

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

2nd Sunday after Pentecost
10:30 a.m.
14 June 2020

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

Opening Words

L: In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us,

P: And sent his Son into the world so that we might live through him.

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. We worship and adore you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, world without end.

Gracious God, we confess there are times when our sorrow is too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and too deep to undo. Lift the burden we can no longer bear; take away the condemnations we level at ourselves and each other. Set us free from all past wrong and hurt, and open a future where we can begin again and grow in grace.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

God of compassion, you have opened the way for us, and brought us to yourself. Pour your love into our hearts, that, overflowing with joy, we may share the blessings of your realm; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: "The gift of God is eternal life 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

Holy One, the unfolding of your Word gives light. Shine upon us now, illumine your truth and enlighten our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 116 (*Thanksgiving for Recovery from Illness*)

I love the Lord, because he has heard
 my voice and my supplications.
 Because he inclined his ear to me,
 therefore I will call on him as long as I live.
 The snares of death encompassed me;
 the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
 I suffered distress and anguish.
 Then I called on the name of the Lord:
 'O Lord, I pray, save my life!'
 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
 our God is merciful.
 The Lord protects the simple;
 when I was brought low, he saved me.
 Return, O my soul, to your rest,
 for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
 For you have delivered my soul from death,
 my eyes from tears,
 my feet from stumbling.
 I walk before the Lord
 in the land of the living.
 I kept my faith, even when I said,
 'I am greatly afflicted';
 I said in my consternation,
 'Everyone is a liar.'
 What shall I return to the Lord
 for all his bounty to me?
 I will lift up the cup of salvation
 and call on the name of the Lord,
 I will pay my vows to the Lord
 in the presence of all his people.
 Precious in the sight of the Lord
 is the death of his faithful ones.

O Lord, I am your servant;
 I am your servant, the child of your serving-maid.
 You have loosed my bonds.
 I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice
 and call on the name of the Lord.
 I will pay my vows to the Lord
 in the presence of all his people,
 in the courts of the house of the Lord,
 in your midst, O Jerusalem.
 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**

The Reading for the Day

Romans 5: 1-8 *(God's love for sinners, i.e. you)*

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

Romans 5:8 *"...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

Early on, we learn how to show gratitude. But we're not always up front about why. I might say 'thank you' to earn your favour, or from fear you'll hate me if I don't.

That's one way. The other way is to say 'thank you' from a pure feeling of gratitude, from un-repayable indebtedness.

Outwardly, both ways look identical. "Thank you," I say. But, like two rockets launched on a trajectory that differs by only half a degree, their paths diverge over time. They become different ways of life. Did I thank you because I had to? Or did I thank you freely, joyfully, for no other reason than gratitude itself?

There's a lesson in faith here.

"Christ died for us while we were still sinners," says Paul. Not because we'd got down on our knees, beat our breasts, and said, "Jesus, I'm so sorry." And not on account of some original lustre shining through the tarnish, either. No, it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us.

Salvation is not reward for virtue, not even the virtue of admitting we have no virtue. That turns faith into a surreptitious work. Salvation is a gift placed in our hands, not a medal pinned to our chests. We confess our sins not to ask God for forgiveness, but to thank God for already giving it.

When a boat capsizes at sea, the crew of the Coast Guard do not ask, "What sort of person is drowning? Is that person worthy of our rescue?" To qualify for rescue, there are just two things you need to be: i) you need to be human, and ii) you need to be drowning.

So with salvation in Christ. "While we were yet sinners, lost and drowning, Christ died for us." And this *proves* God's love for us, says St Paul. He means Jesus' death shows us this reality.

Do you remember Eliza Dolittle complaining to Henry Higgins?

"Don't talk of stars burning above; if you're in love, show me.

Tell me no dreams filled with desire; if you're on fire, show me."

Jesus Christ is what God *does* for us. His doing *shows* us the character of God. The gospel isn't a stock market rumour passed on by a man with 'insider information'. Jesus himself is the good news, the deed done, God's love in action.

So, if we profess faith in Jesus Christ, if we "lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord", that can only be from sheer gratitude for a love that's already there, already real.

We do not make our salvation by 'making believe'. We do not even search it out. It finds us. We can never make God love us any more or any less. We may play that game with each other, but with God it can't be done. Yet, it's not so easy to receive a gift with pure gratitude, is it? It unsettles us. "I don't deserve this. But I *want* to deserve it."

Have you been one of those people who fights over the bill in a restaurant? Something inside us insists, not just on paying our own way, but on paying for theirs too. Where would we do-gooders be without people to do good to? Something within in us wants to 'out-good' them rather than live with the burden of *their* gift to us.

I suspect people turn their backs on the Church when they feel this air of judgment descending on them, a smug self-assurance that those on the inside have for those on the outside.

But if some sceptic were to come to us and say, “*Show* me. Show me the gospel is true”, we couldn’t say, “Well, look at me! My life is perfect. I’m clean, shiny, and fragrant. I’m unstained by woe, unchained by sin, and untroubled by doubt. I believe in Jesus, I live a perfect life, nothing bad happens to me.”

No, no, no.

Instead, we’d take that person by the hand and lead them to the Baptismal Font and the Lord’s Table. We’d invite them to taste the same love we have tasted, as unready and imperfect as we are. We’d ‘show’ the truth of God, not by pointing to ourselves, but by pointing to this water, this bread and cup, these ‘signposts in a strange land’ that point to the grandest truth in the universe, to an event, the Word of God who *does* things, shows itself, and forever changes our reality.

In other words, we’d point to Jesus Christ, who, while we were yet sinners, died for us.

Prayers of Intercession

Holy One, what language shall we borrow to thank you, dearest friend? Yours is the gift of life itself, and yours the blessing upon it. From the smallest of seeds you cause magnificent trees to grow, and from the hardest of hearts you create loving ones. To you belong the mysteries of the universe. Fill us with the hope that does not disappoint. We pray to you.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ. Bless us with your life-giving Spirit, remake us in your image, and shape us to your purpose. Fill your Church with truth and peace. Where it is corrupt, purify it; where it is in error, direct it; where it is lazy, enliven it; where it is right, strengthen it; and where it is in need, provide for it.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for musicians who glorify you in the use of their talent, and for Church musicians who inspire us to songs of praise, psalms of thanksgiving, and the lament that eases sorrow. We pray for Lorraine Clark with gratitude in our hearts, and for Angus Sinclair, firm in the hope that comes from you.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for peace, wherever hatred erupts into words and weapons are drawn to threaten and to kill. Deepen true love and understanding in every human heart. Help us find peace in our own turbulent times, and to make peace in the world all around us.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for children and young people, across our land and throughout the world. Loving God, your Son Jesus Christ gathered children about him, and blessed them. Remind us how needful they are. Give us hearts that reach out to children, and wisdom to impart direction to them. Make us patient to bear frustrations with them; make us humble to listen to their words; and give us a lively imagination to enter into their dreams and hopes for the world.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those who will go hungry today, for refugees, for children orphaned by war, disease and famine. O God, the very Bread of Life, your Son Jesus Christ looked with compassion on the hungry, and fed them. Help us, who have so much, to help those who have so little, that out of the great bounty you supply in creation, the needs of all may be supplied.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We remember and give thanks for those who have died. Let us never forget the gift they were to us and to the world; and who, in their own way and in their time, loved and served you...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy One, you are the true life of all. Your love makes all things new. Plant seeds of joy in our hearts now, that we may live for him who died and was raised for us, Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, we give glory 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**