

St Paul United Church of Christ  
5312 Old Blue Rock Road  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45247  
Allen M. Fluent, Transitional Pastor  
**Order of Worship for The Second Sunday in Lent**  
**March 7, 2021**

*(Although we are now holding worship in our building, we are conscious of the ongoing challenge of in-person worship while the coronavirus persists, and the need many feel to avoid the possibility of contagion. Therefore, we will be continuing the practice of sending a worship bulletin to all who are on our mailing lists for email or hard copy. Those who will be worshipping from home and who have computer access will also be receiving a recorded version of the service that will be sent out by email on Sunday afternoon and also can be seen on our Facebook page. We welcome your participation in any way that is convenient for you, and we encourage you to share our worship service with any person you know who may appreciate receiving it. )*

Morning Announcements and Prayer Requests

Prelude (recording begins)

Opening Prayer

God, we have come to listen for your presence, to discover you in the world you are still creating, and to find you in the innermost sense of blessing that we feel within our hearts. Throughout this holy Lenten season, may your gifts of grace transform us, so that we find ourselves new each day to see the world from the viewpoint of Christ crucified and risen. May this holy foolishness abide, and we be led at last into the sunlight of your holy realm.

Hymn #35

**"O Mighty God"**

#35

**New Century Hymnal (black)**

*O mighty God, when I survey in wonder the world that formed when once the word you said,*

*The strands of life all woven close together, the whole creation at your table fed,*

**Refrain:**            *My soul cries out in songs of praise to you,  
O mighty God! O mighty God!  
My soul cries out in songs of praise to you,  
O mighty God! O mighty God!*

*When your voice speaks in rolls of thunder pealing, your lightning pow-er bursts in bright surprise;*

*When cooling rain, your gentle love revealing, reflects your promise, arcing through the skies, R*

*The Bible tells the story of your blessing so freely shed upon all human life;  
Your constant mercy, every care addressing, relieving burdened souls from sin and  
strife. R*

*And when at last, the clouds of doubt dispersing, you will reveal what we but dimly  
see;*

*With trumpet call, our great re-birth announcing, we shall rejoin you for eternity.*

*Final Refrain:        Then we will sing your praise forever more,  
                                 O mighty God! O mighty God!  
                                 Then we will sing your praise forever more,  
                                 O mighty God! O mighty God!*

### **Responsive Litany: Psalm 19 (Common English Bible)**

Heaven is declaring God's glory; the sky is proclaiming God's handiwork.  
One day gushes the news to the next, and one night informs another what needs to be  
known.

**Of course, there's no speech, no words – their voices can't be heard –  
but their sound extends throughout the world;  
their words reach the ends of the earth.**

God has made a tent in heaven for the sun.

The sun is like a groom coming out of his honeymoon suite;  
like a warrior, it thrills at running its course.

**It rises in one end of the sky; its circuit is complete at the other.**

**Nothing escapes its heat.**

The Lord's instruction is perfect, reviving one's very soul.

The Lord's laws are faithful, making naïve people wise.

The Lord's regulations are right, gladdening the heart.

The Lord's commands are pure, giving light to the eyes.

Honoring the Lord is correct, lasting forever.

**The Lord's judgments are true. All of these are righteous!**

**They are more desirable than gold – than tons of pure gold!**

**They are sweeter than honey – even dripping off the honeycomb!**

No doubt about it:

Your servant is enlightened by them; there is great reward in keeping them.

**But can anyone know what they've accidentally done wrong?**

**Clear me of any unknown sin and save your servant from willful sins.**

**Don't let them rule me.**

**Then I'll be completely blameless; I'll be innocent of great wrong-doing.**

**Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you,  
Lord, my rock and my redeemer.**

Hymn

"Great is Thy Faithfulness"

#72

Worship & Rejoice Hymnal (blue)

*Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee;  
Thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not; as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.*

**Refrain:**        *Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see.  
All I have needed thy hand hath provided – great is thy faithfulness,  
Lord, unto me!*

*Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest, sun, moon and stars in their courses above  
join with all nature in manifold witness to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. R*

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine, with ten thousand  
beside! R*

**Gospel Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

*For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us  
who are being saved it is the power of God, For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom  
of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."*

*Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age?  
Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God,  
the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of  
our proclamation to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire  
wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to  
Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of  
God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and  
God's weakness is stronger than human strength.*

*Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human  
standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose  
what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to  
shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are  
not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of  
God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God  
and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written,  
"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

Hymn

“Near the Cross”

#479

Worship & Rejoice Hymnal (blue)

*Jesus, keep me near the cross; there a precious fountain,  
free to all a healing stream, flows from Calvary's mountain.*

*Refrain: In the cross, in the cross, be my glory ever,  
'til my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river.*

*Near the cross, a trembling soul, love and mercy found me;  
There the bright and morning star sheds its beams around me. R*

*Near the cross! O Lamb of God, bring its scenes before me;  
help me walk from day to day with its shadow o'er me. R*

*Near the cross I'll watch and wait, hoping, trusting ever,  
'til I reach the golden strand just beyond the river. R*

Sermon:

Our lesson this morning is the second in two weeks on the cross of Christ, but it is different from last week's lesson from the Gospel of Mark that told us about Jesus' commitment to take upon himself the danger of the cross in the days leading up to his execution. This week we are looking at what happened after that – after his death, and after the wonder and amazement of his disciples when they felt for the first time his living presence among them; and still later, as an early form of the church began to take shape and come into being. It is not surprising that, as Jesus' death became more widely known, people would begin to question the early church leaders:

Why do you still believe in this man's teachings? Don't you see that God did not protect him? Don't you yet acknowledge that he was put to death in the most miserable way? Don't you see that he really wasn't the Christ, like people thought he was? The Christ will come to save us; but Jesus couldn't even save himself. How is it that you not only don't acknowledge these things, but now you even call your new way of life “the way of the cross.”

What could be more foolish than that?

Paul the apostle probably understood such challenging questions. In fact, he might have asked them himself, because there was a time when he thought like that too. The Book of the Acts of the Apostles tells us that Paul was a learned man who knew the religious teachings of his Jewish tradition. He knew what a messiah was supposed to look like. He knew that he should ride victoriously into Jerusalem and overthrow the oppressor. He knew he wasn't supposed to die. Paul was a person who was trained to judge

heretics, and that's just what these followers of Jesus seemed like to him. They were following a dead man!

It took a dramatic incident that happened on the way to Damascus, so we are told, to cause Paul to change his mind. He was struck blind, so the story goes (not knocked off his horse like many depictions of the incident claim), and when he was able to see again he was strangely changed.

What happened to Paul was not an accident, like falling off his horse would be. It was more like an ecstatic experience so dramatic that hit him like a blinding light and set him to a re-evaluation of who he was and what he believed, and how he would henceforth spend his life. We are not told what precipitated this event. But from what we do know, we might construct the simplest possible explanation: Paul's consciousness was struck by an overwhelming realization that came directly from his experience with the people he had been trying to convert or destroy. Paul had been carrying out a zealous religious mission to destroy a group of apparently misguided fanatics who were followers of a man who had died, whom they called the Christ, the Messiah of the Jews. As he went about his task, again and again, he encountered people who could put aside fear of prison, fear of torture, fear of death itself. They were bound together by a common faith in something they called the Heavenly kingdom that made a mockery of the advantages sought by those in worldly power and those who were willing to oppress their neighbors for the sake of gaining more of the world's treasures for themselves. By losing his life, the crucified man had set loose in the world a spirit with the capacity to make life whole for those who believed.

Now imagine Paul, transformed to his very core by this sudden revelation of the power that lies within all of us when we give up making the quest for worldly treasures and advantage over others the primary aim of our lives. Imagine him, after his life had been re-molded, as the founder and pastor of a little church in Corinth, where he shared this newfound wisdom. The congregation listened to what he had to say. They took it to heart, and there was a wonderful time of peace experienced among them. But then Paul went away. He felt his work was done there, and he was off to other fields of ministry. One day, a message comes to him that his beloved friends in Corinth are bickering among themselves, some claiming spiritual gifts that others don't have, some seeking power over others, wanting credit or special status because of their greater wisdom. It is like the worldly selfishness, greed and ambition from which their faith in the crucified Christ had saved them had remained unconsciously within them and had risen up again to tempt them to return to the habitual ways and wisdom of the world. It was even affecting their religion, and causing strife within the congregation. Paul hears of it, and he is deeply saddened. He writes them a letter, and it says:

“Consider your own call, brothers and sisters. Not many were wise. Not many were powerful. Not many were of noble birth. God chose what is foolish in the world to put to shame the wise. We proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block and foolishness to those who fight and struggle to control the world’s resources for themselves, but to us who are called to live in God’s fellowship of mutuality and peace, the power and the wisdom of God.”

So now I say to you, brothers and sisters, that for us these words are also true: not many of us are exceptional in wisdom; not many are powerful, not many were born with elite family ties. God does not rely upon us for what we have, except for our calling to be faithful to a Gospel of self-giving love that will stand up to the divisive forces of our time.

### **Musical Interlude**

Jake Rizer

### **Sacrament of Holy Communion**

Come gather at the table of the crucified and risen Christ. At this table there is no advantage, and no one is left out. Here the values of acquisition and privilege are set aside, and each of us takes our place in a circle of friendship to seek one another’s good. It is Jesus who sets the table for us, and shows us how good it is to rely upon God’s grace poured out and shared among us all.

We remember that our Lord took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it, saying take and eat, this is my body that is given for you. In the same way after supper he took the cup, saying take and drink, this is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

May this table remind us of the table of the world, where the people of all nations are meant to gather and share the abundance God provides. We ask God’s forgiveness for every child of God who is lost to hunger, homelessness or despair; and we pray for the wisdom of Christ to discern what cost we are able to pay for all God’s children to be sheltered, fed and free.

May this table remind us of the love that is shared in this fellowship of God’s people, that we may be thankful here for one another, for the gifts that are brought here by each one who has come, and for the encouragement we have felt in times of prayer.

May these gifts of food and drink be to us the very body of Jesus Christ our Lord, that we may perceive Christ’s spirit in our midst as we gather here.

We lift up for your blessing all those among us who may be experiencing illness, sorrow, loneliness or depression. May each of us be committed to care for any among us who are experiencing such needs. We lift up for your blessing also our neighboring faith

communities of our own denomination and of other faith traditions. We thank you for all who seek to provide help and neighborliness to others, responding to human need putting aside concern for safety and personal convenience.

As Jesus has taught us, so we pray:

### **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.**

**This is the body of our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ, that is given for you. Take and eat.**

**This is the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, that is shed for you.**

**Take and drink.**

**May the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord be and abide with us now and forever more. Amen.**

### **Closing Hymn**

**"Now Let Us from This Table Rise"**

**#715**

**Worship & Rejoice Hymnal (blue)**

*Now let us from this table rise, renewed in body, mind and soul;  
with Christ we die and rise again, his selfless love has made us whole.*

*With minds alert, upheld by grace, to spread the Word in speech and deed,  
we follow in the steps of Christ, at one with all in hope and need.*

*To fill each human house with love, it is the sacrament of care;;  
the work that Christ began to do we humbly pledge ourselves to share.*

*Then give us grace, Companion God, to choose again the pilgrim way;  
and help us to accept with joy the challenge of tomorrow's day.*

### **Benediction**

*Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.*

### **Postlude**