

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

*7th Sunday after Pentecost
10:30 a.m.
19 July 2020*

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

Opening Words

L: We wait for the Lord.

P: On God's Word and Spirit our hope depends.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God most holy, you are light to the minds that see you, life in the souls that love you, and strength for the hearts that seek you. To turn from you is to fall; to turn to you is to rise; to abide in you is to stand fast forever. Glory be to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our one true and living God.

Holy Lord, give us hope for your mercy and sorrow for our sins. Hold them not against us, but forgive. Bring us new life where we are weary and worn, new love where we are hard of heart, and new joy in the places where we are sad in spirit. Set us free from all that holds us down, then raise us up, forgiven and healed, to new life in Christ.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Eternal God, Author of our life and End of our pilgrimage: Guide us by your Word and Spirit amid all perils and temptations, that we may not wander from your way, nor stumble in darkness; but may finish our course in safety, and come to our eternal rest in you; through the grace and merit of 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: "The Lord is our light and salvation. Whom shall we fear?" 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

O God, your voice stirs our minds and rouses our hearts. Teach us to sit at your feet and hear your Word; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 139: 1-12, 23-24 *(There is comfort in being seen and known by God)*

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
 You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 you discern my thoughts from far away.
 You search out my path and my lying down,
 and are acquainted with all my ways.
 Even before a word is on my tongue,
 O Lord, you know it completely.
 You hem me in, behind and before,
 and lay your hand upon me.
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
 it is so high that I cannot attain it.
 Where can I go from your spirit?
 Or where can I flee from your presence?
 If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
 if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
 If I take the wings of the morning
 and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
 even there your hand shall lead me,
 and your right hand shall hold me fast.
 If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall cover me,
 and the light around me become night',
 even the darkness is not dark to you;
 the night is as bright as the day,
 for darkness is as light to you.

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
 test me and know my thoughts.
 See if there is any wicked way in me,
 and lead me in the way everlasting.

(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 28: 10-19a (*Jacob's dream at Bethel*)

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set.

Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

And the Lord stood beside him and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.'

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!' And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

Genesis 28:16 *"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."*

It's just the kind of place – desolate, lonely, dead – where you'd believe God is not. And yet, God is.

In the same way, you'd think this 21st century is a *time* when God is not: but God is. For we live in a time and place where the horrific has happened. We live 'after Auschwitz'. And when it's not being horrific, the secular world can seem shallow and one-dimensional.

Still, here and there, religion is resurgent. But all too often it's the hammer-blow of fundamentalist zeal, not a humble re-discovery of the love who makes and mends the world, whose holiness is healing.

When a religion itself turns ugly, does God abandon it to its own devices? When aggressive secularism belittles a life lived in faith, when commerce and consumption dominate the public square, God feels a long way off.

As he languished in a Nazi prison, awaiting execution, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a deeply faithful man, wrote these words: "God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross." So it seems.

Is there not a desert in our hearts, too, when our lives are drained of significance and colour, when all sense of the sacred has gone? (The 'heart of darkness' Joseph Conrad called it.)

Yet Jacob's dream asks us to trust that heaven and earth have something to do with each other. There's traffic between them. "Jacob dreamed there was a ladder from earth to heaven. And angels of God were ascending and descending on it." Even this barren landscape can be a divine dreamscape.

"Surely the Lord is in this place," says Jacob, "and I didn't know it. This is the very gate of heaven." Couldn't we say this about the territory we inhabit in our own daily lives? Do we walk by heaven's gate, but never see it?

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God", wrote the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. And though (he goes on to admit) the world seems smeared and smudged, and our hearts are wretched, and we feel unloved and unlovable, still, he writes, "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things."

But of course, it's *deep down*. We can scarcely see it. We're blinded by fear and the frenzy of worry; by selfishness, sin, and sorrow. And yet, like leaven in the bread, like the invisible mustard seed, God's grace is at work in us and in our world.

Only as Jacob dreams, his guard down, his fear and ambition at rest, does God have a chance to command Jacob's attention.

God shows the 'scoundrel' Jacob that his world, and his life, has eternal meaning. So does ours.

We should pay more attention to our dreams, our reveries, those thoughts and feelings that invade us when our defences are down. Perhaps God is trying to tell us something.

Jacob's dream – like Martin Luther King's when he shouted "I have a dream this day" – carries a blessing and promise for himself and his people. We've inherited that blessing and promise too.

It's not a fantasy, not 'escape' from the world. It's a visionary's hope founded on a divine promise: "Know that I am with you." It's the kind of dream that gives you fresh energy to return to the world, wide awake and alive; to see the world with fresh eyes, ripe with God's purpose, open to love's transformation, "charged with the grandeur of God."

"The Lord is in this place, and I did not know it."

Prayers of Intercession

O God of Bethel, by whose hand thy people still are fed; who through this weary pilgrimage hast all our fathers led: our vows, our prayers, we now present before thy gracious throne; as thou has been their faithful God, so always be our own.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Loving Lord, your Church is dear to us. How can we forget the joy we have found in the life of the body of your Son, and the truth we have heard in his Word? We pray for Elmwood Avenue Church, scattered throughout our homes, yet never divided from each other, nor distant from you. Keep our worship true, our work vital, and our lives holy and just.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those who endure harsh suffering; for those who, through addiction, have lost their health and freedom; for those who live in constant pain; for victims of war and oppression; for those who suffer hunger and poverty; and for those in our own land who have no home tonight.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those who give themselves to the art of healing and caring for others, for nurses, support workers, counsellors, and physicians of every kind; give them skill and compassion; renew your strength within them, and give them joy in their calling.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those afflicted by despair, whose lives feel meaningless, who suffer the anguish of inner darkness, and find nothing of worth within themselves. Pierce their soul's dark night with the light that darkness can never extinguish. Let it shine within them and from them. Restore their joy.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, remember us when we cannot see your way or purpose. Take our hands and work with them; take our lips and speak through them; take our minds and think with them; take our hearts and set them ablaze with love for you, for all people, and for all creation.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O God of Jacob, you speak in the light of day, and in the dark of night when our sleep is filled with dreams of a new heaven and earth. We remember, with great gratitude, those who have died and come awake in your presence, for the dreams they

shared with us, for the good that entered the world through them, and for everything they were, by nature and by your grace...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy Lord, patient and kind, enliven our spirits when we are slothful, and temper our passions when we are rash, that in your own good time, and in your own way, you may produce in us a rich harvest from the seed you have sown and tended in our hearts.

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**