

*Common Worship in Separate Places  
For the people of Elmwood Avenue Presbyterian Church  
London, Ontario  
and their friends*

*The 10th Sunday after Pentecost  
1 August 2021*

*To cross the threshold into worship, light a candle and keep a moment of silence.*

*Opening Words*

L: They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.

**P: They shall mount up with wings as eagles.**

L: Let us worship God.

*Prayers of Adoration and Confession*

Gracious God, in your wisdom you made us, in Jesus Christ you came to redeem us, and through your Holy Spirit you sanctify us for him. Give us breath to sing of your majesty, and, with all creation, to praise you as the true life of all; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our one true and living God.

Have mercy upon us, O God, according to your lovingkindness. In your great compassion blot out our offences. Create us in a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us. Cast us not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from us. For you are slow to anger and full of compassion.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

**P: Christ, have mercy upon us.**

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

God of mercy, you forgive us even before our lips form the words to ask for pardon. Wash us from all our sins and restore us to the joy of your salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen*

*An Assurance of Pardon*

L: "Purge us with hyssop and we shall be clean; wash us and we shall be whiter than snow." May God grant us pardon, true repentance, and bring us to eternal life.

**P: May the peace of Christ be with us all.**

*Prayer for Illumination* Holy One, in the speaking of your Word, tell us what we need to hear and show us what we ought to do; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

*The Psalm for the Day*

**Psalm 51: 1-12** (*A prayer of penitence*)

Have mercy on me, O God, in your great goodness;  
according to the abundance of your compassion  
blot out my offences.

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness  
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my faults  
and my sin is ever before me.

Against you only have I sinned  
and done what is evil in your sight,  
So that you are justified in your sentence  
and righteous in your judgement.

I have been wicked even from my birth,  
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

Behold, you desire truth deep within me  
and shall make me understand wisdom  
in the depths of my heart.

Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean;  
wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Make me hear of joy and gladness,  
that the bones you have broken may rejoice.

Turn your face from my sins  
and blot out all my misdeeds.

Make me a clean heart, O God,  
and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence  
and take not your holy spirit from me.

*(Said together)* **Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen**

*A Reading for the Day*

**2 Samuel 11: 26 – 12:13a** (*The prophet Nathan confronts King David*)

When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.'

Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.'

Nathan said to David, 'You are the man!

'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more.

'Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

'Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife.

'Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.'

David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.'

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

P: **Thanks be to God.**

### *Some thoughts on the Reading*

**2 Samuel 12:7** *"Nathan said to David, 'You are the man!'"*

Nathan 'exposed' King David. Of course, he was already exposed to God, "from whom no secrets are hid." But Nathan exposed David to himself. He held up a moral mirror to David. David didn't like the face staring back at him.

Earlier, David had stared at Bathsheba, nude, while she was bathing, and he'd taken her into the Royal Bed. She conceived a child.

David did his best to cover this up. He sent her dull but loyal husband, Uriah, to die in battle. Uriah duly did. But Nathan, the Court Prophet, blew the whistle on 'Uriah-gate'.

Powerful people tend to employ 'yes men', spineless sycophants who pander to power's arrogance. But Kings need advisors with backbone, people who'll tell them the truths they *don't* want to hear. No one likes this. But how lucky King David was to have a Civil Servant who refused to flatter the Royal Ego. Nathan told him the difficult truth.

But Court Prophets must know Statecraft too. If they want to keep their heads, they must speak shrewdly to Sovereigns, Presidents, Popes, and CEOs. Nathan approached the topic obliquely. He told a story about a rich man who stole a beloved lamb from his poor neighbor to feed his guest at a feast. What does His Royal Highness think of *that*?

"This man must die!" shouts David.

"You are that man," whispers Nathan. "You are!"

"O would some Power the giftie give us / To see ourselves as others see us!" wrote Burns. God's Prophets *are* this gift. Nathan confronted David, not to humiliate him, but to restore the integrity of his Kingship. But that couldn't happen until David acknowledged his broken integrity. That was the first step. *There was no other way.*

This is precisely why, in Presbyterian Churches, we approach God in Public Worship with robust Songs of Praise and Prayers of Adoration, yes; but then, immediately, lest we forget ourselves, we offer honest words of Confession. Confession of what? Confession of sin, our broken integrity.

No one likes this. So what? We must do it. For we see ourselves as little Sovereigns who rule our own little lives, don't we? We dare not think we're above all that 'silly confession of sin' business, for that would be the worst sin of all.

But a Prayer of Confession is more than making a list, checking it twice, and telling our sins to God. We don't even *know* half our sins, do we? A true list would include some of the deeds we count as virtue. What's more, we're much mistaken about many of the sins we *do* put on the list. Some of our petty peccadillos and blush-worthy guilts may really be righteous pleasures and worthy necessities, and not 'sins' at all.

No, the point of a Prayer of Confession is to seek the light of God so we may begin to see ourselves as God sees us, in all the dark corners of our souls. But we mustn't do this in a show of self-loathing and breast-beating (a perverse posture of false virtue). We must do this so that we may know ourselves truthfully, amend our lives accordingly, and accept ourselves as mercifully as God does. *And accept each other too.*

Something has gone terribly wrong when Christians pass themselves off as the smug champions of clean living and virtuous opinion, sniffing out others' errors so they can condemn them with glee. Since when does pointing out someone else's 'sin' make the pointer extra virtuous? Never, that's when.

This sport has taken off like a B.C. forest fire in our secular world. A new and merciless Puritanism rages across our land. We hear it in blazing voices of shrill self-righteousness: “Look at all those *sins* those other people did that *we* would never, never have done! We’re progressive and good! Our moral radar is infallible! Shame on *them!*”

Those who are most shrill in condemning the sins of others are those who’ve not yet faced the darkness inside themselves. They’re blind to the evil they’re very capable of doing, the very evil they denounce in others. (“This man must die!” shouted David.) Feeling no need for anyone’s forgiveness, they’re incapable of forgiving anyone else.

To some extent, that describes all of us, doesn’t it?

We do not know ourselves as well as we think we do. We all have ‘blind spots’. Others may see them, but we can’t; rather in the way Nathan could see King David’s big blind spot but David couldn’t, because he’d covered it up and blinded himself to it.

Others can see our hostility, envy, arrogance, or the manipulative claims we parade as victimhood. They can see these things in *us* because they feel their effects upon *themselves*. If they dare to tell us what they see and feel, and if this punctures the false, inflated image we’d had of ourselves, we may push back, and shout, “*I’m* not the hostile one! *I’m* not envious! *I’m* not arrogant! *I’m* not manipulative!”

In such moments, the greatest mark of virtue is, instead, to hear what others say they see in us, to gaze into the mirror they’re holding up to us, and then try to see ourselves as *they* see us. Even if we hate what they show us. Even if we hate them for showing it. They are a gift to us – a painful gift, to be sure, but a gift nonetheless. After all, a big part of ‘loving our enemies’ is learning what they have to teach us, beginning with our little part in causing a state of hostility to arise in the first place.

When John F. Kennedy was assassinated, Senator Patrick Moynihan felt it revealed something foul in his nation’s soul. We have our versions in Canada. “We shall laugh again,” he said, “but we shall never be young again.”

The same can be said of poor King David. “I have sinned against the Lord,” he cried. Would he still be King? Yes. Never was David more ‘Royal’ than when, having sinned, he bore the burden of seeing the truth about himself.

But he’d never be *young* again. Innocence died. But so did naiveté. Wisdom and self-knowledge took their place. Humbled, he is more human. Knowing his vice, he is more virtuous. Confessing his broken integrity, he can more easily forgive it in others.

So can we.

### ***Prayers of Intercession***

Loving One, open our eyes to the work of your hand in the splendour of creation, and in the beauty of human life. We cherish your blessing and would share it with each other and the world all around us.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for your whole Church. Help us to hold onto the truth embedded in our common faith, to live with courage in this troubled time, trusting in your love and hoping for a future inspired by your grace. Renew our faith in this high calling.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Living God, you are full of compassion. We pray for those whom you love dearly but the world does not love; those whom we pass by on the other side, who have no share in this world's wealth; and those who fit in nowhere. Be near them. Move the hearts of your people to care more deeply for them.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for those whose bodies have outlived the health of their minds, and for those who feel their life has become an unbearable burden and a severe sorrow. Bless and keep them in your care. Help them believe they are still a blessing to others.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

God of all wisdom, help those who bear the burden of leadership in government. May your own Holy Spirit so direct their counsels and actions that they may hear the cries of suffering people. Cause your justice to roll down like waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We remember those who have died. We praise you for the hope that is ours in Christ, a hope for the life eternal, where your saints rejoice in your presence without ceasing ...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

O Lord Jesus Christ, be our defence on the day of trouble and our refuge when evening comes. Go before us to guide us and be above us to bless us; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God for evermore.

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray:

**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, the power and the glory, for ever. Amen**

### ***Benediction***

*(Said together)* **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forever. Amen**