

WORSHIP CONTENT ELEMENTS FOR SUNDAY, MARCH 22, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

FOURTH SUNDAY in LENT

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: We come in the name of Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world and our light.

All: **Jesus, Light of the World, give us eyes to see as you see!**

One: Once we lived in darkness, but now --

as children of light, we are called to what is good and right and true.

All: **Jesus, Light of the World, give us eyes to see as you see!**

***OPENING HYMN** "O Day of Radiant Gladness" [tune *Glory to God* #393]

Tune: ES FLOG EIN KLEINS WALDVOGELEIN

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| <p>1. O day of radiant gladness,
O day of joy and light,
O balm of care and sadness,
Most beautiful, most bright;
This day the high and lowly,
Through ages joined in tune,
Sing "Holy, holy, holy"
To the great God triune.</p> | <p>2. This day at the creation
The light first had its birth;
This day for our salvation
Christ rose from depths of earth;
This day our Lord victorious
The Spirit sent from heaven,
And thus this day most glorious
A triple light was given.</p> |
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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Gracious God, we are people who still love darkness rather than light.
We keep shameful deeds secret, but flaunt our occasional acts of virtue.
We see ourselves as blameless, but pass judgment on others.
We do not stand firmly enough with those who are vulnerable,
but step back, protecting ourselves.

Forgive us, we pray.

Bring us into your light that we may see ourselves rightly.
Bring us into your light that we may know ourselves loved.
Bring us into your light that we may live more fruitful lives.
Keep raising us, we pray, from the deadness of sin,
and shine upon us with your grace.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from II Corinthians 5)*

One: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to God,
not counting our sins against us.”

**All: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”**

One: So rejoice and be glad, believing in the good news we know and proclaim...

**All: ...That we are new creations in Christ, renewed, loved, and forgiven.
Alleluia! Amen!**

***RESPONSE OF PRAISE** “Halle, Halle, Hallelujah!” *(refrain)* Glory to God #591

Halle, Halle, Halleluja! Halle, Halle, Halleluja!

Halle, Halle, Halleluja! Halleluja! Halleluja! *(Public Domain)*

THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Gracious God,
illumine our hearts and minds
as the Scriptures are read and proclaimed,
so that by the power of your Holy Spirit
we may see what is good and right and true.
And seeing, help us to do what is pleasing to you,
so that your glory becomes visible
in our words and deeds.
In Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

John 9:1-41 (Common English Bible)

¹ As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who was blind from birth. ² Jesus’ disciples asked, “Rabbi, who sinned so that he was born blind, this man or his parents?”

³ Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents. This happened so that God’s mighty works might be displayed in him. ⁴ While it’s daytime, we must do the works of the one who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ After he said this, he spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and smeared the mud on the man’s eyes. ⁷ Jesus said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (this word means sent). So the man went away and washed. When he returned, he could see.

⁸ The man’s neighbors and those who used to see him when he was a beggar said, “Isn’t this the man who used to sit and beg?”

⁹ Some said, “It is,” and others said, “No, it’s someone who looks like him.” But the man said, “Yes, it’s me!”

¹⁰ So they asked him, “How are you now able to see?”

¹¹ He answered, “The man they call Jesus made mud, smeared it on my eyes, and said, ‘Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.’ So I went and washed, and then I could see.”

¹² They asked, "Where is this man?"

He replied, "I don't know."

¹³ Then they led the man who had been born blind to the Pharisees. ¹⁴ Now Jesus made the mud and smeared it on the man's eyes on a Sabbath day. ¹⁵ So Pharisees also asked him how he was able to see.

The man told them, "He put mud on my eyes, I washed, and now I see."

¹⁶ Some Pharisees said, "This man isn't from God, because he breaks the Sabbath law." Others said, "How can a sinner do miraculous signs like these?" So they were divided. ¹⁷ Some of the Pharisees questioned the man who had been born blind again: "What do you have to say about him, since he healed your eyes?"

He replied, "He's a prophet."

¹⁸ The Jewish leaders didn't believe the man had been blind and received his sight until they called for his parents. ¹⁹ The Jewish leaders asked them, "Is this your son? Are you saying he was born blind? How can he now see?"

²⁰ His parents answered, "We know he is our son. We know he was born blind. ²¹ But we don't know how he now sees, and we don't know who healed his eyes. Ask him. He's old enough to speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they feared the Jewish authorities. This is because the Jewish authorities had already decided that whoever confessed Jesus to be the Christ would be expelled from the synagogue. ²³ That's why his parents said, "He's old enough. Ask him."

²⁴ Therefore, they called a second time for the man who had been born blind and said to him, "Give glory to God. We know this man is a sinner."

²⁵ The man answered, "I don't know whether he's a sinner. Here's what I do know: I was blind and now I see."

²⁶ They questioned him: "What did he do to you? How did he heal your eyes?"

²⁷ He replied, "I already told you, and you didn't listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

²⁸ They insulted him: "You are his disciple, but we are Moses' disciples. ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but we don't know where this man is from."

³⁰ The man answered, "This is incredible! You don't know where he is from, yet he healed my eyes! ³¹ We know that God doesn't listen to sinners. God listens to anyone who is devout and does God's will. ³² No one has ever heard of a healing of the eyes of someone born blind. ³³ If this man wasn't from God, he couldn't do this."

³⁴ They responded, "You were born completely in sin! How is it that you dare to teach us?" Then they expelled him.

³⁵ Jesus heard they had expelled the man born blind. Finding him, Jesus said, "Do you believe in the Son of Humankind?"

³⁶ He answered, "Who is he, sir? I want to believe in him."

³⁷ Jesus said, "You have seen him. In fact, he is the one speaking with you."

³⁸ The man said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshipped Jesus.

³⁹ Jesus said, "I have come into the world to exercise judgment so that those who don't see can see and those who see will become blind."

⁴⁰ Some Pharisees who were with him heard what he said and asked, "Surely we aren't blind, are we?"

⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you wouldn't have any sin, but now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains."

Ephesians 5:8-14 (New Revised Standard Version)

⁸ For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – ⁹ for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰ Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; ¹³ but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴ for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

SERMON by Pastor Bill Vincent

What would we do without light?

You're reading this page right now because of light.

I like to think of myself as an amateur photographer. You don't do photography without light.

We have lights on our cars so that we can see at night and see where we are going.

We need light to see! Simple, right?

What would we do without light?

[--pause--]

Actually that could also be a difficult question, or at least a complicated one.

Let's remember, there are some people who are physically blind, who don't see light at all. Our story from John speaks of a man who was blind.

On another level, this past week, with all the rain and all the clouds we have experienced here in this area of Missouri, we have seen very little sunshine, and some may feel like we have seen very little light.

And, of course, with the spread of the coronavirus in our country, and in the world, and with so much anxiety raining down upon us, this time could be described as a dark time, with little, or no, light.

What would we do without light?

Let me rephrase that question.

What *do* we do without light?

Of course, if we were like a plant, especially a chlorophyll based plant, then without light, we would shrivel up and die. Not a very comforting or encouraging picture, though perhaps instructive.

For it seems to me that when we are without light, we tend to hunker down and die, often from fright and loneliness.

Melinda Quivik of St. Paul Minnesota, shares this perspective:

Consider what you learn from a visit to an underground mine, when the guide turns off the lights for a brief moment.

*** You are oriented only to yourself -- the clammy humidity on your skin that occurs far underground, hearing or feeling the beat of your heart.**

*** You can no longer see anyone else in the group.**

*** You alone are important; there is no larger picture.**

*** You are focused on the moment, on temporal safety.**

(OK this may be a little dramatic, but if you've been in a mine without light, you know I'm telling the truth!) (Melinda Quivik, Liturgical and Homiletical Scholar, St. Paul, Minnesota; www.workingpreacher.org)

I've been in a mine. She's telling the truth.

We tend to fold in upon ourselves and shrivel up in a self-enclosed ball.

The thing is, when you turn the lights off underground, it may catch you off guard, but it need do so only momentarily.

We need not fear, for God is with us. I do not mean that to come across as a trite answer or a quick fix. But I lift this up as a basic affirmation of our faith: God is with us, at all times, in all places, regardless of the darkness around us. Do we believe it to be true? Will that basic affirmation of what we believe guide us in our lives, in our response, in spite of the darkness around us?

We need not be fearful. Or let me be clearer: we need not be overwhelmed by fear.

Many of us are fearful, we're anxious; we worry, we are concerned about ourselves, about our loved ones, about contracting the virus, or surviving it, about where the money will come from, or the next meal. We are worried and concerned. And legitimately so. There are things to be concerned about.

But we need not be overwhelmed by fear. We need not panic.

Remember, Jesus said,

I am the light of the world.

He said that in the presence of a man who had never seen the light, literally.

And he spoke about a light which not only makes life brighter, but also shines into the darkest corners of people's lives, and offers compassion and guidance, encouragement and presence, even when no one else is present.

Even if we be physically blind -- or be in an underground mine with all the lights out -- we can see this light: the light of compassion and love, the light of caring and presence.

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death [the psalmist writes]
-- even though I walk through a valley as dark as death, through the
darkest valley --*

*I fear no evil,
for you are with me;*

*with the rod and staff of the good shepherd
to comfort me...and guide me...and love me with "goodness and mercy...all
the days of my life." [Psalm 23]*

Do you remember the story from 2018 about the boys' junior soccer team in Thailand that got trapped in a cave when "heavy rains partially flooded the cave, blocking their way out"? They were in the cave for 10 days before they were found. Can you imagine what they experienced? cold and frightened in the dark. And imagine their experience when that first cave diver came up out of the water and shone a light on them...a light for them! A light that meant rescue. A light that meant hope. A light that gave life.

But I suggest to you that part of that light had been with them all the while: for they stuck together, and they had the guidance of their assistant coach, who cared for them (as best he could) and gave them hope and kept them calm...and was a light, even in the darkness.

We need not be overwhelmed by fear.

And we need not be lonely. We may need to be alone...for now, for a while. We may need to distance ourselves physically, for our own good and for the good of others. But we need not be lonely. For God is with us. And we can still communicate that to each other, we can still communicate with each other. And we can still care -- we *do* still care.

A colleague reminded me that 'social distancing', though important in our response as a community to the coronavirus, is actually a somewhat misleading term. We actually are not practicing *social* distancing as much as we are practicing *physical* distancing.

The United States Surgeon General, in an interview this week on the "Today Show," said
Social distancing does not mean social disengagement. (Tuesday, March 17, 2020)

We can still be, and should be, social, even as we practice 'social distancing'. We can call each other up, or text. We can write a letter (what a novel idea!) or an email. We can greet each other with a smile and a warm hello -- though maybe not necessarily a hug and a handshake. We can be social. We need to be social. Because we need to be in relationship with each other, even though we might be staying home more, or all the time.

We need to be social. It is part of showing that we care. It is part of continuing to nurture our relationships. It is part of sharing the light.

And it is good for others...and for ourselves.

Some of you know that I was part of a group this past year that was sharing about resiliency in ministry. Resiliency: that ability to snap back to 'normal' (like a rubber band) after being stretched, and stressed, and strained. Research indicates that the most important component of our resiliency is our social network: relationships, supportive, caring relationships. And even in this time of social distancing and societal anxiety, we need to nurture those relationships and be nurtured by those relationships; we need to reach out and show we care and be willing to be cared for, so that we might remain resilient, and keep on keeping on, and do so together, even though we may not be 'together'.

I dare say that everyone of us knows someone who does not have a computer or internet access. These people are cut off from others even more so than those of us who do have such access.

Do we know their phone number? Could we call them up, even periodically, and just say Hi, and ask How ya doing? and give them the opportunity to be in touch with another, to know a supportive relationship, so that they too can be resilient...and see the light?

Do we know where these people live, and if they are nearby, would we be willing to go to their house, knock on the door or ring the doorbell (and then step back 6 feet!), and, when they come to the door, have a conversation with them? "I just stopped by to say hello and see how you are doing?" Talk, converse, and show you care, so that they, and you, can be more resilient, and see the light...and share it.

I find it interesting that our story for today came from the gospel of John. For when we try to explain what God was doing in Jesus Christ, John offers the clearest expression of what we call Incarnation: God did not distance Godself from humanity, social or otherwise. God came even closer: 'in the flesh' (which is what 'incarnation' means), 'in our skin', or even 'under our skin'.

This God, who came in the flesh in Jesus Christ, comes in the flesh even now in you and me. And in doing so, shines the light of hope and help, faith and fearlessness, love and life.

Will we be a part of that? For our sakes and the sake of our community...and beyond?

For once you were darkness, [reads Ephesians 5] but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light-- for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true.

I leave you with this:

Seek the light, and know it.

Share the light, and reflect it.

Grow in the light, and live in it.

Be touched by the light, and be the light...even when it's raining.

For remember: the light is always there for you.

Let's make sure it's always there for others as well.

Amen.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

In life and in death we belong to God.

**Through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,**

**and the communion of the Holy Spirit,
we trust in the one triune God, the Holy One of Israel,
whom alone we worship and serve.**

**With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

(from *A Brief Statement of Faith*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

God our faithful Shepherd,
we depend on you for everything we need:
for daily food, for guidance and protection,
for healing in injury and comfort in sorrow.
You respond in abundant provision.
Thank you for your tender care of us.
Thank you for soothing the wounds of this life.
Thank you that in the presence of enemies,
especially the last enemy of death,
you are with us, as Shepherd, Host, Home.

Knowing your faithfulness in our lives,
we bring before you the lives of others,
the cares of this world,
entrusting all things to your goodness and mercy.
Bring healing to those who are ill in mind, body, or spirit.
Bring release to those who are held captive by old hurts
or new bonds that oppress and entangle.
Bring freedom to those unjustly accused,
relief to those burdened with debt,
comfort to all who suffer from abuse of any kind.

We pray for people living precariously in the midst of war.
Protect, we pray, citizens and soldiers alike,
and teach us to put away our weapons,
taking up instead words of peace and reconciliation.
By the power at work in Christ,
break down the walls of hostility we build
so that we may learn to live together graciously.

We remember those living in the midst of drought and famine.
We pray for rain to fall and crops to grow,
and for generosity to overflow from our own hands and resources,
until all your children receive their daily bread;
until all your children have clean water to drink;
until all your children have adequate shelter and medical care.
Compel us to be better stewards of creation
so that our habitation is sustainable and responsible.

Loving God, help us to see the world as you see it;
to see others as you see them;
and to see ourselves rightly, too.
Pursue us all with your goodness and faithful love
until goodness and faithful love fills every heart
and informs every action.
We pray these things in the name of the one
who came that we might see,
Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.
Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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

Offering

**Doxology*

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise God, all people here below;
praise God above you heavenly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.**
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**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**For your goodness and mercy that overflow through our lives
and equip us to share, we give thanks, O God.
No sacrifice can match your generosity;
no offering is adequate to express our gratitude.
We bring ourselves with our gifts,
that all may be consecrated anew to your service. Amen.**

SENDING

***HYMN** “Open My Eyes That I May See” Glory to God #451

Tune: OPEN MY EYES

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Open my eyes, that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!</p> | <p>2. Open my ears, that I may hear
Voices of truth Thou sendest clear;
And while the wave notes fall on my ear,
Everything false will disappear.
Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!</p> |
|---|--|

3. **Open my mouth, and let me bear**
Gladly the warm truth everywhere;
Open my heart, and let me prepare
Love with Thy children thus to share.
Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Arise! Shine!
for the light of Christ is upon you.
Go into the world
bearing the fruit of Christ's light
so that all might see
what is good and right and true;
and live as children of the light
to the glory of God.

May the love of God pursue you,
the light of Christ enfold you,
and the Holy Spirit keep you;
as you dwell in the house of the Lord
your whole life long.

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