

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

3rd Sunday after Pentecost
10:30 a.m.
21 June 2020

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

Opening Words

L: Give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good.

P: God's love endures forever.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy One, you are light to the minds that know you, life in the souls who love you, and strength in the hearts that seek you. Help us so to desire your will that we may want to serve you, whose service is perfect freedom. Glory be to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

O God, you are merciful and just. Do we hid from your presence? You face us with the truth of our lack of love; you uncover the layers of our illusions; you pierce us with a sword that heals; and you cleanse us with a purging fire. Still you refuse to let us go. Remake us in the image of your costly love. Let your grace flow through our human nature, to perfect, pardon, and restore us to you, and so to our true selves.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to spend ourselves and not to heed the wound; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and not seek reward, save that of knowing you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: Jesus said, "Those who lose their life for my sake will find it." 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 86 *(A Prayer in the Face of Danger)*

Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me,
 for I am poor and needy.
 Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
 save your servant who trusts in you.
 You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord,
 for to you do I cry all day long.
 Gladden the soul of your servant,
 for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
 For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
 abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.
 Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer;
 listen to my cry of supplication.
 In the day of my trouble I call on you,
 for you will answer me.

There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
 nor are there any works like yours.
 All the nations you have made shall come
 and bow down before you, O Lord,
 and shall glorify your name.
 For you are great and do wondrous things;
 you alone are God.
 Teach me your way, O Lord,
 that I may walk in your truth;
 give me an undivided heart to revere your name.
 I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart,
 and I will glorify your name for ever.
 For great is your steadfast love towards me;
 you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

O God, the insolent rise up against me;
 a band of ruffians seeks my life,
 and they do not set you before them.
 But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,
 slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.
 Turn to me and be gracious to me;
 give your strength to your servant;
 save the child of your serving-maid.
 Show me a sign of your favour,
 so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
 because you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

(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

St Matthew 10: 24-39 *(There's a hard road ahead. Don't fear it.)*

Jesus said: 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.

'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up

the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

L: This is the Gospel of the Risen Christ.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St Matthew 10:34 *"I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."*

I don't like these words. But I must hear them. They remind me that a life of faith is not a game or hobby. Matters of life and death are at stake.

"I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." So much for 'gentle Jesus meek and mild', the harmless rabbi who loves children, speaks softly, and bids us only to say happy things, think good thoughts, and try a bit harder to play well with each other.

If this were all Jesus had lived for, who can fathom what he died for? This 'Mr Rogers of Galilee' doesn't square with the Gospel's vivid witness. It's made from the desires of a society that won't stand for divine criticism. It wants divine affirmation, *only* – a life of comfort built on comfortable lies.

But no. There's so much force in what Jesus says and does. If we let him loose on the way we live, play our politics, and organise our society, we'd either have to change utterly, or we'd have to rise up and kill him all over again. Instead we do neither and play 'let's pretend'.

No wonder the Church is meek and mild, its clergy ineffectual 'nice guys'. But Jesus claims the power to undo our lives as they are right now. Consider his more demanding sayings:

"Those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

"Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor."

"You cannot serve God *and* wealth."

"Blessed are you when you're persecuted for doing what's right."

"What does it profit if you gain the whole world but lose your soul?"

"Give to everyone who begs from you."

"Love your enemies."

"Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me"

"If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away."

Which brings us back to this one: "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Yet Jesus struck no one with fist or club or sword. He counselled his disciples "to turn the other cheek". And on the eve of his own death, he said, "all who take the sword shall die by the sword." Jesus launched no jihad, crusade, or holy war. There's something obscene about killing in his name.

So, his sword is not made from steel, is it? It's the sharply spoken *word* that cleaves through falsehoods like a hot knife through cold butter, exposing the lies we live by. Who would want this?

When St Matthew's gospel came to be written, obedience to the claims of faith strained old loyalties. It meant saying not "Caesar is Lord", but "Jesus is Lord." That could earn you a prison term, maybe a death sentence. Is it any wonder a Roman father forbade his children from becoming Christian? It would only bring shame on the family.

So, that's the context for Jesus' other disturbing words: "I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother...and one's foes will be members of one's own household." Not a happy prospect, is it?

Yet this, too, points to the disruptive truth of Christianity, a truth that (if it's acknowledged, if it's lived) may just give birth to a new freedom, precisely *because* it requires a new obedience, one stretching even the oldest and strongest of bonds to the breaking point. "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me," says Jesus – a line the 'family values' brigade ignores.

Jesus warned his friends and followers. "If they malign me – and they will – how much more will they malign you." And yet, still, "what I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops."

Three times, in short order, he tells them not to fear – not to fear the truth, and not to fear those who'd persecute them for it. For the way of life is to hear the truth and live by it. "I am the way, the truth, and the life," he said. Doesn't *that* make sense?

"So, do not fear," says Jesus. For fear brings out the worst in us. If fear gets hold of us, we may flee the risky business of doing our true work in life. We'll fail at being our *true* selves, our 'soul', and miss the whole point of being who we are. To calm our fear, we'll be a *false* self instead, too afraid to feel and think and speak and live as we ought. In other words, we'll reject Jesus' claim on our lives and fit ourselves to the call of other, lesser claims and people.

"But whoever denies me – and whoever denies their true self, whom I loved and died for – I will also deny before my Father in heaven," he said. "For how will we know it's *you* we're talking about?"

The peace of Jesus Christ we routinely – and naively? – wish for each other is not the bland absence of conflict. It's the disturbing presence of his love and justice, judging us in order to love us, unmaking us so we may be re-made.

In other words, it's 'the peace that passes all understanding', and Jesus gives it to us, not as the world gives, not as false comfort, but as the gift of his love at the cost of his life. And all he asks is that we love him in return, not to deny him but to be 'true' to him; and, in the power of his Spirit, to live as fearlessly and truthfully as he did.

And when we fail? To be forgiven and fail better the next time.

Prayers of Intercession

God, eternal and loving, in every time and place and circumstance your people call on you, rejoicing in your love and cherishing your truth. Hear the prayers of our hearts.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for the Church of Jesus Christ around the world, across our land, and in our own neighbourhood. Bless Elmwood Avenue Church and all who look upon it as your house of peace. Holy Lord, in Jesus Christ you set us free from sin and death. Give us grace to follow him, who gave himself for us, and to give ourselves to him, who gives life to us.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those places on earth where there is tragedy, accident, and death. God of compassion, you watch our world, and weave from its tragedy and terror emblems of your healing and grace. Do this now, we pray; surround those struck by illness and sorrow and death a strong sense of your presence and love

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O God of strength and mercy, hear and help those who tremble in the darkness of temptation and addiction of any kind. Stretch out your hand to them, hold your light before them, recall them from their wandering, and restore them to their better selves, and so to you.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for all who are ill in body, mind, or spirit. Heal and restore them. We thank you, too, for those whose health has been restored; for the skill of physicians, the kindness of caregivers, and the generosity of friends; and through it all for your unfailing promise and presence.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy One, when our hearts are full of fear, empower us with your love and command us with your truth. Give us courage to be ourselves and strength to love each other. Let them be antidotes for fear.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O Lord of heaven and earth, we remember those who have died, who served you in this life and now rest in your presence; for those whom we have known, and for the great number no longer remembered by anyone on earth, but named and loved by you.

Save us and help us, that at the last we may join with them to see you face to face, and know you even as we are known by you...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Eternal Spirit, living God, in whom we live and move and have our being, all that we are, and have been, and shall be is already known to you, down to the very secrets of our hearts, and all that rises to trouble us. Holy flame, burn within us; cleansing wind, blow through us; fountain of living water, well up within us, that we may love and praise in deed and in truth; and to you be glory, with the Father and the Son, one God 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**