

**The Green Hill Presbyterian Church**  
**September 27, 2026 – Table Copy**

**SILENT PREPARATION**

Grant us, Lord, not to be anxious about earthly cares, but to love that which is above, and even now, while we live among transient things, to hold fast to those things that shall endure; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

**Leader:** Come, let us remember God's presence with us. Let us give ear to all that God would teach us.

**People:** **Our ancestors told us about God's might. They celebrated God's wondrous deeds.**

**Leader:** In the wilderness of Sinai, God provided water. Through the sea, God provided safe passage.

**People:** **Yet the Israelites questioned God's presence. They needed assurance amid their doubts.**

**Leader:** Our doubts can lead to honest searching. God welcomes questions that lead to new truth.

**People:** **We want to see God's larger picture. We are here to broaden the scope of our concerns.**

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION (*Unison*)**

We marvel, O God, at the thought that you care about us. We are amazed that you – the Creator of the universe – would take on human flesh, to draw us near to you in ways we might begin to understand. As Jesus emptied himself to serve, modeling your love – even in the face of death, we seek in these moments to lay aside self-interest, that we might take direction from you. Help us to humble ourselves in order to obey you, to listen in order to hear, and to care in order to serve. Lead us in these moments to worship you in spirit, and in truth. Amen.

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

Loving God, whose messengers have shown us the way of righteousness, and whose revelation – in Jesus Christ – has demonstrated the power of humble obedience to your will: Speak to us this day through your Word; that we might find the joy of serving you, and that our witness might be authentic – and influential – in the lives of all we meet; for the sake of that same Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**FIRST READING:**

Matthew 21:23-32

*As we come to our reading from Matthew's Gospel, the religious leaders have grown increasingly desirous of doing away with Jesus.*

*This conflict continues to grow in today's reading....*

When he [that is, Jesus] entered the temple,  
the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him –  
as he was teaching –  
and said, "By what authority are you doing these things,  
and who gave you this authority?"  
Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer,  
then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things.  
Did the baptism of John come from heaven,  
or was it of human origin?"  
And they argued with one another,  
"If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us,  
'Why, then, did you not believe him?'  
But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd,  
for all regard John as a prophet."  
So they answered Jesus, "We do not know."  
And he said to them,  
"Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.  
"What do you think?  
A man had two sons; he went to the first and said,  
'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'  
He answered, 'I will not,' but – later – he changed his mind and went.  
The father went to the second and said the same,  
and he answered, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go.  
Which of the two did the will of his father?"  
They said, "The first."  
Jesus said to them,  
"Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes  
are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.  
For John came to you in the way of righteousness,  
and you did not believe him,  
but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him,  
and – even after you saw it –  
you did not change your minds and believe him."

**SECOND READING:**

Philippians 2:1-13

*This morning,*

*our reading from Paul's letter to the church at Philippi  
offers a solution to the challenge of achieving unity  
in the body of Christ....*

If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love,  
any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy,  
make my joy complete:  
be of the same mind, having the same love,  
being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit,  
but – in humility – regard others as better than yourselves.

Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he existed in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped,  
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,  
assuming human likeness.

And – being found in appearance as a human –  
he humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death –  
even death on a cross.

Therefore God exalted him even more highly,  
and gave him the name that is above every other name,  
so that – at the name given to Jesus –  
every knee should bend, in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth,  
and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me,  
not only in my presence – but much more now, in my absence –  
work on your own salvation with fear and trembling,  
for it is God who is at work in you,  
enabling you both to will – and to work for – his good pleasure.

9/21

SERMON

"Who Is Your Why?"

We begin – this morning – with *a story*; well – perhaps – more of *a fable*.

It was first told – in short story form – by **Jane Tyson Clement**:  
a 20th-century poet, playwright, and novelist.

The title is, "*The Storm*."

Today, we will share it....

Once upon a time – in the **Midlands of England** – there was a certain village.

It was a picturesque community – of thatched-roof houses,  
located along the banks of a river.

In this village dwelt three brothers.

The oldest was the ferryman; the middle one – the miller;  
and the youngest – the forester,  
who looked after the game preserve belonging to their lord.

The three brothers had done well for themselves.  
And, they had much to be proud of.

But they were far from happy.

None of them had ever found anyone to share his life with.

They lived solitary lives.

Once a week, they would gather at the village tavern –  
for some venison stew, and a flagon of ale,  
but they spoke but a few words.

Each brother seemed lost in his own, dark thoughts.

That is, until the day a terrible storm rose up.

For many hours – before it struck,  
the air had grown heavy, and humid.

Strange white seabirds were sighted, soaring over inland meadows.

Charcoal-gray storm clouds gathered overhead.

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The songbirds fell silent.  
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The three brothers hastened to their respective houses.  
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The storm began at dusk, with howling winds, torrential rain,  
and the creaking of trees bent over – at unnatural angles.

The darkness was complete —  
the sort of darkness that fills a person with dread.  
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The forester – snug in his stone cottage –  
was well aware of what the storm could do.  
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Walking back to his house, he had mentally noted a large, dead, beech tree –  
just a short distance from his front door.

Surely, it would fall.  
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He could only hope – and pray – that it would miss his house.  
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A chill wind was moaning through his chimney.  
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Then, he heard the noise he'd dreaded — splintering wood.

And – with a mighty thump –  
the trunk of the great tree crashed to the ground.  
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It barely missed his house.  
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But then – in the stillness after its falling – he heard another sound —  
one he'd never expected to hear.

It was the sound of a child crying.

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This couldn't be. It had to be an illusion, a trick of the mind.

But – then – the forester heard it again:  
the cry of a youngster, just outside his thick, oaken door.

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Should he risk unbarring it?

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Only a madman would go out on a night like this.

But the child's cries beckoned him onward.

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Out towards the fallen tree he went.

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He couldn't see the child, but he could hear him.

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Reaching into the tangled branches, he felt a small, wet face.

Touching the boy's chest, he could feel a furiously beating heart.

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He eased the little boy free from the tangled branches,  
clutched him to his chest,  
and fought the wind – all the way back to the house.

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Who was this mysterious child?

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He was no more than two or three years old.

And, how had he found his way into the branches of the fallen tree?

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No time to ponder such mysteries —  
he wrapped the boy in warm blankets, and hugged him to himself –  
until he felt the little one's breathing slow.

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The two of them fell into a peaceful sleep.

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He awoke to a blaze of sunlight, and the singing of birds.

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The door of his cottage was unbarred – and wide open.

Of the child he had rescued, there was no sign.

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“Little one! Where are you?” he cried.

Only the songbirds answered.

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Then, he noticed the devastation of his beloved forest.

He thought only of his brothers and the other villagers –  
and ran off, to help them.

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Breathless, he arrived at the house of his brother, the miller.

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Pounding on the door, he called out his brother’s name.

When his brother answered,  
the forester poured out the story of the strange child he’d found –  
cradled in the branches of a fallen tree —  
and how he’d vanished the next morning.

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“Will wonders never cease?” his brother exclaimed.

“I, too, was behind closed doors in my cottage,  
burrowed deep into the blankets on my bed,  
when I heard a child crying.

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I threw on my cloak, and went down the path – as fast as I could.

Right by the edge of the millpond, I found him — so very close to the water!

I scooped him up, brought him home,  
and fed him hot broth from the pot on the stove.

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But — the next morning, he was gone!”

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The two of them rushed out, then,  
to the home of their brother, the ferryman.

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They discovered he, too, had had a similar experience.

He'd heard cries coming from the opposite side of the river,  
poled his boat across, and rescued the little boy.

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But — when morning came — he was gone.

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The three brothers looked at each other — in stunned silence.

Then, they took in the storm's devastation all around.

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But their hearts were unaccountably light.

They noticed the bright sunshine.

It was a day of rare beauty.

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“It was the same with each of us,”  
the forester said slowly to his two brothers.

“We reached out to the child — and now the world is newly made.”

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No one worked harder than they did to help their neighbors rebuild.

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Everywhere one of the brothers showed up, sorrow was eased,  
hope grew afresh,  
and an unaccountable warmth crept into every heart.

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And, from that day forward, the three brothers —  
the forester, the miller and the ferryman — were different men.

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Where their lives had — once — been sadness and gloom,  
now they showed forth contagious joy.

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The miller sang at his work — something he'd seldom done before.

The forester always had a child from the village by his side —  
as he walked through the woods.

As for the ferryman,  
he delighted in giving children free rides across the river.

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The joy of the three brothers spread to everyone.

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Travelers — who knew the place —  
marveled at how the very atmosphere had changed.

No one went hungry or cold.

No one suffered loneliness or fear.

It was as though a new kind of joy had been set loose.

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"It was during the great storm that everything changed,"  
the villagers would say.

"Unexpectedly, *joy came to us*, and the world was made new."

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***"Make my joy complete,"***  
wrote **Paul** to the **Christians** — of **Philippi**.

***"Be of the same mind, having the same love,  
being in full accord and of one mind."***

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*That* is an extraordinary statement — when we truly consider it.

Having a *common mind* is one thing — a rare gift — in and of itself.

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But “*having the same love?*”

What could **Paul** possibly *mean by that*?

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Most often,  
we tend to read this passage as though it were a letter –  
*written to individuals.*

But it *was not*.

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Our **English language** – unlike many others –  
uses the same, second-person pronoun, “*you*,”  
for both the singular – *and* – the plural.

And so, it’s hard for **English-speakers** to distinguish –  
between an *assortment of individuals* – or a *collective group*.

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Happily, that is not so in **New Testament Greek** –  
as **Paul** is clearly *addressing the entire community*.

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Our closest, **English**, equivalent may be the word “*y’all*.”

We must – then – Imagine **Paul** – saying to the **Philippians** –  
“*Y’all have the same love.*”

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That’s how the **Philippians** would have understood it.

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But – the reality is –  
it’s a rare enough thing *for two people* to share the same love.

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But, an *entire community*?

For this to happen, such love must have *some independent existence* –  
*outside* our individual lives.

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The problem is that we are used to thinking of love  
as *something we create for ourselves* —  
a treasure to be jealously guarded — and protected —  
lest we lose it.

And so, it boggles the mind to think of love  
as freely, lavishly, and endlessly distributed --  
throughout an entire community.

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But *that* is exactly what **Paul** believes is possible.

And such love *is not* so much an individual possession — “yours and mine” —  
as it is “yours, mine, and ours.”

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The **love of Christ** is *infinitely bigger* than any one of us —  
even any number of us.

It is more of a *great sea* -- in which *we all* swim.

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And — so — we can be confident that it *will never* be exhausted.

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Such is the discovery that many survivors of hurricanes, floods,  
and tornadoes have made.

A storm has a way of bringing love out — into *an entire community*.

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It is happening now — as the nor-easter pummels the **East Coast**.

And, such was the case when the **Twin Towers** were struck by terrorists —  
just over twenty-five years ago!

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Suddenly, neighbors who barely know each other —  
who would barely nod to one another in passing —  
find they have something in common.

They’ve been fighting the storm together.

And, the storm has stripped away *not only* the leaves from the trees;  
it has stripped away *their separateness* – and *isolation*.

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Today, our existence seems to be characterized by violent, cultural storms –  
in addition to those caused – or exacerbated – by climate change.

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But, we must never fear that love will run out —  
for – in **Christ** – **God** has provided *an infinite supply* for us.

Individual relationships may – *sometimes* – disappoint,  
but the love that flows into our hearts from the **Almighty** –  
through **Christ** – knows no limit.

And – so – may we never hesitate to share **Christ's love** with others,  
for – truly – it is both *without measure*, and *without price*!

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Indeed – not infrequently – a person –  
who has been involved in some kind of ministry to others –  
remarks that they received a surprising blessing.

And that – despite their seemingly-insignificant contribution.

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But we should not be surprised:  
The **One who is Love** created us –  
that we might love one another. (cf: I John 4:7-12)

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And love – when given away – *does not* diminish, but *is multiplied*.

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The **Apostle Paul** understood this, and so he wrote:  
“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love,  
any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy,  
make my joy complete:  
be of the same mind, having the same love,  
being in full accord and of one mind.  
“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but – in humility –  
regard others as better than yourselves.  
Let each of you look not to your own interests,  
but to the interests of others.  
Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

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In other words – in **Jesus Christ** – *we are God's why.*

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And so *today* – and *every day* that **God** gives us –  
we are each called to ask ourself:

*“Who is your why?”*

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**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Amen.**

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**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH (*Unison*)**

(adapted from *A Declaration of Faith*)

**Jesus' involvement in the human condition is God's involvement.  
His compassion for all kinds of people is God's compassion.  
His demand for justice, truth, and faithfulness is God's demand.  
His willingness to suffer rejection is God's willingness.  
Jesus' love for the very people who reject him is God's love.**

**We acknowledge that Christ chooses to be known in the world  
through this community of ordinary people,  
therefore we dare not despise or abandon the church.  
Christ is the head of the church,  
therefore we are responsible to Christ  
when we make policy and decisions in the church.  
Christ is the foundation of the church,  
therefore it will not fall despite our weakness.  
We are confident that the Lord of the church  
will judge and defeat our sinful intentions and actions,  
help us in our weakness and blindness,  
and use the church to accomplish his purposes.**

**Throughout its history the church has struggled  
to be faithful to God in political situations:  
under persecution,  
or as an established arm of the state,  
or in separation from it.  
God rules over both political and religious institutions.  
We must confuse neither with the kingdom of God.  
We must not equate the Christian faith  
with any nation's way of life  
or with opposition to the ideologies of other nations.**

**The church must be free to speak to civil authorities,  
neither claiming expert knowledge it does not have,  
nor remaining silent when God's Word is clear.**

**We testify God is at work here and now  
when people obey Christ's commission  
to witness to him and make disciples of all nations,  
when they spread the good news. Amen.**

**PRAYER OF DEDICATION (*Unison*)**

**O God, we give because you have richly blessed us. We present  
ourselves in your service because you have gifted us in so many ways.  
We extend helping hands because we care about all those you have called us  
to love. May every tongue that confesses Jesus Christ as Savior share in that  
one mind which so powerfully demonstrates your love. Amen.**

**CHARGE AND BENEDICTION**

**Jesus said freely, freely, you have received;  
freely, freely give.**

**Go in my name, and – because you believe –  
others will know that I live!**

**In other words, they will come to recognize – and follow – Jesus Christ.**

**And, Christ will become their “why” – as well!**

**Let us receive the Lord's benediction....**