

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

*The 22nd Sunday after Pentecost
24 October 2021*

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

Opening Words

L: Jesus said, "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them,

P: and we will come to them and make our home with them."

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Almighty God, in whom we live and move and have our being, we give you all praise. We come with devotion to you, Christ our Redeemer. We honour you, Holy Spirit, source of hope and life of our life. Receive our praise, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our one true and living God.

Forgiving Lord, you are near to the broken-hearted; you save those who are crushed in spirit. Give us grace and courage to cast off our sins and turn to you for healing. Show us in Christ the sure path of salvation and strengthen us to follow gladly in the way of the Gospel.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us

O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed: give unto your servants that peace which the world cannot give; that our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments, and free from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." 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 Guide us, O God, by your Word and Holy Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover our peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 34: 1-8 (*Praise for Deliverance from Trouble*)

I will bless the Lord at all times;
 his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
 My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
 let the humble hear and be glad.
 O magnify the Lord with me,
 and let us exalt his name together.
 I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
 and delivered me from all my fears.
 Look to him, and be radiant;
 so your faces shall never be ashamed.
 This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord,
 and was saved from every trouble.
 The angel of the Lord encamps
 around those who fear him, and delivers them.
 O taste and see that the Lord is good;
 happy are those who take refuge in him.

(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 Mark 10: 46-52 (*Jesus heals a blind man.*)

They came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside.

When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.'

And they called the blind man, saying to him, 'Take heart; get up, he is calling you.' So, throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.

Then Jesus said to him, 'What do you want me to do for you?'
 The blind man said to him, 'My teacher, let me see again.'
 Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has made you well.' Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

L: This is the Gospel of our Risen Lord.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St Mark 10:49 *"Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here.'"*

There was always an urgency in Jesus' steps. He went briskly from place to place – teaching, healing, gathering followers – as if he were on a tight schedule, which, in a way he was. He had an urgent appointment with the cross.

But passing through Jericho that day, Jesus stopped in his tracks. For a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, panhandling by the roadside, shouted his name out loud. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" he cried.

"Jesus stood still" says St Mark. At the sound of his name, he stood still.

I once heard my name shouted in a busy, noisy airport. I thought, "They're on to me!", and I dropped my duty-free bag. But no, it was just someone I knew sneaking up on me. Our being in the same place at the same time was pure coincidence. If he'd shouted any other name, I'd never have heard him. But if someone shouts our name, we can't *not* hear it. Even in the din of life's loud background noise, we must turn and look. In the same way, at the calling of *his* name, Jesus turned and looked.

Doesn't he still? When we 'call on the name of the Lord', as we do here, aren't we calling out to him as Bartimaeus did that day, begging him to turn and see, to hear and help us? But then what happens? Look out. Then he, in turn, calls out to us.

"Jesus stood still and said, 'Call him here,'" says St Mark. And it's as though, by standing still, Jesus' transferred all his 'kinetic energy' to blind Bartimaeus, stuck by the side of the road. He threw off his beggar's cloak, leapt to his feet, and ran to Jesus. Mind you, he ran blindly.

"What would you have me do for you?" Jesus asked.

"Make me *see* again," said Bartimaeus.

"He regained his sight," says Mark, "and he followed Jesus on the way."

"Faith comes by hearing," said St Paul. Hearing is the organ of faith. But so is seeing. Not *physical* sight, not as such. After all, "faith is the conviction of things *not* seen," says Hebrews. But faith isn't *blind* conviction. It's rooted in reality.

We see the world not just as we behold it, physically, with our eyes, but also as we behold it with our 'inner sight'. Our 'insight' and desire, our knowledge and

conviction – we always wear these ‘spectacles’, and they colour everything we see. They blind us to some things, yes, but they show us others. They reveal physical sight alone is too blind to see. We can envision things, not as they *are*, but as they might be. This kind of seeing is visionary and imaginative. It happens in the mind and the heart because it draws on our knowledge and our desire.

For example, imagine hiking with a dedicated birdwatcher. At the end of the trail the birdwatcher asks, “How many birds did you see along the way?”

“Three,” we say, rather proudly. “I think one of them was blue jay. What about you?”

“Not many today. I only saw thirty-seven birds, eighteen different species.”

Why the difference? It must be this: the birdwatcher’s knowledge and love of birds *enabled* him to see what we failed to see.

Just as we’re primed to turn and look when someone calls our name, so we’re primed to envision the fulfilment and the healing of our hopes and desires. We’re on the lookout for these. But physical sight can’t do it on its own. Only something like ‘faith’ can see things, not just as they visibly *are*, but as they might become. This kind of seeing is visionary and imaginative.

Where we see a leaky run-down shack, someone who loves restoring old things already ‘sees’, as if in a vision, the renovated home it will become. In a neglected tangle of weeds, a gardener envisions the flowers and fruits she’ll grow there in the spring. And in the blind beggar named Bartimaeus (and in us), Jesus already sees what a neglected child of God will yet become.

But the seeing is two-way. Despite his blindness, Bartimaeus ‘sees’ Jesus. He sees him truly, in his *mind’s* eye, in the light lit by hope. He sees a healer who abounds in mercy. “Make me *see* again,” he pleads.

“Your faith has made you well,” says Jesus. Meaning what? He might mean this. “Your faith *already* sees me very well, doesn’t it? Let me restore your physical sight so it matches your *in-sight*. Then you’ll be whole at last.” For that would be a symbol of salvation, wouldn’t it? Salvation is the wholeness we feel when our inner life rhymes with our outer life. They’re healed, in harmony, no longer at odds with each other.

When King Lear meets Gloucester on the wild heath, in Act 4 of Shakespeare’s play, Lear is mad with grief, shattered by loss, and utterly disillusioned. Everything he knew about his life turns out to be wrong. He’s at odds with himself and the world. He says to Gloucester with bitterness, like a dishevelled drunk on a barstool, “You see how this world goes.”

But Gloucester can’t see. He’s blind. His eyes have been horribly gouged out. So, he answers Lear this way: “I see it, *feelingly*...”

What does he mean? He navigates the world by touch, now, the way we would do if we crossed a cluttered room in the pitch dark, *feeling* our way. His hands are his eyes now. “I see the world, *feelingly*...,” he says.

But he means more, doesn't he? What he feels from *within* corresponds with the world *without*. He no longer sees with raw, physical sight, no; but by the *feelings* that rise in his heart, he *does* see the truth of things. By his own grief, he knows the grief of kings, even King Lear. Not with his eyes, no, but with a kind of faith, "I see it, feelingly," he says.

It's no wonder, as Jesus hurried 'on the way' to his appointment with the cross, when he heard his name being called in a cry for healing and help, he simply *had* to stand still. He stood still so that Bartimaeus could leap to his feet and run to him and follow him. A bright vision had long been lit *within* the blind beggar. Now it stood in *front* of him, calling him. He saw, with healed eyes, his deepest desire and hope.

Prayers of Intercession

O God, living and true, what your prophets declared and your poets have sung of your goodness, we now see in the light of the glory shining in the face of Jesus Christ. We pray for the Church, the world, and each other.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ. Wherever your Church is tired or complacent, anxious or despairing, kindle a deeper love of worship, a stronger will to follow, and a more fervent faith to live by; and, that we may obtain what you promise, teach us to love what you command.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

God, our refuge and our strength, you raise up servants to reform and renew your Church in the light of your Word. Defend your Church in our day and keep us ever faithful to the truth that makes us free.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Because it would cheer Christ's heart, we pray for those who are outcast and despised, who beg and plead for help and no one listens. We pray for those who live in paralyzing fear of the pandemic. Give them courage to face their fear. We pray for those who are dying, that as their life draws to a close, you may draw closer to them.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Have mercy on those afflicted by blindness or the impairment of their eyesight. Protect and defend them in their vulnerability and strengthen them with your inner light.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Loving One, your Son Jesus Christ was made perfect by the things he suffered. Have compassion on those who travel through illness and pain. Uphold their faith, that they may trust and not be afraid; give them the comfort and strength of your presence.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We remember with thanksgiving those who have died in the faith, especially those known and dear to us. Grant that, like them, we may find our peace and rest in you, that when our days on earth are over, we may share the joy of everlasting life...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)....*

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy One, your Son has shown us how to love one another. May our love for you overflow into a joyous life and be a light in the dark places of the world.

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, forever. 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**