

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

*13th Sunday after Pentecost  
10:30 a.m.  
30 August 2020*

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

*Opening Words*

L: This is the day that the Lord has made.

**P: let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

L: Let us worship God.

*Prayers of Adoration and Confession*

Holy One, in you we live and move and have our being. You made us in your image to share your love and learn your truth. You shower gifts and blessings upon your people, for you have sent us Jesus Christ, your very Word in human dress, who died and rose and lives for ever. Fill us, now, with your Holy Spirit, and fashion within us the life of our Lord. Receive our praise, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Lord of mercy, in quiet recollection we sense our distance from you, and from each other. Forgive us for the love we have shown only in word and speech, too rarely in deed and truth. Help us to put our faltering trust in you, for we need your life and strength in ours; and we wish to be rid of everything in ourselves and in our world that harms your heart, and gives you grief.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

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

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Gracious God, you are author and giver of all good things. Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true faith; nourish us with all goodness; and make manifest in our lives signs of your mercy and justice; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. . *Amen*

*An Assurance of Pardon*

L: "In him was life, and the life was the light of all people." 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 Lord, let your Spirit overshadow us as we hear and receive your Word, that with honest hearts we may be rooted in your truth and enlivened by your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

***The Psalm for the Day***

**Psalm 105: 1-6, 23-26, 45c** (*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.  
 Then Israel came to Egypt;  
 Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham.  
 And the Lord made his people very fruitful,  
 and made them stronger than their foes,  
 whose hearts he then turned to hate his people,  
 to deal craftily with his servants.  
 He sent his servant Moses,  
 and Aaron whom he had chosen.  
 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***

**Exodus 3: 1-15** (*Moses at the Burning Bush*)

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the

bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, 'I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.'

When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses, Moses!'

And he said, 'Here I am.'

Then he said, 'Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' He said further, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.'

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then the Lord said, 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.'

But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'

He said, 'I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.'

But Moses said to God, 'If I come to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your ancestors has sent me to you", and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?'

God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' He said further, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "I am has sent me to you."' God also said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the Israelites, "The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name for ever, and this my title for all generations.'

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

**P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

### *Some thoughts on the Reading*

**Exodus 3:3** *"I must turn aside and look at this great sight."*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes in one of her poems:

*"...Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God.*

*But only he who sees takes off his shoes.*

*The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries..."*

Moses' takes off his shoes. He turns aside to see this sight.

But as eye-catching as the burning bush is, it's not the sight Moses saw but the *words* he hears that change the course of his life. For the burning bush appears in order that God might speak with Moses. God commissions him to lead the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

"Who am I, that I should go?" he asks. "Hadn't you better ask someone else?"

To which God says, "I will be with you."

Moses casts about for another excuse. "When I say, 'the God of our ancestors sent me' and people ask, 'What is his name?' – what shall I tell them?"

God answers by uttering a word related to the verb 'to be'. *I AM.*

In the days of the Temple in Jerusalem, only the High Priest could utter this Name, and only in the Temple's inner sanctum, and only once a year, on the Day of Atonement. Otherwise, the Name was neither spoken nor heard.

But God speaks it to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

We presume we'll know God's revelation when we meet it. But will we? Will we turn aside and take off our shoes, or sit around plucking blackberries?

Christian faith teaches us that no one is yet fully alive who hasn't, at some point, turned aside from the plodding path we travel like weary commuters and stood with barefoot awe before the light of God's revelation, calling us down a road less travelled.

There's a frightening gulf between God's grandeur (God's "I-Am-Ness") and our littleness. Secularism rages at this. It hates to think we're 'little'. But to take the bread and drink the wine of Holy Communion, and to hear God's Word and sing 'Amen', is to comprehend two things. First, it's to sense the dizzying depth of the gulf between God and us. Yes, we are little. But secondly, it's also to know the gulf has been crossed. Crossed on *Jesus'* cross, at immense cost, and with what great love, for the liberation of creation. Doesn't this change the course of our lives?

Did I say two things? I meant three. The third is the mystery of eternity itself, revealed to Moses in a bush that burns but never burns out. Divine love never ends.

We've all had loves and friendships we wish would never end. We've sat around campfires having conversations so wonderful we wish they'd go on forever. But they don't. The fire goes out.

And yet, like a bush that's never consumed, *this* communion, *this* covenant, *this* conversation with God, will never burn out.

Here's another poem, this one by a doleful clergyman, R.S. Thomas:

*Life is not hurrying  
on to a receding future, nor hankering after  
an imagined past. It is the turning*

*aside like Moses to the miracle  
of the lit bush, to a brightness  
that seemed as transitory as your youth  
once, but is the eternity that awaits you.*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

“God is love, whose arms enfolding all the world in one embrace, with unfailing grasp are holding every child of every race. And when human hearts are breaking under sorrow’s iron rod, all the sorrow, all the aching, wrings with pain the heart of God.” Holy One, we pray for the Church, the world, each other, and ourselves.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ. You have promised to bless your Church so your Church may bless the world. You call the poor and outcast to take their place in the festive assembly of your New Covenant. Give power to your Church to honour your presence in the humble and the suffering. Make us see each other as brothers and sisters, gathered as one around your Table.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for those who are sick in body, mind, or spirit. Eternal God, in a flaming bush you promised deliverance to your people; and in the cross of Jesus you embraced our suffering and pain. In times of misery, show us the transforming power of your love. Heal and save all who cry out to you today.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for those treated as less than slaves, neglected by an economy that has no need for them, and feels no responsibility for them. We pray for those who work long hours at gruelling jobs, as your people once worked for Pharaoh, for pay too meagre to secure food and shelter. Awaken the conscience of rich people, rich nations, and the rich governments who do their bidding.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Holy One, give us grace not to pass by someone’s suffering or joy blindly or blithely. Give us eyes to see it, and hearts to share in it. Give us understanding and sympathy, and guard us from selfishness. Helps us to enter into each other’s joys and sorrows. Use our labour to gladden each other’s hearts.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Living Lord, your Word burns like fire within us. Give us bold and faithful hearts, that in your strength we may be unafraid to live by your Word and follow where your Holy Spirit leads us.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We remember before you with glad hearts and deep gratitude, those who have died and come alive in the communion of saints ...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Eternal God, help us to entrust the past to your mercy, the present to your love, and the future to your wisdom, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who is the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

**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**