

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

The 5th Sunday of Easter
10:30 a.m.
10 May 2020

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

Opening Words

L: The Lord's unfailing love and mercy never cease;

P: Fresh as the morning and sure as the sunrise.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy One, your Word speaks us into being. Your Spirit breathes life into all living things. We lift up our hearts to join the symphony of praise sounding forth through plants and animals on earth, moon and sun in the sky, and by saints and angels in heaven. Glory be to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Merciful God, draw near to the broken-hearted; save us when we are crushed in spirit. If we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed; if we have failed to love you with heart, mind and strength; if we have disdained our neighbours in their need, or refused their help for ours; forgive us now. Show the path our lives should take; work your will within us; and mould us into a truer image of your love.

Lord, have mercy upon us;

Christ, have mercy upon us;

Lord, have mercy upon us.

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. Give us grace to love one another, to follow in the way of his good commandments, and to share in his risen life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: "In him was life, and the life was the light of all people." 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 Lord, lead us in the way, instruct us in the truth, and fill us with the life everlasting; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 31: 1-5, 15-16 *(A prayer for deliverance.)*

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.
Incline your ear to me;
rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me,
a strong fortress to save me.
You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.
Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.
My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.
Let your face shine upon your servant;
save me in your steadfast love.

(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 John 14: 1-14 *(Jesus reveals that he is the way to the Father.)*

Jesus said: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.'

Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?'

Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.'

Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

'The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves.

'Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.'

L: This is the Gospel of our Risen Christ

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Gospel Reading.

St John 14:6 *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."*

On their own, these words could be mistaken for a 'meme' gone 'viral'. But they're embedded in a long conversation Jesus had with his disciples on the night before he died. They belong there, not on a T-shirt.

He knew he was about to leave them. And whatever would come next, he told them not to fear it. "Let not your hearts be troubled," he said. For there was more going on than they could imagine, and God was at work in all of it. "I'm going on ahead of you, I'm preparing a place for you. You know the way."

Now, 'disciple' means 'learner'. That makes Jesus their teacher. And every teacher remembers that one pupil who was always putting his hand up. Good teachers enjoy them (up to a point). For Jesus, it's Thomas. Was he really such a 'doubter'? Maybe he was really a fantastic questioner. He raises his hand. Jesus knew he would.

"Yes, Thomas?"

"Umm, Jesus? I don't follow you. We *don't* know where you're going. How can we know the way?"

Philip clears his throat and joins in. "Sir? If I may make a suggestion, perhaps you could just *show us the Father*. You know, just tell us the answer from the back of the text book."

"You mean the answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything?"

"Yes! Then we'll be satisfied. (Well, *Thomas* won't.)"

Philip may be the sort of pupil whose questions are really complaints. "Do we have to work this out for ourselves? Can't you just tell us so we can memorise it for the final exam?"

But good teachers don't do this, do they? They show us the steps, then make us make the journey ourselves, coaching us as we go. Life requires it. We can't learn to ride a bicycle, or play the piano, or swim in the lake without, at some point, getting on a bike, sitting down at the piano, and jumping in the lake. No one can do this for us.

So, Jesus says, in effect, "Thomas, Philip, and the rest of you disciples asleep in the back row...didn't we cover this already?" Or rather, as St John's gospel reports it, Jesus says this: "Have I been with you all this time and you still don't know me? Whoever has really seen me *has* seen the Father. How can you say, 'show us the Father'?"

And yet, in the midst of this talk between teacher and disciples, Jesus does, in fact, blurt out the answer, as teachers sometimes do when the bell is about to ring. Thomas, remember, had said, "We don't know where you're going; we don't know the way." But Jesus answers by saying, in effect, "Yes, you do. You just don't know you know it. You know me, don't you? Well, *I* am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one reaches the Father – that is, no one finally arrives at the place they're meant to be – except through me...I am the way. I am the true path to real life," he says.

At some point, we've all had to ask someone for directions. Even the men. I once received an answer that went something like this. "Go to the next corner, turn left at the stop sign, go three more blocks and turn right. At the next set of stop lights turn right, then go past three more lights and turn left at the next road. Cross the railway tracks and you'll see a gas station. Just beyond that there's a road going off to the left. *Don't take that road. That's the wrong road.* Go past the shopping mall, the fire station, and when you see the water tower, you should be coming up to a four way stop. Turn right at the stop sign after that one. It's just past the barn that burned down four years ago. You can't miss it."

No, I'm going to miss it.

What if, instead, the person said this: "That's a long way. That place is hard to find. You'll never get there on your own. Follow me, I'll take you there."

"For the ultimate truth," says William Temple, "is not a system of propositions grasped by a perfect intelligence, but is a personal being apprehended in the only way persons are ever fully apprehended, that is, by love."

To be with him, following his way, is already to have arrived.

Prayers of Intercession

Gracious God, we praise you for the gift of your Son, for the life-giving mystery of his cross and the glory of his resurrection. Hear the prayers we make in his name.

We pray for the Church. Dispersed by pandemic, but not divided, we turn together to face you. Deepen our communion with each other in Christ. Do not let our hearts grow numb with grief, our spirits weaken with worry, or our minds be clouded with misery. We trust you. You made us to be one with you in the living body of Christ. Renew our faith when we awaken and refresh our gratitude when we lie down to sleep.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer.

We pray for people and places where there is tragedy or misery, illness or injustice, private or public, accidental or deliberate. We pray for all who suffer an illness for which there is no cure. Let them not fall into an abyss of despair. Shed your light in the dark corners of their lives.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer.

God of compassion; you watch our human ways, and weave out of terrible happenings the wonder of goodness and grace. Surround those who have been shaken by tragedy with your love and healing. Though they be lost in grief, let them find peace in you.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer.

We pray for those made irritable by the aches and pains and frustrations of their lives; for those who feel useless in helping others, and those who feel they do not deserve our care. Gracious Lord, let them then know of your love for them; help them see the wonder and beauty of your image shining forth from them, that they may be lamps of hope to us in our darkest hours of distress and fear.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer.

Sovereign God, we pray for peace, for an end to warfare, hatred and strife. We bring before you the divisions of our world. Remove from the hearts of people and nations all prejudice and hatred, all racism, anger and greed that lead to violence and oppression and death. By your Spirit instil in those who wield power the greater power of your peace.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer.

God of infinite wisdom, from you all skill and science flow, all mercy, care and love. Teach us to be fair in our economic life, just in our politics, loving in our homes, and always truthful in word and deed.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer.

God of glory, the living and the dead are alive in you. With gratitude we remember those who have died. Heal our grief. Then enliven, deepen, and complete our faith, that one day we may, with them, behold you face to face in the place Christ prepares for us...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)....*

L: Lord in your mercy,

P: Hear our prayer.

Holy One, keep our feet firmly in the way Christ leads us, sound from our mouths the truth Christ teaches us, and fill us forever with the life that is Christ within us, who lives in holy love, with you and the Holy Spirit, world without end.

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**