

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, MAY 24, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SEVENTH SUNDAY of EASTER

GATHERING

CALL TO WORSHIP *(based on Psalm 68)*

One: Let the people be joyful! Let them rejoice before God.

All: Let us all be jubilant with joy!

One: Sing to God, all peoples of the world. Sing praises to God most high.

All: From the sanctuary of heaven, God gives life and renews the face of the earth.

One: Let the people be joyful! Let them rejoice before God.

All: Let us all be jubilant with joy!

***OPENING HYMN** “Come, Christians, Join to Sing” GtG 267

1. **Come, Christians, join to sing:**
Alleluia! Amen!
Loud praise to Christ our King:
Alleluia! Amen!
Let all, with heart and voice,
before his throne rejoice;
praise is his gracious choice:
Alleluia! Amen!

2. **Come, lift your hearts on high:**
Alleluia! Amen!
Let praises fill the sky:
Alleluia! Amen!
He is our guide and friend;
to us he'll condescend;
his love shall never end:
Alleluia! Amen!

3. **Praise yet our Christ again:**
Alleluia! Amen!
Life shall not end the strain:
Alleluia! Amen!
On heaven's blissful shore
his goodness we'll adore,
singing forevermore:
Alleluia! Amen!

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

We sing of your grace, O Lord, yet fail to live for your glory. We seek after our own praise, and fail to give you yours. We pat ourselves on the back when things go well, then fail to acknowledge your gifts and provision. Forgive us, gracious God. Open our eyes to your work in our midst. Open our hearts to your Spirit moving among us. Open our lives to your life and your presence within us. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(based on Psalm 51)*

One: Our God is a God of grace, quick to forgive and ready to recreate in us pure hearts and willing spirits. So take to heart the good news; believe it, live it.

All: **For by the grace of God we are loved and accepted, forgiven and restored through Jesus Christ our Lord. Alleluia! Amen.**

***RESPONSE OF PRAISE** “Halle, Halle, Hallelujah!” *(refrain)* GtG 591

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

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THE WORD

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Spirit of Glory, Spirit of God,
bless us with a word of life this day
to restore, support, and strengthen us
as we seek to be one with you. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 17:1-11 *(Common English Bible)*

Jesus is together with his disciples in the upper room, sharing with them last minute words of instruction and guidance. And he concludes his words with a prayer, which is where we pick up the reading.

¹ *When Jesus finished saying these things, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, so that the Son can glorify you. ² You gave him authority over everyone so that he could give eternal life to everyone you gave him.*

³ *This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent.* ⁴ *I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do.* ⁵ *Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I shared with you before the world was created.*

⁶ *“I have revealed your name to the people you gave me from this world. They were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.* ⁷ *Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you.* ⁸ *This is because I gave them the words that you gave me, and they received them. They truly understood that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.*

⁹ *“I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those you gave me, because they are yours.* ¹⁰ *Everything that is mine is yours and everything that is yours is mine; I have been glorified in them.* ¹¹ *I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, even as I am coming to you. Holy Father, watch over them in your name, the name you gave me, that they will be one just as we are one.*

SERMON “To Know You” by Pastor Bill Vincent

Eternal life.
Heard of it?
I suspect/bet you have.

And you probably have some idea in your head of what that means, too.

Now, I confess I had this notion about eternal life, that may have been influenced a lot by how I perceived other people were using the phrase.

So, I tended to think of eternal life, especially as other people talked about it, as referring mostly to...well, heaven, the afterlife, what happens after we die. In other words, eternal life was something to come in the future.

And there's certainly truth in that. There's definitely a dimension of eternal life that is future-oriented.

It's just that, to this way of thinking, 'eternal life' tended to mean something far off down the road, in the distant future.

But what about the present? What about here and now? What about...today?

Is there a dimension of eternal life that can be experienced and known, and even lived, here and now?

And that's where this passage from John 17 -- this prayer of Jesus' -- seemed to reach out and grab me like never before.

Now, it is quite clear that of the four gospels, John is the one that speaks of eternal life more than the others.

We've all heard that well-known verse: John 3:16...

“For God so loved the world that God gave God’s only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (NRSV)

But here, in this prayer in John 17, it’s as if Jesus speaks less about how we *have* eternal life -- through belief -- and more about what eternal life actually is.

This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you sent. (v.3)

Turns out, this is the final reference to eternal life in the Gospel of John -- the last time the phrase is used.

This is eternal life: to know you...

And this sounds like something I don’t have to wait for some unknown future to experience.

Joachim Guhrt comments,

Eternal life does not...just begin in the future, it is already the possession of those who have entered upon fellowship with Christ. (Dictionary of New Testament Theology, vol.3, p.832)

And another notes,

Eternal life isn’t a place but a way of being. (Lectionary Homiletics, Preaching 6c)

Even now.

Now, let me be clear: to experience eternal life, even now, does not sweep away all our problems. Does not plunk us, care-free, in a resort somewhere with no cares and no worries.

What it does do is re-orient us to what is important, what should be our focus, what should be our perspective, what should be the center of our life so that our life is the experience of eternal life, now.

Yes, I agree that even so, our experience of this eternal life in the here and now is not all it can be, nor all it should be.

And yes, I look forward to a time sometime when the fulness of eternal life will be fulfilled and known.

But I believe now my focus, and my energy, should be brought to bear in knowing and experiencing, and indeed sharing, eternal life in the here and now -- today, in the present.

This is eternal life: [Jesus prays] to know you...

To know our Lord and our God.

And how do I do that?

Well, the answer to that question seems to rest on the answer to another, very basic question: ‘What does it mean to know anyone?’

To begin with, let’s acknowledge it’s one thing to know *of* someone. It’s another thing altogether to *know* someone.

“Yeh, yeh, yeh. I know of God. I’ve heard about God somewhere or another.”

James Howell (Charlotte NC) writes,

Clearly Jesus isn't thinking head knowledge or dogmatic factoids. [Then he gives this example:] *I know my wife, can anticipate her moods, understand her hurts; we have a deep history, and hard-won territory we've staked out. Many tears, endless conversations, completing one another's sentences: Jesus says eternal life is this (but even richer) with God.* (Lectionary Homiletics, Preaching 6c)

Truly to know God -- that is eternal life.

Not simply a head knowledge, but a deep knowledge with my whole being.

As the prophets of the Old Testament would speak of 'knowing God' on a deep, intimate, personal level.

So, again how do you do that? How do you know someone?

You talk with them: use words, speak and listen.

Prayer is certainly one way we get to know God. Think of prayer as conversation: sit down and have a talk, not only to talk and share of yourself, but also to listen.

And, yes, part of this conversation is the word: the written word, as in the scriptures. Reading and listening to this word. But also praying the scripture, and in doing so, hearing God speak.

"I gave them the words that you gave me, and they received them." (v.8)

Jesus said. Have we honestly, and earnestly, received them?

"...and they have kept your word." (v.6)

he said. Have we? Have we heard, have we *embraced* the Word that stands before us and prays for us?

How else do you know someone?

You work with them: do things with them, be engaged in activities together.

It's one of the reasons I have enjoyed doing mission work trips with people. Traveling together, fixing your meals together, balancing a shower schedule, having down time together, working through a project together, you get to know people, you get to know them well.

Jesus prays,

"I have glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do."

(v.4)

Later on, when Jesus first appears to the disciples (as a whole), having been raised from the dead, he will greet them and say,

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21)

As in Christ's finishing his work, he glorifies the Father, so in our finishing -- and earnestly being about -- our work (his work), we glorify him -- and know him better.

Even as we bumble and fumble around.

Again, James Howell (Charlotte NC) notes,

It is precisely in their bumbling, their not knowing, that Jesus is glorified ...

Jesus' glory is that he chose the weak, the foolish, the uncommendable. ...we are Jesus now, we are his glory, and precisely because we are not up to the task. Jesus' work, after all, is grace and mercy, so if we had impressive resumes and theological brilliance it wouldn't be about the real Jesus, would it? (Lectionary Homiletics, Preaching 6c-7a)

Did you catch what he said? "Jesus' work...is grace and mercy." His work in us, his work through us, his work with us. And in that work -- by our participating in his work and being about it in our daily lives and embracing it with all we are -- we learn of him and grow in him...and know him.

And how else do you know someone?

By simply being in their presence: and you hear how they speak, and you see how they work, and you sense who they are.

And this may be the most difficult way of our knowing God.

For think of all the busy-ness we are about: all the noise, all the rush; all the decisions to be made, all the precautions to be taken; bombarded with choices; so much to do, so much to think about.

Who has time to be present with anyone?

Elijah was one of those prophets who knew God, better some times than others. There was one time when he almost tried to run away from God. He ended up on the holy mountain, Mt.Horeb, and had this wondrous encounter:

[The Lord] said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a ["still small voice"] sound of sheer silence. (I Kings 19:11-12)

Here was where Elijah met God: in that still small voice, in the sound of sheer silence.

Will we stop every now and then? Will we slow down long enough to hear the "still small voice"? Will we take the time to discern the "sound of sheer silence"...and rest in God's presence? and so, come to know God? and come to know life?

-We seek to hear God speak, and we hear God speak of love.

-We work together in God's love.

-And we strive to rest in the presence of God's love.

In these ways, we truly get to know God's love and so get to know God.

And I believe that when we do -- *as* we do -- we come to realize this is where we want to be -- in God.

We come to realize this is *how* we want to be -- like God.

We come to realize this is how we were meant to be -- this is *who* we were meant to be -- children of God.

And this is where we experience life -- full, deep, abundant life.

And as the One who *is* our life is everlasting, so the life we are in God is eternal...even now.

***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

Redeeming God,
you call us to devote ourselves constantly to prayer
for the sake of Jesus Christ.
Therefore, let us offer our prayers this day
on behalf of your church and the world, saying,
fill us with your Spirit's power,
that we may be one with Christ, as Christ is one with you.

Rescuing God, parent of orphans and protector of widows,
you give the desolate a home to live in
and lead out the prisoners into prosperity.
Help us to order the patterns of our common life
to support the health of your human family
and the welfare of your world.
Fill us with your Spirit's power,
that we may be one with Christ, as Christ is one with you.

Yearning God, you call us to your vision of community
and your way of life.
May we strive for a better world
and commit to work in mercy and compassion.
And we thank you for those who have been willing to give of their lives
for the freedom we know and the peace and justice we seek.
Fill us with your Spirit's power,
that we may be one with Christ, as Christ is one with you.

Steadfast God, you have given to your church
the inheritance of faith in Christ alone,
and bestowed your Spirit's love upon us to make us one in you.

Help us to grow in strength and courage
to witness to this hope:
that all may find your saving love eternally in Christ.
Fill us with your Spirit's power,
that we may be one with Christ, as Christ is one with you.

Life-giving God, you send rain in abundance
to relieve the parched crops and thirsty land,
and make clean the winds of heaven.
Help us to find sustainable solutions
as we seek to honor and care for the well-being of your creation.
Fill us with your Spirit's power,
that we may be one with Christ, as Christ is one with you.

Loving God, you heard the sufferings of your people, listened to our cries,
and sent a Son into our world that was no stranger to our pain.
Help us to offer your healing and compassion
as we minister to others in the mercy of your Christ.
Fill us with your Spirit's power,
that we may be one with Christ, as Christ is one with you.

Resurrecting God, you draw near to those who are sick and dying,
and you call them home to you.
May we all know the joy of life eternal,
then and now,
shared with you,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER (Contemporary Version)

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

Jesus said to the Father,
All mine are yours, and all yours are mine.
Therefore, let us offer to God this day
our lives and labors in service of Christ's love.

Offering

**Doxology* GtG 606

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

**Glorious God, everything that is given to us
rains forth out of the abundance of your love,
even Jesus Christ our Lord.
Bless our gifts and our lives together
that all we are and all we offer give glory to you;
in the name of Christ we pray. Amen.**

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** "Take Thou Our Minds, Dear Lord" GtG 707

- 1. Take thou our minds, dear Lord, we humbly pray;
give us the mind of Christ each passing day;
teach us to know the truth that sets us free;
grant us in all our thoughts to honor thee.**
- 2. Take thou our hearts, O Christ; they are thine own;
come thou within our souls and claim thy throne;
help us to shed abroad thy deathless love;
use us to make the earth like heaven above.**
- 3. Take thou our wills, Most High! Hold thou full sway;
have in our inmost souls thy perfect way;
guard thou each sacred hour from selfish ease;
guide thou our ordered lives as thou dost please.**

4. **Take thou ourselves, O Lord, heart, mind, and will;
through our surrendered souls thy plans fulfill.
We yield ourselves to thee: time, talents, all;
we hear, and henceforth heed, thy sovereign call.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: Live as a prayerful and giving people;
the God of grace will be with you.

All: **Let us praise God in the wilderness.
Let us celebrate God's presence everywhere.**

One: May the abundance of God bless you,
the strength of Christ keep you,
and the Spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God,
shine upon you forever.

All: Amen!

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