

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

*10th Sunday after Pentecost
10:30 a.m.
9 August 2020*

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

Opening Words

L: The city of God has no need of sun or moon;

P: the glory of God is its light.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy One, ever gracious, you are worthy of praise. All creation bows before you, and the glorious company of heaven adore you. Throughout the world your Church acclaim you, our Sovereign and Lord. We praise you that in our weakness we can know you, and find in the foolishness of the cross the wisdom that quickens us to life. We revere your holy name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you, in thought, word and deed. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. In your mercy, forgive what we have been and help us amend what we are, so we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your name.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Almighty God, you sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your Church. Open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love, joy and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." 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

God of mercy, amid the changes and chances of this mortal life, help us to hear your unchanging word, that we may live by trusting in your goodness, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b (*God's faithfulness to Israel*)

O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,
 make known his deeds among the peoples.
 Sing to him, sing praises to him;
 tell of all his wonderful works.
 Glory in his holy name;
 let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
 Seek the Lord and his strength;
 seek his presence continually.
 Remember the wonderful works he has done,
 his miracles, and the judgements he has uttered,
 O offspring of his servant Abraham,
 children of Jacob, his chosen ones.

When he summoned famine against the land,
 and broke every staff of bread,
 he had sent a man ahead of them,
 Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
 His feet were hurt with fetters,
 his neck was put in a collar of iron;
 until what he had said came to pass,
 the word of the Lord kept testing him.
 The king sent and released him;
 the ruler of the peoples set him free.
 He made him lord of his house,
 and ruler of all his possessions,
 to instruct his officials at his pleasure,
 and to teach his elders wisdom.
 Praise the Lord!

(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

St Matthew 14: 22-33 (*Peter tries walking on water*)

Immediately, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray.

When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear.

But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'

Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.'

He said, 'Come.'

So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'You of little faith, why did you doubt?'

When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

L: This is the Gospel of the Risen Christ.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St Matthew 14:29 "*Peter got out of the boat, walked on the water, and came toward Jesus.*"

Let the boat Peter disembarks from stand for the Church, and let Peter stand for 'every Christian'. The early Church knew this *instinctively*.

Modern people like us, being more literal-minded and less sophisticated than they were, tie ourselves in knots, asking "did this *really* happen?"

"You'd better believe it!" say the so-called conservatives. They pride themselves on their ability to believe 'six impossible things before breakfast', as though a sign of 'real' faith is to defy rationality.

“I can’t and I won’t believe it!” say the so-called liberals. They pride themselves on their (wholly imaginary) intellectual superiority, as though faith must be boxed in by our narrow, ‘modern’ modes of rationality.

Each side thinks they already know everything they need to know about faith, God, and the ways of the world. They don’t. A little humility wouldn’t go amiss here. Humility, after all, is the beginning of wisdom. But good luck getting them to see this.

By sneering at each other, conservatives and liberals miss what the early Church understood. Peter’s hike across the water depicts *their* lives, thrashed by the wind and wave of those dangerous times they lived in, times of persecution, arrest, and torture.

The Roman State had a deep dislike for Christians. They didn’t care for anyone whose allegiance was to a ‘power’ – a God of love and justice – who couldn’t be corralled by Rome. Christians used to be very hard to control. They wouldn’t bow before the emblems of State, corporate prowess, and technological progress.

So, the Church was born in a tempest of persecution and torture. To turn and ‘follow Jesus Christ’ was like putting to sea in a hurricane. And it could cost you. Not just an hour of your time and a few dollars coughed up on a Sunday morning. It could very well cost your life.

So, if the boat stands for the Church, let Peter stand for you and me. He’s impulsive, self-confident and devoted one minute, but the next minute he loses his nerve. He’s tempest-tossed and overwhelmed. He doubts and sinks and fears he will drown.

“You of little faith,” says Jesus, “why did you doubt?” He reaches out his hand and catches Peter.

Like Peter, certain he’s sinking yet still held up, we too endure the peril and paradox of Christian existence. What depicts it better than the foolishness of trying to walk on water? Who would try such a feat if it were not Jesus Christ himself calling us? “Jesus said, ‘Come’. And Peter got out of the boat...*and walked.*”

They early Church knew that to answer the call of Christ was to be a witness to him, which is what the word ‘martyr’ really means: ‘witness’. Don’t we still live in Caesar’s world? Doesn’t it still need the ‘witness’ it does not want?

And yet, for the most part, the worn-out Church in North America cares more about self-preservation. We’re happy to keep hearing the ‘old, old story’, we dwindling, aging few. But we’re also content not to think too deeply about just how radically different a “world according to Christ” might look, aren’t we?

It feels like an old world is dying, and a new one is struggling to be born, and we’re adrift between them. Will it be a better world, or worse? No one knows. Humility is called for. But the storm is raging all around us. Don’t you feel its waves buffeting the walls of the Church? I do.

So, what’s the Church to do? Batten down the hatches in fear? Or step over the side to meet our Lord who is already there?

The 'old, old story' of Jesus Christ may just help us to understand the world, to live in it, and if need be to resist it. Not because it's easy, or painless to do so. Not because it's trendy and might fill our pews once again (clearly, it's not that – a faithful Church may get numerically smaller and poorer). And not because we can 'save' the world by what we do. Why, then? Because Jesus Christ is already there, and he's calling us.

If he can walk on the sea – *the sea!*, Israel's symbol for anarchy, for everything that resists God's creative love – if Jesus Christ can subdue the sea, then who the heck is Caesar? Why would we ever fear him?

How I wish we had the courage to go out and meet those who've been battered and beaten by life, drowning, pushed to the margins by those who have power. How I wish we could befriend them, share their lot if we had to, and so share Jesus Christ with them in the Word and Sacraments of his Church.

If we did, we'd meet Jesus Christ in *them*, wouldn't we?

Prayers of Intercession

Eternal Father, strong to save, whose arm hath bound the restless wave, who bade the mighty ocean deep its own appointed limits keep; O hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for your whole Church. Where it is indifferent and complacent, awaken it. Where it is persecuted and oppressed, protect it. When your Church is in danger, make firm our trust; when your people falter, steady our faith. Show us in Jesus Christ your power to save, that we may never be afraid to proclaim him as Lord.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for peace throughout the world, wherever weapons are deployed to threaten and to kill. Gracious God, cure your children's warring madness, bend our lives to your control; shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss your kingdom's goal.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for the welfare of the natural world, for the just use and care for its resources. Make us care about this. Temper the human greed that would exploit nature and kill its future only for financial profit.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Strong and loving God, you have taught us to trust and not be afraid. Deliver us from fear of an unknown future, fear of failure and poverty, fear of illness and pain, fear

of bereavement and loneliness, fear of old age, and fear of death. Make our faith strong within us. Give us courage to face what we fear, and to commit our all the days of our lives into your safe care and keeping.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

God of all love, maker of our hearts and the source of our affections, we praise and thank you for the gift of friendship. We commit our friends into your loving care, that our bonds may continue and deepen, throughout this life and beyond it.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O God of all times and places, we give thanks for those who have died in the faith, especially those known to us, who have entered into the joy and peace of your presence. Grant that we may follow their example, and come to share with them the glory of everlasting life...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*...

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O Christ, whose voice the waters heard and hushed their raging at thy word, who walked upon the foaming deep and calm amid the storm did sleep; O hear us when we cry to thee for those in peril on the sea.

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**