

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

*The Second Sunday after Epiphany  
16 January 2022*

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

*Opening Words*

L: God is our light and our salvation.

**P: Therefore, we shall not fear.**

L: Let us worship God.

*Prayers of Adoration and Confession*

Loving God, the fountain of life, in your light we see light. In Jesus Christ you came to redeem us, and through your Holy Spirit you shower your gifts upon the Church. Draw us into a deeper union with you, keep us in the bond of peace, and bring all creation to worship before your throne; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

God, eternal and merciful, we confess our sin: the sin we deny and the sin we know too well; the wrong we have done and the good we have left undone. Mend our lives; deliver us from proud thoughts and vain desires. Help us, with true humility, to draw near to you and confide in your grace, finding in you our refuge and strength.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

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

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Almighty God, the light of your new creation now shines in the face of Jesus Christ, giving us joy in our sorrow, and friendship in our loneliness. May your people, illumined by this light, now shine with joy and praise for him, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen*

*An Assurance of Pardon*

L: "In Christ all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell." 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, prepare our hearts to receive your Word. Silence within us any voice but your own, that, by hearing, we may come to understand your will and trust in your truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

*The Psalm for the Day*

**Psalm 36** (*Human Wickedness and Divine Goodness*)

Transgression speaks to the wicked  
 deep in their hearts;  
 there is no fear of God  
 before their eyes.

For they flatter themselves in their own eyes  
 that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated.  
 The words of their mouths are mischief and deceit;  
 they have ceased to act wisely and do good.

They plot mischief while on their beds;  
 they are set on a way that is not good;  
 they do not reject evil.

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,  
 your faithfulness to the clouds.

Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,  
 your judgments are like the great deep;  
 you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God!  
 All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

They feast on the abundance of your house,  
 and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

For with you is the fountain of life;  
 in your light we see light.

O continue your steadfast love to those who know you,  
 and your salvation to the upright of heart!

Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me,  
 or the hand of the wicked drive me away.

There the evildoers lie prostrate;  
 they are thrust down, unable to rise.

*(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 John 2: 1-11** (*Jesus' miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Water turns into wine.*)

On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'

And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.'

His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'

Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim.

He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.'

So, they took it.

When the steward tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.'

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

**L:** This is the Gospel of our Risen Christ.

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

## *Some thoughts on the Reading*

**St John 2:10** *"The steward said to the bridegroom... 'You have kept the good wine until now.'"*

Like weddings today, this was a feast. People make toasts at a feast, and for that you need a drink in your hand. Perhaps Jesus gave a toast in the way Jews still give it, shouting "L'chaim – to life" – because, as St John tells us in the first chapter of his magnificent Gospel, "in him was life, and the life was the light of all people."

At first, Jesus was one guest among many. But he became the host, the one who provides. What happened? There was a catering nightmare. The wine ran out. This put joy in jeopardy. So, Jesus turned ordinary water into extraordinary wine.

Now, this isn't magic. St John calls Jesus' miracles 'signs', not 'magic'. Magic *tricks* you into believing something that's not so – a rabbit pulled from an empty hat, someone sawn in half and put back together. But a 'sign', in St John's Gospel is no

illusion. It *reveals* truth. A magician is showy, too. He says, "Look what I can do!" But Jesus works quietly, unobtrusively. No one *sees* the transformation happen. They just taste new wine where there was water just moments before.

"This was the first of his signs," says St John. And what did it reveal? "It revealed his glory, and his disciples believed him," he says.

St John says the water came from jars meant for Jewish purification rites – for *religious* ceremony, in other words. It's a sign of the change Jesus makes in religion, too, a change in God's relationship with us, a change as profound and wonderful as the transformation of ordinary water into vintage wine. It's just that good.

Of course, whenever we eat and drink, *we're* being transformed too – *physically*, at least. We become what we eat and drink, in one sense – or rather, conversely, what we eat becomes part of us. Time transforms us too. None of us looks as we did thirty years ago. We age, we change, and yet we endure. We're still the same person, aren't we? In one sense, yes; but in another, no. That's the mystery of transformation.

Our lives are a spiritual transformation, too, though it's not so automatic. It's possible to be spiritually dead – flatlining, unchanging – yet still be breathing and moving. But if we open our hearts to hear the question the Gospel puts to us, we will *grow*, spiritually. We'll become answers to that question. Then, through the wrinkles and creases of our ageing faces, our *forgiven* souls will reveal themselves, and *because* God has claimed us, joy in our hearts will shine in our eyes. We'll make what the old Communion Service used to call "greater progress in grace."

Now, Jesus performed this miracle near the *end* of the meal. And when the wine steward tasted it, he was surprised. He ran to the bridegroom – because he thought *he's* the host of this party, not Jesus – and he said, in effect, "Where'd you get this stuff? Most people serve good wine first. They save the lousy wine for later – you know, when they're drunk and can't tell the difference. But *you've* kept the best till last."

I like what William Temple has to say about this. He says, "Everyone puts forward *first* what is *best* about them. When people first meet us, they find us civil, friendly, considerate," he says. That's true, isn't it? At a job interview, or a first date, we only show our best side. We hide our surly, sullen side, our selfishness, our anger – what the psychologist Carl Jung called our 'shadow'.

Everyone has a shadow. Like the moon, we have a dark side. It's never turned to the sun. God sees it, of course. But at first, we only show off our bright side. We agree with each other too quickly. We grin too much. We're helpful and accommodating to a fault. Like Ned Flanders, we refuse to show anger, frustration, or discouragement, *even when they're called for*. We put forward what we *believe* is best about us. But we're wrong to restrict what's *best* about us only to those moods, talents, thoughts, and character traits that *others* find 'likable'. There's potential and energy in our unlikable shadow side – our anger, our dark moods, our frightening sides. They're not to be repressed or

got rid of. They're just waiting to be turned to the light. God sees them already and loves them, even when others don't.

Still, in front of each other, "Everyone puts forward *first* what they believe to be best," says William Temple. That's why guests get the best wine up front, at the feast's first course. Then what? Then the standards slip. "As they come to know us, especially if they have to live with us, they have to put up with the 'less good'," says Temple. That's true too. First impressions tarnish with time. Sour, stale wine flows from us, the bitter dregs. We show our shadows. How can we not? Anyone who has lived or worked with anyone else for any length of time will know what he means. The first façade falls. We expose our shadows, the dark side of the moon.

But Temple goes on: "In our communion with God it is not so; as we deepen our fellowship with God, made known in Christ, at every stage we may say, 'Thou hast kept the good wine until now.'"

In other words, at *God's* feast the very best only comes at the very end, at the consummation of everything. Maybe that's why this happens at a wedding feast. Weddings want to be consummated too, don't they? In work and friendship and family life, once we've seen, not the best but the worst; once we've accepted each other's foibles and failures and shadows; once we've weathered a hundred storms and fought each other's shadows; once the time for making a 'first impression' has long since past – then, *then*, if we can love and trust each other, we'll roll up sleeves and bring out the best in each other. Now we're really living. Not the fake façade, now, for the shadows have been brought into the light. We asked each other, "What should I do with my dark mood, the energy of my anger?" Here's what we do? We don't repress it. We turn it to a good purpose. This is what love does. It turns us to a good purpose. Only then does the best appear, because, like vintage wine, we've aged well. We've become what we're meant to be. The best has finally been brought out in us. But this is what God does for us through our Lord Jesus Christ, isn't it?

I know. We fear failure. We fear ageing. We fear loss and suffering and death. Endings make us weep. We lament the wrong turns we've made, the hasty words we can never take back, the deeds we can never undo, and the undone deeds we'll never get to do.

And yet, life began with hope and promise, didn't it? Think of your own childhood. No child fears ageing. Children can't wait to grow up, to get past the first course and throw themselves into life's main course. First, we relish change, then we grow to fear it, and turn stiff and stagnant. How odd. Why? What happens to us? Life wounds us – that's what happens. Life hurts us, so we fear life. Love hurts us, so refuse to trust it anymore. Someone snubbed us at Church, so we stopped going. It really gets that trivial, that silly – until all too soon, we come to life's final course, its end.

We live. We suffer. We *die*. What should we do as we approach the end? We need to look back to our birth and beginning, to remember with gratitude God's first

invitation to this feast called 'life'. We need to remember how excited we were to be part of it.

We also need to look ahead, with eyes tutored by faith (because our physical sight can't see all there is to see) – to look ahead to life's consummation, the life that knows no end at the Marriage Feast of the Lamb, where the wine never runs out, toasts are made, the bridegroom embraces the bride, and we turn to our neighbour and say, "This, *this* is what we've lived for. L'chaim – to life."

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

God of grace, we turn to you with thankful hearts, grateful for your care over all creation and your blessing on our lives in all their variety. We commit ourselves once more into your care and keeping.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for the whole Church of Christ, for the prospering of its life, and the deepening of its faith. Cast out our fear and place your love deeply into our heart. And with your love, give us strength and courage. Deepen our communion with one another in Christ, and grant that through the gifts your Spirit bestows upon us we may increase in faith, trust in your truth, and hope for the world to come.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for our own nation, and for those who work in government in this city and province, and for the high court of parliament, that they may govern with wisdom and justice, and for the common good.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for those who feel that life has turned against them and have fallen into despair; for those who feel unloved or abused, and those who cannot believe their life is a good gift from a good God. Pour down your mercy, your gentle healing and peace.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for all who are overworked or depressed, for all who feel lonely and have no one to turn to, and for all who feel tired and fed up with their isolation and exile from daily life. Loving Lord, protect and heal all who turn to you, and fill them with hope.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for those who have no home at all, remembering especially today the growing number of victims of poverty and loss, and all whose lives have been harmed by disaster, tragedy, and the Covid pandemic.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Holy One, awaken us with your voice, call us by name, and enlighten our minds with your grace, that we may bravely turn and give ourselves to you. With hope for the world to come, we give thanks for those who have died, especially those whom we have known and loved, whom we name before you in our hearts...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

O Lord, you made us for yourself, and we are restless without you. Abide with us in times of joy and be near us when hardship comes. Help us to know and trust you in this life, and in the life to come, still to be with you; through Jesus Christ our Saviour, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be glory and praise, world without end.

**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**