

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

*The Seventh Sunday of Easter
16 May 2021*

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

Opening Words

L: I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is our help to come?

P: Our help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of power and love, you raised Jesus from death to life. He ascended to you, filled with glory, to rule over all creation. Free us now to rejoice in his peace, to glory in his justice, and to live in his love. Unite our worship here below with the unending praise of the company of heaven, forever encircling your throne, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

God of royal mercy, when our Lord ascended to you, you crowned him Lord of all. If we have neglected the claim of Christ upon us, and lived as those without hope in the world, recall us to our rightful mind. Forgive our hardness of heart and smallness of mind, our selfishness and impatience with each other. Assure us of your forgiveness, repair our hearts, and renew us in your love.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

P: Christ, have mercy upon us.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

God of majesty, your blessed Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, ascended far above all heavens that he might fill all things. Mercifully give us faith to trust that, as he promised, he abides with us on earth to the end of time; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen

An Assurance of Pardon

L: Jesus said, "When I am lifted up, I will draw all people to myself." 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 Risen and ascended Christ, open our minds to understand your teaching, and bless us, that we may be a blessing to the world, now and in the age to come. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 1 (*The goodness of the Law*)

Blessed are they who have not walked
in the counsel of the wicked,
nor lingered in the way of sinners,
nor sat in the assembly of the scornful.
Their delight is in the law of the Lord
and they meditate on his law day and night.
Like a tree planted by streams of water
bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither,
whatever they do, it shall prosper.
As for the wicked, it is not so with them;
they are like chaff which the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked shall not be able to stand in the judgement,
nor the sinner in the congregation of the righteous.
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked shall perish.

(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 17: 6-19 (*Jesus prays to God the Father for his disciples*)

Jesus said: 'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

'Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

'I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

‘And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

‘While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.

‘But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.

‘I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.

‘They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

‘As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

L: This is the Gospel of the Risen Christ

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St John 17:11 *“I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world.”*

We use this little word, ‘world’, in different ways. Sometimes we mean ‘the *whole* world’: everything that is, was, and evermore shall be. Often, though, we just mean a *portion* of the ‘whole world’: the third world, the ancient world, the world of high finance, or the ‘wide world of sports’.

St John’s Gospel uses this word in different ways too. Sometimes it means ‘the whole shebang’: “God so loved the *whole world*, that he sent his only begotten Son....” “I am the light of the *world*,” says Jesus.

“Do you mean you’re just light of the Western World? Are you only the light of ‘the world of law-abiding Protestant people and their agnostic offspring’?”

“No, I’m the light of the *whole* world. Everyone. Everywhere. For all time.”

And yet, elsewhere, Jesus speaks as though he lives apart from this ‘whole world’. He says his life and identity are rooted elsewhere. It’s as though he has come from a faraway land that is not of this world at all, and he brought us an exotic gift.

“My peace I give to you – but not as the *world* gives,” he says. Then he withdraws.

But before he dies and leaves this world, he prays a long prayer for his disciples. “The world hates them,” he says. “My disciples don’t belong to the world, just as I don’t belong to the world.”

So, we might get the idea that there are two separate ‘worlds’ made from two types of stuff, ‘matter’ and ‘spirit’, or evil and good, or profane and sacred. And, like oil and water, they don’t want to mix.

If that’s how we think of it, then we’re bound to believe our imprisonment in this material world is *the* problem Jesus came to solve. There’s a happy, heavenly ‘spiritual’ world and there’s an evil, earthly ‘material’ one. And Jesus’ job is to be ‘on hand’ when we finally ‘escape’ from the prison of our material bodies, at death, so he can smuggle our disembodied ‘spirits’ into his spiritual heaven. And that’s all there is to it.

But that would be wrong. God’s ambition is so much bigger and, frankly, so much better than that. It’s a ‘new heaven and new earth’.

This isn’t a spiritual *replacement* for the wonderful material world we live in, shimmering as it does with light and sound, smell and colour. According to the New Testament, God’s ambition for this beautiful but bruised old world is to renew and transfigure it.

Maybe it would help if we knew that the Greek word for ‘world’ is ‘*cosmos*’, and *cosmos* can mean ‘system’.

When Jesus and Pilate confront each other, and Jesus says, “My kingdom is *not of this world*,” we could understand him to be saying this: “My kingdom is not of this *system*. I don’t belong to the Roman Empire. I don’t kowtow to Caesar. I’m playing a different game, a better one.”

In this sense, although Jesus lived and died *within* the Roman Empire, he was never *of* it. His resurrection reveals that he’d belonged to a different ‘system’ all along, a divine one.

So, when he prayed within his disciples’ earshot, “The world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world,” he meant, “My disciples belong to *me*; they don’t belong to the ‘system’.”

Remember that protestor’s slogan from the 1960s? “It’s the *system*, man!”

There *are* different ‘systems’, different ways of living in this one big world we all inhabit. There are different ways of distributing power and exchanging wealth, different ways of seeing and appreciating the world and each other, different ‘gods’ to serve, different causes to live and die for.

We’re products of an educational system. We’re ruled by a political system and judged by a judicial system. We make and spend money in an economic system. When we move about the world, we use a transportation system. When we’re ill, we turn to the health care system. These systems are the many ‘worlds’ humans make and inhabit.

But they all dwell within the vast and wonderful ‘ecosystem’ that God has made – or, if you don’t believe in God, then you’ll take the world of nature as a simple ‘given’ – given by no one, mind you, but simply ‘there’ for you to exploit however you wish. Either way, the ecosystem pulses with matter and energy, the rhythms of time, the

architecture of space, and the realms of sea and land and air. It's a home for plant and animal life. It's our home too. We belong here.

Jesus Christ came to remake the *whole* world, to redeem the whole weary system, and to make one glorious 'ecosystem' from nature, humanity, and God.

Every celebration of Holy Communion symbolises this, making it real. God willing, we shall celebrate this sacrament again one day.

We take the grain and the grape, the gift of God in the world of nature. By human labour, we turn them into bread and wine, the products of our human world. Then God takes the bread and wine *we've* made and *re-*makes them into the body and blood of his own dear Son.

When we eat and drink at Christ's table, in faith, we inhabit the whole world, the one we truly belong to, which is love's divine ecosystem. We're at home there. We become what we're eternally meant to be. And for a glorious moment, we dwell in all three worlds at once: nature, humanity, and God – the one divine cosmos.

Prayers of Intercession

God most holy, we join the whole Church to offer you praise for our Lord Jesus Christ, whom you exalted to your right hand. Hear the prayers we make in his name.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Living God, look with mercy upon your people, whom you have sanctified by the dying and rising of your Son. The pandemic keeps us apart. Keep your Church united in love, and consecrate us in your truth. Cause us to shine as a bright beacon whose light cannot be darkened, that the mercy you have bestowed upon us may be shared with others and shown to the world.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those who suffer from incurable illness, for all afflicted by the COVID-19 virus, and for those whose lives are drawing to a close. We pray for those who are passing through any kind of tragedy, quietly and privately, or publicly and palpably. Heal their grief and mend their trouble.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those who feel very far from you today, alone, helpless, lost. Do not leave them this way. Walk beside them. Enable them to trust you, though your way is hidden from their sight. Give them courage in the knowledge of your love, heal their grief and sorrow, and restore the joy for which their hearts cry out.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

God of all comfort, we commend to you those who have lost the security of home and paid employment. Rescue them from fear and scarcity. Let their dire need make demands on our abundance. Let our works of charity be turned into works of justice for all society.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Look in mercy upon the nations. Bring peace to places of conflict. We especially remember Israel and Gaza today. Strengthen the hands of those who seek to heal the wounds of history. Send forth your light and truth into every place of bitterness and warfare.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We remember with grateful hearts all those who have died, especially those whose lives touched ours and left a good mark upon us. When we lie down and take our rest, cause us to remember your love for them and for...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Gracious God, in the resurrection of your Son Jesus Christ, you have given us eternal life and glorified your name in all the world. Refresh our souls with the living streams of your truth, that in our unity, our joy may be complete.

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**