

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

*The 3rd Sunday of Easter
10:30 a.m.
26 April 2020*

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

Opening Words

L: Sing to God with joyful songs; tell of God's wonderful deeds.

P: Let us call on the name of the Lord with praise.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of glory, you cause the sun to rise and chase away the shadows of night. You raised Jesus Christ from death to life so that we would have new life in him. Fill us with the Holy Spirit, that we may know his power and peace within us; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Merciful One, you are so far above us we cannot fully know you, yet so deep within us we can never escape you. You search our hearts and know us. You meet us when we need you most. Forgive our false hope and unexamined prejudice. Forgive the illusions we fall for, the falsehoods we tell ourselves, and others, and you. We have seen you, but have not recognised you. Teach us you who you are, and accomplish your love within us.

Lord, have mercy upon us;

Christ, have mercy upon us;

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Immortal love, you walk beside us always. Clear the clouds of illusion that keep us from seeing you, that we may feel your truth burning in our hearts, receive your strength, and walk on in faith, no longer strangers and enemies, but pilgrims and friends on the road to your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be glory and praise, world without end. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: "If we have died with Christ we shall also live with him." May God grant us pardon, true repentance, and bring us to life everlasting.

P: May the peace of Christ be with us all.

Prayer for Illumination

Holy One, open our minds to understand the scriptures and ignite our hearts with wonder at the presence of the Risen Christ. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19 *(A song of thanks 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!’

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 Gospel Reading for the Day

St Luke 24: 13-35 *(Two disciples meet the Risen Lord on the Road to Emmaus.)*

On that same day, two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"

He asked them, "What things?"

They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?"

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

L: This is the Gospel of our Risen Christ

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Gospel Reading.

St Luke 24:16 “...their eyes were kept from recognising him.”

When I was an penniless student, I had summer jobs in the forests of Northern Ontario. I sometimes spent a rare day off by hitch-hiking from a lumber camp to a nearby town. One day, some men I worked with stopped to pick me up.

“We could tell it was you from way off,” they said. “We could tell from the way you walk.”

Until then, it hadn’t occurred to me that I walk in my own strange way. But we all have distinctive ways. Remember that Gershwin song?

*“The way you wear your hat, the way you sing off key,
the memory of all that: no, no they can’t take that away from me.”*

Everyone has something about them they can’t see in themselves; a certain look, a turn of phrase, a tone of voice, even the way they walk. But it’s instantly recognisable to those who know them. We store them in memory where they can’t be taken from us.

Why, then, do these disciples fail to recognise Jesus when he joins their weary walk from Jerusalem to Emmaus? “Their eyes were kept from recognising him,” says St Luke. Had resurrection changed Jesus’ features? Did it distort his voice and alter his gait? Or is it something to do with them?

“We’d hoped he was the one to redeem Israel,” they say. Messiahs do that. They make you hope in them. “We’d set our hearts on a potent player in the politics of power, a liberator of our people. But he couldn’t pull it off. He went and died a useless death.”

Because their heart’s hope failed them, they failed to recognise the real work of the real Messiah who walked beside them, alive. Their hope was false in the first place.

In 1949, some intellectuals who’d sympathised with communism wrote a book, *The God that Failed*. Communism had promised to satisfy human need, and to do it with justice. “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need”, wrote Karl Marx. A fine idea. But Stalin’s way was savage and brutal. His terror opened their eyes. If communism was their god, it failed them.

Others should write the same book about capitalism (actually, others have). Its faith in market forces (i.e., organised greed) fails to deliver justice, enriches few at the expense of many, ravages ecosystems, and massages our desires, making us want what we do not need. We’re so easily manipulated. The Church must take care not to mimic capitalism’s methods by peddling a ‘Jesus’ who’s one more item on a menu of ‘lifestyle enhancement products’, lest we mistake Jesus for Santa.

“Can’t you see how *necessary* it was for the Messiah to suffer these things and then to enter his glory?” asks Jesus. “How foolish you are. How slow of heart to believe.” Our sluggish hearts don’t know what they ought to want, do they?

As they walk, he teaches them from the Scriptures. His death is not a failure. It’s the work of God for the salvation of the world. Later they’ll say, “Didn’t our hearts burn within us we walked and talked?” But the heart is the seat of desire. Jesus’ teaching changes them from within. He teaches them how to desire properly in this life, and how to hope truly in the next.

Finally, they recognise him. They recognise him the way we still do: first in the Word that sounds from his mouth, and then in the Sacrament’s breaking of bread. Those distinctive gestures, stored away in memory, had already endeared him to them (“the way he breaks the bread, the way he tells the truth”). Seeing them again, they see it’s him.

But in their very moment of vision, he vanishes. Why? The Risen Christ won’t be nailed down to a cross made of wood or a fantasy made of wishes. He won’t fill our stockings. Instead, he fulfils our *true* need, which is to recognise him who sees and loves us; and so become the strange self we can’t yet see, but *he* does. A child of God made in the image of his love.

Prayers of Intercession

Holy God, our Father, we offer prayer through Jesus Christ in the power of your Spirit.

We pray for the Church, for every branch of the vine that is Christ, throughout the world, across our land, and in our neighbourhood. We pray for Elmwood Avenue Church. We long for the comfort and joy of your sanctuary; we miss the faces and voices of friends. When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain, let your loving touch call us to life again. Walk beside us. Make our hearts burn within us at the sound of your voice, open our eyes to your glory, and teach us to rejoice.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer.

We bring you those who suffer, exhausted by illness and fear. We pray for all who have been afflicted by the COVID-19 virus, and for those who fear it will invade their households and infect those dearest to them. We pray for those who will die alone. When the shadow of death is falling, make bright with your presence the path that passes through darkness.

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

We pray for those who work to discover new drugs, vaccines, and treatments for our physical and mental health. We pray for scientists and researchers, who, through your gifts of curiosity and intelligence, see deep patterns behind tangled data, and push

back the frontiers of our knowledge of your creation. Sustain them in their work in ways that make it become your work too. Teach us to use the knowledge yielded by their efforts in ways that are loving and just.

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

We pray for those made poorer and hungrier during this pandemic. Bring this time of isolation to a swift end, that we may restore our economic life and share in the blessings of society. Put your justice into our common life. Give us leaders with courage, unafraid to say when they are wrong, but diligently desiring to do what is right.

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

We remember those who feel alone and forgotten. Keep watch, dear Lord, with those work or watch when night falls. Give your angels charge over those who sleep and those lie awake with worry. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for your love's sake.

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

We thank you for those who have died, who loved us well, and for the comforts of memory. Stay with us, Lord, when the day is far spent and our night is at hand. Kindle our hearts on the way, that we may recognise you in the scriptures, in the breaking of bread, and in each other...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*...

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

God of life, when the road ahead is uphill and endless; when the burdens we shoulder bend our backs down; when joy has gone and our lives have no music in them, flood our path with your light. Turn our eyes to where the skies are filled with promise; tune our hearts to the music of the spheres. Put your life in our hearts, that we may become good companions to all who walk with us on the long road of life.

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**