

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

*The Sixth Sunday of Easter
9 May 2021*

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

Opening Words

L: Let the sea thunder and all that fills it, the world and all that dwell upon it.

P: Let the rivers clap their hands and the hills ring out before the Lord.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Eternal God, in you we live and move and have our being. You are so high above us that we cannot comprehend you, yet so deep within us that we can never escape you. We cannot know you except you reveal yourself. We cannot love you except you first love us. Awaken us to your presence today. Call forth our worship from the centre of our souls, through your Son Jesus Christ, in the power of his Spirit among us.

Holy One, you know us as we are. We hold before you the sin and sorrow that weigh us down. Come through the tangled pathway that keeps us from coming to you. Find us, who cannot find our way to you; and forgive us, who cannot forgive ourselves.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

P: Christ, have mercy upon us.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Great and loving God, you have prepared for those who love you joys beyond our understanding. Pour into our hearts such love for you, that, loving you above all else, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever.
Amen

An Assurance of Pardon

L: "The mercy of God is from everlasting to everlasting." 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 Lord of all truth, surprise us with joy, and open our minds to the movement of your Spirit, speaking through your Word; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 98 (*Joy in the victory of God*)

Sing to the Lord a new song,
 for he has done marvellous things.
 His own right hand and his holy arm
 have won for him the victory.
 The Lord has made known his salvation;
 his deliverance has he openly shown in the sight of the nations.
 He has remembered his mercy and faithfulness
 towards the house of Israel,
 and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.
 Sound praises to the Lord, all the earth;
 break into singing and make music.
 Make music to the Lord with the lyre,
 with the lyre and the voice of melody.
 With trumpets and the sound of the horn
 sound praises before the Lord, the King.
 Let the sea thunder and all that fills it,
 the world and all that dwell upon it.
 Let the rivers clap their hands
 and let the hills ring out together before the Lord,
 for he comes to judge the earth.
 In righteousness shall he judge the world
 and the peoples with equity.

(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 John 15: 9-17 (*Jesus call his disciples 'friends'*)

Jesus said: As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's

commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.

I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

L: This is the Gospel of the Risen Christ

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St John 15:11 *"I have said these things to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."*

There was a brilliant, mad philosopher in the 19th century. His name was Friedrich Nietzsche (pronounced 'Neet-cha'). He poked fun at Christians. "If joy is the mark of a *redeemed* life," he said, "then Jesus' disciples don't look very redeemed to me." He had in mind the severe sort of person who scowls at other people's fun. "Why all the glum faces?" Nietzsche asked.

Presbyterians have a reputation for glum faces. We may sing Psalm 100: "Him serve with *mirth*; his praise forth tell. Come ye before him and *rejoice*." But we're liable to sing it like a funeral dirge when our gout is acting up.

As a child, I noticed how the eyes of frowning adults would light up when they heard about someone's calamity, especially if they could trace it to a character fault: being in a hurry, spending too much money, staying up too late, being careless with tools, or, worst of all, *being lazy*.

Theirs was the meaner kind of joy. '*Schadenfreude*' (pronounced "SHAH-den-FROY-duh") – a double-barrelled German word for "taking pleasure in someone else's misfortune."

Or even our own misfortune? In one of Stephen Leacock's stories, The Reverend Uttermost Dumfarthing tells his congregation that seventy per cent of them are destined for hell. "The congregation was so swelled the next Sunday," writes Leacock, "that the Minister raised the percentage to eighty-five, and everybody went away delighted."

They're delighted because it confirms their grim views: life is sorrow, and the world is a vale of tears, a place without pleasure.

What's wrong with joy? Where's the harm in happiness? And yet, our ancestors were wiser than we are. They knew life can't be all 'mirth and merriment'. All too often, the world *is* a vale of tears, a place without pleasure. Life *can* be an uphill journey marked with toil and sorrow.

But must joy die when pain comes? Not if the joy is already deep within us, as Jesus promised it could be and would be.

The joy that God the Son shares intimately with God the Father, he also shares with those whom he calls 'friends.' Servants serve. Friends share.

"The servant doesn't know what the master is doing," says Jesus. "But I've shared with you everything I've heard from my Father...so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."

Pleasure may be opposed to pain. *Weeping* may be laughter's opposite. But joy lives and breathes beneath the waves of pleasure or pain, laughter or tears. Joy can be there, under sunlight or moonlight, whether we're solemn and sad, or gleeful and glad.

C.S. Lewis thought the best kind of joy was really a kind of 'hurt' or 'longing', the sweet pain of heartache. "Our best 'havings' are 'wantings'," he said.

He believed, as Presbyterians *say* they do, that we're made for joy. Our 'chief end' (our life's purpose) is the love and joy of God. We're *destined* for this (dare I say *pre-destined*?).

Lewis had looked inside himself at a tender age and found a deep desire for joy. But when he looked *outside* himself, and basked with earthly delight in the good and beautiful and true things he experienced here and now, he felt heartache – not *Schadenfreude*, now, but the *stab* of joy.

These *are* true joys, he thought, but they satisfy our longings only to awaken them further, the way a drink of alcohol can both slake our thirst and awaken a thirst for more.

What we taste in life, he thought, is like the sun's reflection in a dewdrop. Its light gives us joy, but it's the slightest fragment, a single sparkle, when what we want is to behold the sun itself. We want a cup that fills and fills until our "cup runneth over." We want our joy to be as 'complete' as Jesus promised it would be.

Lewis says these longings create "an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction," the way the pain of someone's absence puts us in closer touch with the depth of our love for that person. We 'enjoy' that pain because we *cherish* that love.

Every good hunger, *and* its satisfaction, awakens our soul-hunger for the heavenly banquet. "Our best 'havings' *are* 'wantings'."

Lottery winners, after their spending spree, tend to settle back into the same old level of low-grade happiness they had before. The money didn't do it for them. Why?

Joy's *real* enemy isn't pain or sorrow, or those deprivations we could remedy with cash. Joy's real enemy is mistaking what we want in the first place.

Most of us do not need all that we have in the way of wealth. Jesus didn't think life was about *having* lots of things. For our best "havings" are, in fact, 'wantings'.

Have you noticed that when we struggle to get what we *think* will make us happy – money, fame, power, position, more and better stuff – and we get it, it often makes us, not joyful at all, but restless and empty all over again?

When we look back at our lives, we see that some of the most joyful times haven't been times of wealth and security, but times of struggle and hard work – times when we lived for a high purpose, swam against the current, and came through on higher ground, like Israel crossing the Red Sea.

Perhaps we came through wounded. But we came through wiser, humbler, and better. *They're* the moments when we sparkled with joy. And if crazy old Nietzsche could have seen us, he'd have had to admit we looked very alive indeed, and very redeemed after all.

Prayers of Intercession

God our Creator, we praise you for your handiwork in shaping and sustaining your wondrous creation. Hear the prayers of your Church.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We are grateful for the gift of your Church, the body of your Son Jesus Christ. We pray for patience and calm. If our hearts are hard, soften them. If our minds are bound, free them. If our souls are rigid, break their stubborn moulds. Write your name in our hearts. Be our strong tower of defence, our comfort in every pain. Guide us through danger and temptation, and renew your Spirit within us.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for places visited by calamity and tragedy: for those dying of hunger and disease, for victims of racism, war and terror. Why must the world be this way? We ask you why, but cannot hear your answer, and it troubles our faith in you.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

God, your Son Jesus Christ knew hunger and strife, toil and labour: hear the cries of those who call upon you today. Send your peace, justice to our troubled world.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Look with compassion on those with whom we argue and fight, at home and in our daily living. We pray for those who annoy us, and for those estranged from us, because of misunderstanding or betrayal, or something we have done and now regret.

Gracious God, you have made us in such a way that we need one another, but because we do not know how to love everyone, help us to start with those by our side.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Loving Lord, teach us to love as you have loved, to heal and forgive each other, to reach out with hands ready to receive the blessings of life, and to share them with others.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We praise you for all the saints of every age, and especially for those who have been dear to us, who have died. Nourish our lives with the memory of their words and deeds, and all they accomplished in their time; until that day of days when we shall feast with them in the world to come...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy One, send your Spirit of truth to dwell within us, that we may turn from what is false, live by Christ's command, and be true to the love you have shown us.

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, 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**