church on Sundays,
we too often live the rest of the week as though you don't exist.
We listen for teachings to our own liking.
We follow those who flatter us;
We participate in the greed that is destroying your good earth,
and we allow evil to triumph through our neglect.
Forgive our faithless and fickle ways.
Open us to your constant presence, O God.
Tune our ears to the sound of your voice;
turn our hearts to your ways of grace;
that we might grow in faithfulness to you,
for the sake of Jesus Christ,
in whose name we pray. Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Friends, the good news is this: God is not done with us.
Our Creator is still forming and shaping us,
forgiving us, and allowing us to grow.
Hear the Good News of the Gospel. Believe it. Live it.
All: **In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.**

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 Luke 11:1-13
Luke 18:1-8

LUKE 11:1-13 (various)

¹ Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." ² So he said to them, "When you pray, say:

'Father, may your name be revered as holy.

May your kingdom come.

³ *Give us each day our daily bread.*

⁴ *Forgive us our sins,*
for we also forgive everyone who has wronged us.

And do not bring us to hard testing.’”

⁵ *He also said to them, “Imagine that one of you has a friend and you go to that friend in the middle of the night. Imagine saying, ‘Friend, loan me three loaves of bread because a friend of mine on a journey has arrived and I have nothing to set before him.’*
⁷ *Imagine further that he answers from within the house, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’*
⁸ *I assure you, even if he would not get up and help because of his friendship, he will get up and give his friend whatever he needs because of his friend’s shameless audacity.*

⁹ *“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.*
¹⁰ *For everyone who asks receives; whoever seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.*

¹¹ *“Which father among you would give a snake to your child if the child asked for a fish?*
¹² *Or if the child asked for an egg, would give a scorpion?*
¹³ *If you then, as bad as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask?”*

LUKE 18:1-8 (various)

¹ *Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to be discouraged.*
² *He said, “In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected people.*
³ *In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’*
⁴ *For a while he refused but finally said to himself, ‘I do not fear God or respect people,*
⁵ *but I will give this widow justice because she keeps bothering me. Otherwise, there will be no end to her coming here and embarrassing me.’”*
⁶ *The Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says.*
⁷ *Will not God provide justice to God’s chosen ones who cry out to God day and night? Will God be slow to help them?*
⁸ *I tell you, God will give them justice quickly. But when the Son of Humankind comes, will he find faith on earth?”*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “The Key...Is Not in Your Pocket” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Prayer.

We talk about it. We think about it. We ponder it.

We worry about it. We wish for it.

But do we ever actually work at it?

It is a “discipline” – a spiritual discipline – after all, as Fred Craddock notes:

the text treats prayer as a learned experience, not simply as a release of feelings. Discipline is clearly implied. (Luke (Interpretation series) p.153)

Aspects of prayer take practice: take our action, our focus, our energy, our intention.

And yes, the passages we read today suggest that it will not necessarily be easy.

It will take time – and practice.

It will take persistence – tiring persistence.

It will take patience – exhausting, tear-your-hair-out patience.

So, is this the key to prayer? Our effort. Our work. Our time. Our energy. Our practice. No.

The key to prayer is not we ourselves.

Not to excuse us from having to do anything regarding prayer.

All that time and energy and focus and intention and practice is indeed a vital part to prayer – OUR vital part to prayer. And we need to be willing to put the energy into it: to take the time, to exercise that practice.

But, having said that, all our time and effort and energy and focus, and blood and sweat and tears – and asking and seeking and knocking (which are important – don't get me wrong – and we need to expect and plan and intend to do them: to put ourselves into our asking and seeking and knocking). But all of that – all of our part, all that we can do – is not the key to prayer.

The key to prayer is not we ourselves.

The key to prayer is, simply, God: God's power, God's patience, God's presence. God.

And let's be clear: God is not under our control. God is not in our pocket, to do as we please, to do for us what we please.

Yes, we look at the world around us and cry out at the pain and agony, the unfairness and injustice of it all: "Why doesn't someone do something about this mess?"

Well... part of the inevitable – uncomfortable – result of prayer is coming to the realization that one someone that can do something about this mess...is me...and you.

Yes, that may be one of the reasons we shy away from prayer.

We don't want to face this realization. We don't want to have to change. We don't want to have to do anything, certainly not something risky or challenging, fraught with danger to ourselves, or potentially fruitless in the grand scheme of things (or so we think).

We want everyone else to change.

We want God to change.

Well, putting it like that does sound kind of silly.

But maybe it's not so much that we want God to change as we want God to change other people, or to change the world, or to change the situation, and maybe even to change God's own mind.

And Emil Brunner, 20th century Reformed theologian, suggests that might be a possibility: that indeed, God makes it possible that we can influence God, that we can help to change God's mind.

But ultimately, that's not the purpose of prayer.

The purpose of prayer is not to change God's mind.

The purpose of prayer is not to persuade God to see things our way and to convince God to do what we want.

Remember: God is not in our pocket. We do not snap our fingers and God snaps to our attention.

No, the purpose of prayer is not that end of having God securely in our pocket, at our beck and call.

The purpose of prayer is to connect us to God: to connect us to God's power so it can be at work in us, at God's directing. The purpose of prayer is to connect us to God's purpose so we can see things God's way and engage ourselves in that, and commit ourselves to that way. The purpose of prayer is to connect us to God's presence so we can rest assured in God's life for us, with us, in us, and so embrace that life, to God's purpose and God's hope and God's love for us and for the world.

And so to emphasize that connection, we call God "Father"...or "Mother" or "Parent." All important images; all stoked with meaning – though sometimes a meaning at odds to the very intent of the words.

For some only know parents that are neglectful; and to call God "Parent" is to evoke that neglect.

And some only know mothers as doting; and to call God "Mother" is to evoke that 'dotiffulness'.

And some only know fathers as abusive; and to call God "Father" is to evoke that abuse.

Yet, when Jesus uses the term – and encourages us to use the same – it seems obvious that he is intending a personal, close, intimate reference; a warm, caring, compassionate reference.

And that becomes part of the key – or the key to the key. That God is that close and that intimate and that personal. That God is that kind and that caring and that merciful and that gentle.

And if God is like that....

If God is like that...

So Jesus says, if we, "*as bad as we are, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more*" ... will God.

If we, even in our weakest, most failing moments, know how to give something decent to our children, how much more – how very much more – will God give and respond to us.

"Prayer," Charles Cousar says, **"is rooted in the kindness and generosity of God"** (*Texts for Preaching: Year C*, p.448). And Kenneth Bailey notes:

Unlike the [widow], the believer faces a loving Father, not a capricious Judge. Within that relationship of love and confidence, prayers are offered to God. (*Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels*, p.267)

So go ahead and ask, and seek, and knock.

For the one you ask, the one you seek, the one for whom you knock, is not only able but willing – graciously willing – to grant what you ask and provide what you seek and open the door ... if indeed, that is what you need, and that is what God wants ultimately for you.

For the prayer "Not my will but yours be done" is the most honest and effective – and maybe the most difficult – of our prayers.

Again: God is not in our pocket – as key or any other tool that we might use against anyone or anything else. We do not pull strings for God to grant us our wish, or snap our fingers for God to fulfill our will.

But God is our “Father,” or “Mother,” or “Parent,” or whatever title evokes that care and love, and majesty and grander, and deep, abiding presence of love.

And perhaps that is the very faith that the Son of Humankind is seeking, and will be seeking.

Eduard Schweizer, noting the images Jesus uses in his parables, says they

appear to state the obvious – but only on the assumption that God is “friend” and “father” to humankind. (*The Good News according to Luke*, p.193)

And that assumption takes faith. The faith, the trust, the confidence that God is the picture that Jesus paints. And so we will rest in that God, and rely upon that God, and work with that God in our lives and in this world, confident: knowing that God works with us and goes with us and is with us...in love.

So when God does not answer our prayers the way we want...? Will we trust – will we have faith – that, despite such evidence to the contrary, God still cares?

And when it seems as if all our prayers are simply hurled against an immovable stone wall, or shouted into an empty, deafening silence...? Will we trust – will we have faith – that, despite all this evidence to the contrary, God is with us...and God still cares?

The Apostle Paul, in many ways, seeks to affirm the same thing, and bolster that faith as he reminds us of what God has done for us in Christ himself:

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? God, who did not hesitate to spare God's own Son but gave him up for us all – can we not trust such a God to give us, with him, everything else that we can need? (Romans 8:31-32)

Will we have faith? In light of what God has done for us in and through Jesus Christ, will we have faith?

The real power of prayer lies in the One to whom we pray, knowing that, when we speak, someone – someone who cares – is listening...and speaks...and is present.

And if, after all the asking and seeking and knocking...

if, after all the **“hurling its petitions against long periods of silence”** (Craddock, p.209), and delay...

if, after all that, the pray-er takes the time to sit, and wait, and listen...

an answer will come...even if it only be in the realization of a presence;

an answer will come...even if it only be the whisper: “I am here.”

For the greatest answer to prayer is God's presence.

And that is the key.

***HYMN** “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” GtG 465

1. **What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry**

everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit;
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

2. Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
3. Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield thee;
thou wilt find a solace there.

Words: Joseph Scriven, 1855
Music: CONVERSE, Charles C. Converse, 1868
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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

Prayer means calling upon God whose Spirit is always present with us. In prayer we approach God with reverence, confidence and humility. Prayer involves both addressing God in praise, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication, and listening for God's word within our hearts. ...

... When we pray, we respond with love to that greater love which meets us from above. ... By praying we acknowledge that we depend on grace for all that is good, beautiful, life-giving and true.

Prayer brings us into communion with God. The more our lives are rooted in prayer, the more we sense how wonderful God is in grace, purity, majesty and love. Prayer means offering our lives completely to God, submitting ourselves to God's will, and waiting faithfully for God's grace. Through prayer God frees us from anxiety, equips us for service, and deepens our faith.

... Communion with God is finally the answer within the answers to all our prayers.

(from *The Study Catechism: Full Version*, Copyright © 1998 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Sing “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying” GtG 469

**Lord, listen to your children praying.
Lord, send your Spirit in this place.
Lord, listen to your children praying.
Send us love; send us power; send us grace.**

Words and Music (CHILDREN PRAYING): Ken Medema, 1970 © 1973
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THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

Unison Prayer of Dedication

**Source of all goodness, power, and strength,
we come with gifts in response to your love.
You pour out your goodness;
we bring you thanksgiving.
You infuse us with power;
we offer the fruits of our labor.
You sustain us with strength;
all that we do we dedicate to your glory.
Accept these gifts we bring
that through them we may do justice,
and love kindness,
and walk humbly with you,
as a testimony to your abiding grace and presence. Amen.**

***HYMN** “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts” GtG 494 (*Verses 1-4*)

- 1. Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts,
thou fount of life, thou light of all,
from the best bliss that earth imparts
we turn, unfilled, to heed thy call.**
- 2. Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;**

thou savest those that on thee call;
to them that seek thee thou art good,
to them that find thee, all in all.

3. We taste thee, O thou living bread,
and long to feast upon thee still;
we drink of thee, the fountainhead,
and thirst our souls from thee to fill.
4. Our restless spirits yearn for thee,
where'er our changeful lot is cast,
glad when thy gracious smile we see,
blest when our faith can hold thee fast.

Words: Latin, 12th cent.; trans. Ray Palmer, 1858, alt.
Music: QUEBEC, Henry Baker, 1854
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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 (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

(With the passing of the bread, please wait until all have been served so that all may partake together, reflecting our unity in Christ.)

(With the passing of the cup, please partake as soon as received as an expression of our personal relationship with Christ.)

Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “For the Bread Which You Have Broken” GtG 516

1. **For the bread which you have broken,
for the wine which you have poured,
for the words which you have spoken,
now we give you thanks, O Lord.**
2. **By this promise that you love us,
by your gift of peace restored,
by your call to heaven above us,
hallow all our lives, O Lord.**
3. **With the saints who now adore you
seated at the heavenly board,
may the church still waiting for you
keep love's tie unbroken, Lord.**
4. **In your service, Lord, defend us;
in our hearts keep watch and ward;
in the world to which you send us
let your kingdom come, O Lord.**

Words: Louis FitzGerald Benson, 1924, alt.
Music: KINGDOM, V. Earle Copes, 1959
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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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