

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

*The 24th Sunday after Pentecost
(Remembrance Sunday)
7 November 2021*

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

Opening Words

L: God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in time of trouble,

P: therefore we shall not fear.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of time and eternity, before your face the nations rise and fall. Words fail us when we come to praise the fullness of your Word spoken in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Let our world know his peace this day. Give us the hope his Holy Spirit brings, and unite our praise with the worship of the whole Church in all times and places.

Merciful one, with sorrow we confess that in our hearts we keep alive the passion and pride that lead to hatred and war. We have followed the devices and desires of our own hearts. We love profit more than peace. We seek our comfort at the expense of your justice. Make us want your forgiveness. We wish to be rid of all that grieves you, and to walk joyously in your light.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Holy Lord, your ways are ways of gentleness, and all your paths are peace; teach us, who live only in the power of your forgiveness, to forgive one another. Heal our divisions, cast out our fear, and renew our faith in your purpose of goodwill and peace on earth; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, be glory and praise, world without end. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." May God grant us pardon, true repentance, and bring us to eternal life.

Prayer for Illumination Holy One, strengthen us to receive your Word and to live the faith we confess; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 127 (*The blessing of God*)

Unless the Lord builds the house,
 those who build it labour in vain.
 Unless the Lord guards the city,
 the guard keeps watch in vain.
 It is in vain that you rise up early
 and go late to rest,
 eating the bread of anxious toil;
 for he gives sleep to his beloved.
 Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord,
 the fruit of the womb a reward.
 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
 are the sons of one's youth.
 Happy is the man who has
 his quiver full of them.
 He shall not be put to shame
 when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.

(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 12: 38-44 (*Jesus warns his disciples about the scribes, and praises a widow's example.*)

As Jesus taught, he said, 'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets! They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

He sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the crowd putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. A poor widow came and put in two small copper coins, which are worth a penny.

Then he called his disciples and said to them, 'Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have

contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.'

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

P: Thanks be to God.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St Mark 12:43 *"...this poor widow put in more than all those who contribute to the treasury."*

Imagine a line forming outside the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus sits opposite the treasury box, where (says Mark) "many rich people put in large sums." Jesus sees a poor widow join the back of the queue. She puts her money in too.

"Did you see what just happened?" he asks his disciples.

"No," they say. "What happened?"

"This poor widow put *more* into the treasury than all those rich folks. Amazing."

"I don't think so, Lord," they might have said. "She put her two cents in, yes, but *they* emptied big bags of silver coins. You could hear them clinking from here. How could hers be more than theirs?"

"I'm not talking about its value to the Temple," he said. "I'm talking about its value to *her*, what it meant to her, and what it cost her. The rich folk gave out of their surplus, their slush fund. They won't miss it. *She* will. She put everything she's worth into that treasury box. How wonderful." he said.

Isn't this one more example of Jesus' penetrating vision for those people and things that no one else pays attention to? He grasps their meaning. He wants his disciples to see this meaning too. Because, at this point in the story, Good Friday is looming, and he, too, will give away his whole living with everything he's worth.

We do reveal something about our life's meaning – not everything, but something – in how we spend our money, our time, and who we pay attention to. Have you noticed how we use the same words when we apportion our time and attention as we do when we dole out money? We *spend* time, we *pay* attention, we *give* of ourselves, as though our 'time' and 'attention' and 'selves' were like money in our wallets, which, in a way, they are.

Sometimes, if we come across a lost shopping list in the parking lot, it's fun to guess what kind of activity would require the acquisition of such an odd array of things – for what possible purpose, and what could it *mean*? Someone made a collection of lost shopping lists that others had found. Here's one: diapers, earplugs, Pepto-Bismol, duct tape. (What were they up to that weekend, I wonder?) Here's another. "Cat litter, masking tape, rubbing alcohol, band-aids." (Does someone have an angry cat?) But I like this one best: "milk, eggs, vodka." (The breakfast of champions!)

The widow Jesus saw had just one item on her list. It said, “put all my coins into the Temple treasury.” Why would Jesus praise her for this? Isn’t she foolish? What will become of her now? Perhaps she’s being exploited. If the mob threatened her and said, “Give us everything you’ve got,” and she did, there’d be no grounds for praise, would there? Is it any better if the Temple takes it all?

Jesus *did* say, “Beware the scribes,” those tycoons who wear long robes, say loud prayers, and hog the best seats at the banquet, not to see but to *be* seen. But Jesus isn’t saying, “Don’t show off. No one likes a show-off”. For one thing, show-offs sometimes have something *worth* showing off. What’s wrong with that? What’s more, some people can wear a long robe with aplomb and distinction (case in point!). And some people rightly command our respect. Why should we begrudge them an honourable seat?

But there’s more going on here, isn’t there? “Beware the scribes,” says Jesus. Why? “Because their prayers are only about ‘keeping up appearances’, to distract us from the way they devour widows’ houses, *that’s* why,” he says. These scribes infest our neighbourhood today. They own property, they hike rents, and they turf the most vulnerable people onto the street. Sure, they were already making a profit, but now they’ll make a bigger one, and isn’t that the point of life? And they get away with it. We know what Jesus thinks about that: “What does it profit to *own* the whole world but lose your whole *soul*, for God’s sake?”

Here’s what I think. I think we all have a deep desire embedded within us, not just to *get* all we can from life, that silly ‘bucket list’ of things we’ve chosen to own and experience, and then post on Facebook. Our lives are not about *us* in that sense. That’s a modern, empty delusion – it’s all about me. It’s killing our souls and wrecking the planet. Our lives are truly about what or whom we *serve*. And what or whom we serve says so much more about us than our shopping lists do. What or whom we serve is revealed in our relationships to other people, in those good causes we spend ourselves on, and in those beautiful truths we pay attention to. These matter because, as it turns out, *we* matter to God. *That* is the source of our dignity and worth: what God sees in *us*.

Isn’t that why Jesus notices the poor widow? She puts everything she’s worth into the Temple, not because Temple has a budget shortfall and it needs a new roof, but because the Temple *symbolises*, to her the most beautiful of all beauties, and the most truthful of all truths. It’s not that she offers her whole self to the bricks and mortar of the Temple, *materially*. Neither does she wake up on the Sabbath Day and say to herself, “The weather’s good, and my friend cancelled our luncheon date. I haven’t been to the Temple for months. Maybe I’ll drop in and hear the Rabbi’s sermon. Maybe I’ll *get* something from it for once. Probably not, but maybe.” No, she hasn’t come to ‘get’ something. She has come to act out her life’s complete self-giving, *symbolically*, so that she can better orient every aspect of her inner and outer life in a direction that will be worthy of all her serving and giving in the world. Another word for that is *worship*.

Everyone worships something, even if, tragically, it's just their fragile ego. Or worse, someone else's. Hadn't we better worship that which is *worth* our self-giving?

Our whole lives are an offering to someone. Worship seeks out the source of all real value. We can't evade or avoid this. But we dare not offer our surplus self, our fake self, our slush-fund self. Jesus will see right through that. "Those hypocritical scribes will receive the greater condemnation," he says. We can only offer *truly* that which is truly *ours*, our *real* self, warts and all – even our dark and broken hearts.

Like soldiers returning from war, we're blemished, scarred by wounds life has inflicted, and the wounds we've inflicted on ourselves. But Jesus Christ – that man of sorrows, acquainted with grief – doesn't require us, before we offer ourselves to him, 'to pack up our troubles in our old kit bag and smile, smile, smile'. Because, for one thing, that smile may be as fake and vaporous as the Cheshire Cat's, and he can see right through it. It's far better, in the presence of Jesus Christ, 'to unpack our troubles from our old kit bag and weep, weep, weep'. That's not weakness, and it's not defeat. That way lies strength, faith, and the peace that comes from above.

He wants our whole self, you see, our entire living, just as he gave us his entire self on the cross.

Prayers of Intercession

Holy One, you hold the world within your hands, and we are your children. By the grace we have received from you, and with our eyes upon life's heartache and strife, we pray for the peace of the world.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ, for those who live their faith in the face of danger and persecution. Guard your Church also from the dangers of affluence and arrogance.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O Lord, you have taught us that to gain the whole world and to lose our souls is a great and stupid folly. Grant us grace so to lose ourselves in delight for your truth that we may find ourselves anew in the life of grace, and so to forget ourselves in the doing of your will that we may be remembered in the life of your eternal kingdom.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Give us grace to learn of your stern judgments which overtake us when we set neighbour against neighbour, and nation against nation. Call us to account. Bring an end to all tyranny, violence, and corruption in high places. Give us the wisdom and will to fashion better ways to live our common life.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Bless young people, that they may never see the cruelty of war and its destruction. Grant that in their generation, and in their way, they may be faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Bless those displaced by war, refugees who have lost their livelihood, family, security, and home. Bless those whom we once called 'enemy', and those who served in times of war on our behalf. Let your healing reach those who are wounded in body or languish in spirit, and those whose faith has been shaken by what they have seen and endured.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Finally, rejoicing in the communion of saints, remembering all those whom you have gathered from the storm of war into the peace of your presence, and whose memory we treasure, we keep silence pray for ourselves and those things that concern us most...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Come to us, Lord Christ, when all around us seems dark and uncertain, when our faith is low and we cannot feel you near, and we find it hard to pray. Turn our deep feeling into determination, and our determination into deeds, that as people of peace, we may live for the Prince of peace, to whom, with you and Holy Spirit, be all glory and praise.

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**