

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

*12th Sunday after Pentecost
10:30 a.m.
23 August 2020*

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

Opening Words

L: We will sing of God's steadfast love forever,

P: and proclaim God's faithfulness to all generations.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, for we come to worship and adore you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

You are the source of mercy, Lord. You shine light into the dark places of our hearts. You show us our need of your forgiveness. Forgive our selfishness and greed; forgive the evil we do while trying to do good. Uplift us when we stumble, steady us when we falter; and fill us anew with your Spirit, that freed from iniquity and sure of your love, we may serve you with joy.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Living God, you sent your Son among us to reveal your wisdom and make known your ways. Increase our faith, that we may confess Jesus as your Son, take up his work on earth, and trust his promise to sustain the Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God for ever.

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

Living Lord, pour out your Spirit of wisdom and understanding, that, being taught by you in Holy Scripture, our hearts and minds may be open to know your truth and will for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 124 (*Thanksgiving for Israel's Deliverance*)

If it had not been the Lord who was on our side
 —let Israel now say—
 if it had not been the Lord who was on our side,
 when our enemies attacked us,
 then they would have swallowed us up alive,
 when their anger was kindled against us;
 then the flood would have swept us away,
 the torrent would have gone over us;
 then over us would have gone
 the raging waters.

Blessed be the Lord,
 who has not given us
 as prey to their teeth.
 We have escaped like a bird
 from the snare of the fowlers;
 the snare is broken,
 and we have escaped.

Our help is in the name of the Lord,
 who made heaven and earth.

(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 16: 13-20 (*Peter's declaration about Jesus*)

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'

And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'

He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?'

Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.'

And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

'And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

L: This is the Gospel of the Risen Christ.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St Matthew 16:18 *"You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church."*

Legend and lore, and not a few jokes, portray Peter as heaven's gatekeeper, a sort of holy security guard with a ring of keys jangling from his belt. "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven," Jesus told him.

But if we dig a little deeper, we can see something more going on. "Who do *you* say I am," Jesus had asked.

"You are the Messiah," said Peter. He's the first one to say this openly.

Our inklings and intuitions rarely become 'real' to us until we say them openly too, out loud and to someone else. It's not enough to wonder if we love someone. There comes a time when, if our love is going to mean anything at all, we have to say 'I love you' to the one we've set our heart on. Do those words 'ring true' in our own ears when we speak then in our own voice? If so, do they commit us, now, to pursue a life we'd only dreamed of? They do.

That's why, to this day, the Church makes a 'big deal' of saying the Creed aloud together. "I believe in God the Father almighty, and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord." It *is* a big deal. It commits us to the living of a life we might only ever have dreamed about.

"You are the Messiah," said Peter. Something about this moment of recognition, spoken out loud, is like a key turning in a lock. The key opens a door to a new realm, 'the kingdom of heaven'.

“What you’ve just said is rock solid,” says Jesus. “In fact, *you* are a rock, Peter. And the whole Church will be built on your rock solid confession.” This is a play on words. The name ‘Peter’ comes from a word meaning ‘rock’ or ‘stone’.

Earlier, Jesus had said, “Everyone who hears my words and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock” (*St Matthew 7:24*). That house will be the ‘new Israel’, the body of the Risen Christ, the Church. Christ himself is its cornerstone.

Our confession of faith, like Peter’s, signifies our allegiance and belonging to Jesus Christ. For the Church can’t be contained by a building, even though it rehearses its identity in acts of worship in places called ‘sanctuaries’. Nor can the Church’s faith be shrink-wrapped in doctrines and sealed up in scripture, even though we need their words to orient our lives and guide our steps.

Unlike our idle inklings and vague speculation, our confession of faith is a key unlocking a door. It opens a path to a new way of life. It pledges us to the pursuit of peace. It commits us to a life of forgiveness, justice, and joy, aka ‘the kingdom of heaven’.

Prayers of Intercession

Living God, you invite us to share in your new creation, and to work with you in the world. Use the words of our prayers and the labour of our hands, and make them useful in the service of Christ.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for the well-being of your Church, here in our homes, in the sanctuary on Elmwood Avenue, and throughout the world. May your Church, wherever you bring it to life, be a house of prayer, a centre of Christian teaching, a community of service, and a witness to your redeeming love.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy One, your counsels are perfect in wisdom and love. We pray for those entrusted with government in this land; members of parliament and judges, civil servants and representatives of the Crown. Help them in their calling, and teach them to love mercy, to do justice, and to walk humbly before you.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Bring peace to every place of strife, O Lord. Overturn systems of injustice, and undo the bonds of hatred that bind human hearts. Bless all who work for peace.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

God of all comfort, we commend to you those who, because of their lot in life, are tempted to lose heart; those who have no security of home or work; those who see no

purpose in life; and those who suffer from incurable illness. Enable them to trust in you, though your way is hidden from their sight, and give them courage, hope, and peace in the knowledge of your love.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Merciful One, we pray for those who doubt your love, for those who have lost the faith they once had, for those who cannot bring themselves to trust or believe in you, and for those who turn to you in prayer and hear no answer. Though they cannot sense your presence, keep them always in the apple of your eye.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We remember and give thanks for our brothers and sisters who have died in the hope of resurrection to eternal life. Bring us with them into the light of your presence, that in communion with all your saints we may give you glory for ever...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy Love, give to us, and all your people, in times of anxiety, serenity; in times of hardship, courage; in times of uncertainty, patience; and at all times a quiet trust in your wisdom and love. And whatever this day may bring, let your name be praised.

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**