

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2025

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

CHRIST the KING SUNDAY

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on Luke 1 and Psalm 95)*

One: Blessed be the Lord God,
who has looked favorably upon the people
and redeemed them.

All: **God has raised up a mighty Savior
from the house of David,
as foretold by ancient prophets.**

One: So come, let us sing unto God;
let us make a noise to the rock of our salvation!

All: **Let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise with songs of praise!**

Unison: **Let us worship God.**

***OPENING HYMN** "O Sing a Song of Bethlehem" GtG 159

1. O sing a song of Bethlehem,
of shepherds watching there,
and of the news that came to them
from angels in the air.
The light that shone on Bethlehem
fills all the world today.
Of Jesus' birth and peace on earth
the angels sing alway.
2. O sing a song of Nazareth,
of sunny days of joy;
O sing of fragrant flowers' breath,
and of the sinless boy.
For now the flowers of Nazareth
in every heart may grow.
Now spreads the fame of his dear name
on all the winds that blow.

(continued...)

3. O sing a song of Galilee,
of lake and woods and hill,
of him who walked upon the sea
and bade its waves be still.
For though, like waves on Galilee,
dark seas of trouble roll,
when faith has heard the Master's word,
falls peace upon the soul.
4. O sing a song of Calvary,
its glory and dismay,
of him who hung upon the tree,
and took our sins away.
For he who died on Calvary
is risen from the grave,
and Christ, our Lord, by heaven adored,
is mighty now to save.

Words: Louis FitzGerald Benson, 1899

Music: KINGSFOLD, *English County Songs*, 1893; harm. Ralph
Vaughan Williams, 1906

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UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty God, you brought forth the world for the love of Christ,
yet we have lived in rebellion and turned away from our created purpose.
We have acknowledged the Lordship of Christ with our lips,
but we have not honored him with our lives.
We have served the idols of wealth and privilege;
we have sought the protection of violence to oppose violence;
we have lived in fear of death and loss;
we have not loved our neighbors, nor sought reconciliation with our enemies.
Forgive us, O God.
Deliver us from misplaced loyalties and unacknowledged sin.
Instruct our hearts in the ways of peace.
And free us for joyful service
for the sake of the world,
in the way of Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Because Christ died, we receive forgiveness for our sins.
Because he was raised from the dead, we receive new life in him.
All: **In Christ, God seeks the lost and forgives the sinner
and loves the world.**
One: So rejoice and be glad.
Believe the good news, and let us live it.
All: **For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved.
In Jesus Christ, we become new people.**

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

THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM: Lucy and Daphne Rice

SCRIPTURE READING Luke 23:1-12, 24-26a, 32-43

LUKE 23:1-12, 24-26a, 32-43 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition)

¹ Then the assembly rose as a body and brought Jesus before Pilate. ² They began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man inciting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to Caesar and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." ³ Then Pilate asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" He answered, "You say so." ⁴ Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." ⁵ But they were insistent and said, "He stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where he began even to this place."

⁶ When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. ⁷ And when he learned that he was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him off to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. ⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign. ⁹ He questioned him at some length, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the scribes stood by vehemently accusing him. ¹¹ Even Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him; then he put an elegant robe on him and sent him back to Pilate. ¹² That same day Herod and Pilate became friends with each other; before this they had been enemies.

... ²⁴ So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted. ²⁵ He released the man they asked for, the one who had been put in prison for insurrection and murder, and he handed Jesus over as they wished.

²⁶ As they led him away... ³² Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴ Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵ And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, God's chosen one!" ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine ³⁷ and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

³⁹ One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰ But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" ⁴¹ And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom." ⁴³ He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "Cross Perspective" by Pastor Bill Vincent

Different perspectives on the cross can wind up serving cross purposes.
But that is indeed the nature – the crux – of the conflict that we discern with the cross.

From one perspective, we look at the cross and see...

- this is what power does;
- this is what self-serving does;
- this is what fear does.

It strikes out at others.

It demands its way.

It uses another.

From another perspective, we look at the cross and see...

- this is what mercy does;
- this is what forgiveness does;
- this is what love does;
- this is what God does.

Mercy touches hearts.

Love transforms lives.

Forgiveness heals and restores and rebuilds.

God embraces.

And the “cross perspective” we choose influences the life we choose – the way of life we choose.

From all the various perspectives available to us in this story, it is the second criminal who has the clearest perspective. One of those also crucified alongside Jesus – one who has been condemned, and rightly so, he admits – one who has been justly condemned knows that Jesus has not.

It is this second criminal – whose name we do not know, whose crime we do not know – it is this second man who sees most clearly on this dark day for humanity.

For, yes, as the cross marks the depth of human sin, so the cross also signals Christ’s willingness to take upon himself the pain and guilt of sin – not his own, but ours.

And as the cross marks the ultimate cruelty of human against human, so it also signals Christ’s willingness to stand in the brink between human and human, and serve as a bridge to reconcile and bring us back together again into the community and communion we were meant for and created for.

“Today you will be with me in paradise,” he says.

A supposed king, nailed to a cross, offering the promise of “paradise”? How can that be?

But that is his declaration. That is his decision. That is his choice. That is his way.

And it is so unexpected, so seemingly preposterous.

Because he chooses to suffer our deserved punishment.

But also he chooses not bluster, but humility; not demand, but gentle invitation; not force, but offer; not power, but weakness.

And this choice – this unexpected, unprecedented choice – is good for us and for the world. For, yes, it challenges us, but it also sustains us, it fills us and fulfills us. His way imbues life and death with true life. His choice endows us with hope and strength and courage to carry on and embrace life – and one another – even in those days when we feel like we have been nailed to our own cross.

For this way that he proclaims, proclaims him as

Lord of forgiveness, even in the face of injustice;

Lord of life, even in the face of death;

Lord of community, even in the face of abandonment.

Against all expectations, against all appearances, this way – this cross – proclaims Jesus is Lord.

To be clear: Not a Lord with whip in hand. Not a Lord to force our hand. Not a Lord to use us up and throw us away.

But a Lord who seeks to sway us toward God, with God, for God. A Lord who knows that communion with God is our proper place, our created place, our life-embracing place. And

so a Lord who invites us into that relationship and that journey and that life, even through a cross.

A Lord with healing in his hands and guidance in his words. A Lord with a place for us in his heart and room for all in his embrace.

This is the good news we proclaim and live by.

This is the good news in which Lucy and Daphne – and we all – are baptized and joined to the community and to Christ.

This is the good news to which we cling and on which we rely when life gets tough and days seem hopeless and the world seems like it's gone to hell, and we feel like there's no reason to carry on so, "What's the use?"

But we can, and do, carry on.

Not because we are living with our head in the clouds.

Not because we wear rose-colored glasses as we view life.

Not because we mistakenly believe "all is right with the world."

We carry on because we know that not even death can separate us from this love willing to die for us.

We carry on because we know that, more than anyone else, he understands the pain and frustration we experience. But he also shows us the way through that pain and frustration in another prayer he utters from the cross: "*Into your hands I commend my spirit*" (Luke 23:46).

We carry on because we know his undying love sustains us, his self-giving life inspires us, his merciful forgiving transforms us, showing us the way, leading us in his way, sustaining us all the way, in life and in death and beyond.

Yes, let's be clear: we look at the cross and see the pain and the suffering and the abandonment.

But we also see that this is where mercy is: to bind up wounds, and mend fences and hearts, and restore community where that bond has been shattered.

This is where forgiveness is to be found...and another chance...and another chance...and another chance...

This is where love dwells, with arms to embrace us even in spite of ourselves.

This is where God is.

Yes, smack dab in the middle of the pain and agony of injustice and cruelty, and the violence of life. This is where God is.

Not to abandon us to the pain, but to walk with us through that pain, to uplift us in that agony, to carry us through.

For, as you remember, the cross and its death are not the end of the story. Not that we whitewash the cross; not that we skip over its suffering and its cost.

The cross as a symbol of death is not the final word.

The cross as a symbol of life is.

For three days later – after the worst humanity could do – three days later – by the grace of God, by the power of God, by the mercy of God – three days later, Jesus left the tomb empty...and walked into a new day and a new way and a new way of life that claimed the cross and embraced it and redeemed it...and redeemed us.

So now we can look at the cross and know that this is where life that is real life is.

It does not overlook the pain. It does not ignore the agony. It does not sidestep the suffering. It does not dismiss the despair.

But in its own way, it opens up its arms and embraces all that life has to offer – the good and the bad – and redeems the bad and enlarges the good.

Because it knows and it affirms and it demonstrates that death – and all that is death-dealing – is not the final answer, but life is, love is, God is.

And in that affirmation, we live. And by that affirmation we claim Jesus as Lord. And we live by him and by his side. And we live with him as guide. And we live as his, to share his ‘passion’ – his suffering – and to share his passion for life, for love, for one another.

***HYMN** “Your Only Son” GtG 518
(Lamb of God)

**1. Your only Son, no sin to hide,
but you have sent him from your side
to walk upon this guilty sod,
and to become the Lamb of God.**

Refrain:

**O Lamb of God, sweet Lamb of God,
I love the ho - ly Lamb of God!
O wash me in his precious blood,
my Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.**

**2. Your gift of love, we crucified;
we laughed and scorned him as he died;
the humble King we named a fraud
and sacrificed the Lamb of God. *Refrain***

**3. I was so lost, I should have died,
but you have brought me to your side
to be led by your staff and rod,
and to be called a lamb of God. *Refrain***

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from “*A Declaration of Faith*”)

**We declare that Jesus is Lord.
His resurrection is a decisive victory
over the powers that deform and destroy human life.
His lordship is hidden.
The world appears to be dominated by people and systems
that do not acknowledge his rule.
But his lordship is real.
It demands our loyalty and sets us free
from the fear of all lesser lords who threaten us.
We maintain that ultimate sovereignty
now belongs to Jesus Christ
in every sphere of life.**

**The people of God have often misused God's promises
as excuses for doing nothing about present evils.
But in Christ the new world has already broken in
and the old can no longer be tolerated.
We know our efforts cannot bring in God's kingdom.
But hope plunges us into the struggle
for victories over evil that are possible now
in the world, the church, and our individual lives.
Hope gives us courage and energy
to contend against all opposition,
however invincible it may seem,
for the new world and the new humanity
that are surely coming.
Jesus is Lord!
He has been Lord from the beginning.
He will be Lord at the end.
Even now he is Lord.**

(“A Declaration of Faith” is Copyright 1977, 1991, the Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.); adopted (1977) “as a contemporary statement of faith, a reliable aid for Christian study, liturgy, and inspiration, with the clear understanding that” it is not approved as a part of the *Book of Confessions*.)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: Mighty God of tender mercy...
All: ...hear our prayer.

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.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Gracious God,
you have looked upon your people with mercy, generosity, and love.
You have granted your favor to your people,
offering them redemption, salvation, and wisdom.
And so we offer these gifts for your hurting and broken world.
May they be multiplied to do your service.
May we be strengthened to do your work.
In the name of Jesus the Christ, both Lamb and Shepherd,
who multiplied small gifts and fed multitudes. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN “You, Lord, Are Both Lamb and Shepherd” GtG 274**

**1. You, Lord, are both Lamb and Shepherd.
You, Lord, are both prince and slave.
You, peace-maker and sword-bringer
of the way you took and gave.
You, the everlasting instant;
you, whom we both scorn and crave.**

**2. Clothed in light upon the mountain,
stripped of might upon the cross,
shining in eternal glory,
beggared by a soldier's toss,
you, the everlasting instant;
you who are both gift and cost.**

(continued...)

**3. You, who walk each day beside us,
sit in power at God's side.
You, who preach a way that's narrow,
have a love that reaches wide.
You, the everlasting instant;
you, who are our pilgrim guide.**

**4. Worthy is our earthly Jesus!
Worthy is our cosmic Christ!
Worthy your defeat and victory;
worthy still your peace and strife.
You, the everlasting instant;
you, who are our death and life.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

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

POSTLUDE

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