

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

*6th Sunday after Pentecost
10:30 a.m.
12 July 2020*

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

Opening Words

L: The words you have spoken are spirit and life, O Lord.

P: You have the words of eternal life.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy One, you are the wellspring of life. Pour into our hearts the living water of your grace, that we may be refreshed to live this day in joy, confident of your presence, empowered by your peace, and enlivened by your love; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God for ever.

God of mercy, we grieve for the hurt done by others, and we confess the hurt done by us. If we have been bitter in our thoughts, harsh in our words, and cruel in our actions; if we have been complacent in a world made ill by want and wastefulness; if we wandered from your path and passed by on the other side; forgive our sin, heal us from within, and restore us in your peace.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Eternal God, open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendour of nature and the beauty of life. Help us to cherish your blessings, to share them with each other, and to savour the joy of life in your presence; 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: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." 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

Living God, creation awaits your gift of new life. Sow your Word in our hearts, that we may be rooted in your truth and enlivened by your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 119: 105-112 (*The Joy of God's Word and Law*)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances.
I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your word.
Accept my offerings of praise, O Lord, and teach me your ordinances.
I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law.
The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts.
Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.
I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

(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

Genesis 25: 19-34 (*Jacob tricks Esau*)

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean.

Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived.

The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?"

So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger."

When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.)

Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."

Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"

Jacob said, "Swear to me first."

So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way.

Thus Esau despised his birthright.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

Genesis 25:34 *"Thus did Esau despise his birthright."*

Rivalry begins at home, with siblings. Jacob and Esau were twins and rivals. They were born fighting each other. God told their troubled mother why: "The elder shall serve the younger."

This put God's providential Word on a collision course with well-established law. It's the "law of primogeniture" and it still governs the House of Windsor. The first-born gets the crown, not the second, third, or fourth. They must 'stand in line' for the throne. Meanwhile, they must serve the eldest, who inherits the family's wealth and 'blessing'.

Esau was born first, but Jacob was God's chosen. He emerged from his mother's womb "with his hand clutching Esau's heel", as if to say, "Not so fast, brother..."

God's overturning of the established order is repeated much later in God's choice for David, the youngest of Jesse's sons. Nobody noticed David, but God did. Didn't Jesus, too, have a soft spot for the younger, more prodigal son?

We should never be so rash as to assume 'the way things have always been' is 'the way God wants them always to be'. Powerful people may say that, but they're really saying what *they* want and then attributing it to God, to cow us into acceptance. It's the oldest trick in *The Big Book of Religious Tricks*. Jacob was too smart to fall for that. But he was canny enough to dream up a few of his own tricks.

The conflict created by God's declaration to Rebekah – "the elder shall serve the younger" – must now be played out in the story of Jacob's life.

He's a striver, a schemer, and a bit of a con artist, not unlike Duddy Kravitz, whose 'apprenticeship' Mordecai Richler described with humour and pathos. As we learn much later in the story, Jacob, like Duddy, will do what it takes to wrestle a blessing from life. God *will* bless him. God's providence will emerge through conflict. And the conflict begins in rivalry.

Esau was a hairy man. Esau was a man of the fields, a hunter, a doer, and a man of few words. Having worked up a manly hunger, he crashes the kitchen, where the softer, smooth-talking Jacob has been honing his skill in domestic governance.

"Give me some of that red stuff" says Esau. Is his vocabulary so coarse that he has no word for stew? "I'm famished!" he roars, using a word in Hebrew that rabbi's use for hungry animals. Jacob is hungry for something too: Esau's birthright. And Esau's hunger is just the lever Jacob needs to steal it.

But does he steal it? "It's my stew. I made it myself," says Jacob. "Just give me your birthright and I'll give you all the stew you want." *And Esau does.* Isn't this a free and fair exchange of goods? Haven't they made a 'Free Trade Agreement'?

Yet I can't help but wonder if Canada's indigenous nations, having signed those treaties drawn up long ago in a foreign tongue by agents of an alien power, felt just as hoodwinked as Esau did. "The Christians said we should close our eyes to pray, but I don't anymore," said an indigenous elder. "The last time we did that, when we opened our eyes, our land was gone."

But we can see Esau another way, as the story does. "Esau despised his birthright," says Genesis.

It would seem so. "What use is my birthright, my inheritance, the blessing of my father, and his father before him?" he said, or perhaps 'grunted'. "I'm hungry right now. That matters more to me."

Esau knows nothing of 'delayed gratification', the small sacrifice made now for the sake of something hugely better, the hunger endured in the present for the sake of future blessing.

Esau is stupid. Jacob is smart. Smart fleeces stupid. And God's choice sanctions it! This is why I love the same Old Testament that others sneer at, believing its morality is beneath them. They're wrong. Its morality is earthy and human, not prissy and puritan. The Old Testament does not shy from conflict, or wallow in sentimental niceyness. It's true to the life we really live, not the one we pretend to live.

Esau later regrets his rash choice. But when the 'moment of truth' came, his hunger's satisfaction did mean more to him than his birthright did. He can't pretend it didn't. He has a long road ahead of him now, but he won't be living out his birthright. He blew it.

Like a gambler losing the ancestral estate in a game of poker, he could not undo what he'd done. Like the compulsive drinker leaning on the bar until closing time, he

wants to believe 'hangover guy' is someone else. "That's *his* problem! Another whisky, bartender!"

I wonder when my generation will come awake, feel its hangover, and regret their spurning of a birthright they've stupidly forsaken, the life of faith lived within the Church.

God only knows.

Prayers of Intercession

Holy Love, in Christ you share our pain and ease our sorrow. You bind up our wounds and nurse our spirits back to health. Let such a love as yours compel us to go and do likewise, for others. But first, let your Holy Spirit intercede for us now, with sighs too deep for words.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we would not spurn your blessing. Teach us to cherish your own living body, the Church. Then help us to reach upwards to your throne in worship and adoration; inwards to each other in understanding and friendship; outwards to the world in compassion and care; and down to the depths of our very own selves, where you dwell within, and hold us in being.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We hold up to you, now, the victims of violence in all its forms. Bring your justice to bear upon the world. Help us to be active in the search for peace, in ourselves and in the world you have made. Can you see how we fight over race, class, sex, creed, and shallow differences of opinion? Stop us from hiding behind walls made from hate, from loving only our own kind and fearing all others. Teach us to see your face in their faces too.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those made ill by cancer, by ailments of body and mind, by the Covid 19 virus, and by chronic disease. We call upon your mercy to help all who suffer pain in their bodies, grief in their hearts, or loss of memory in their minds. As our Lord Jesus Christ himself suffered pain, and healed it in others, help them find their peace in him, and, by your mercy, new health and strength.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those who go hungry today, for refugees, for those without money for food or shelter, and for children orphaned by war and famine. We also pray for people rich in material things but starving for things of the spirit, and hungry for your blessing.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

God of justice and salvation, from every land you call people to yourself. You bless them so they may be a blessing to the world around them. When we fail, do not let our failure discourage our hearts. When we succeed, do not let our success trick us into forgetting your blessing. Plant deep in our hearts the joy of doing your will, for that is enough.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy One, we tremble at the slenderness of the thread that separates life from death, how fragile it is, and how easily it breaks. We thank you that, in the risen body of your Son, neither the living nor the dead can be parted from you. Grant that when we come to breathe our last breath, we shall share in the communion of saints, and the glory of life everlasting...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Majestic Lord, you have so greatly loved us, so long sought us, and so mercifully redeemed us. Give us grace that, in everything we do, we may, from the depth of our hearts, give ourselves to you.

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**