

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

*All Saints Day
1 November 2020*

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

Opening Words

L: Blessed be the name of the Lord

P: from this time forth and forever more.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy One, neither death nor life can separate us from your love. With the whole communion of saints, in heaven and on earth, we praise your holy name. Fill us with your peace. Keep us close to Christ, and join our praises here below with the songs of angels, martyrs and saints above, who sing forever around your throne: Glory be to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Eternal God, in every age you raise up men and women to live and die in faith. If we have forgotten them, turned away your truth, denied your will, and harmed each other, call us again to do what is just, to love your mercy, and to walk humbly before you to end of our days.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

O God, the source of all being, our beginning and our eternal end, you make us glad with the remembrance of those who have served you faithfully on earth and come fully alive in your presence. Replenish our hope in your eternal kingdom, that we may have life in all its fullness; through 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: "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." 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

God of mercy, amid the changes and chances of this mortal life, help us to hear your unchanging word; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 34: 1-10, 22 (*Praise for deliverance from trouble*)

I will bless the Lord at all times;
 his praise shall continually be in my mouth.
 My soul makes its boast in the Lord;
 let the humble hear and be glad.
 O magnify the Lord with me,
 and let us exalt his name together.
 I sought the Lord, and he answered me,
 and delivered me from all my fears.
 Look to him, and be radiant;
 so your faces shall never be ashamed.
 This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord,
 and was saved from every trouble.
 The angel of the Lord encamps
 around those who fear him, and delivers them.
 O taste and see that the Lord is good;
 happy are those who take refuge in him.
 O fear the Lord, you his holy ones,
 for those who fear him have no want.
 The young lions suffer want and hunger,
 but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.
 The Lord redeems the life of his servants;
 none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

(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 Matthew 5: 1-12 (*Jesus' portrait of a 'blessed' life.*)

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you

L: This is the Gospel of our Risen the Lord.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St Matthew 5:4 *Blessed are those who mourn.*

On All Saints Day, we remember those we've known, loved, admired, and respected, who have died. We do this by saying their *names*. Usually, that's all we have left, just their names. The body is gone; their 'effects' are scattered and strewn. But when we say their names out loud, we give memory a little 'stir'. And when we say them in God's sanctuary, we do it to stir God's memory too. We're saying, "They're precious in your sight too, aren't they? – *more* precious, if that were possible."

For this reason, each of *our* names is precious too. They do more than one of those 'Hello, my name is....' stickers stuck to our sweaters. Their adhesive is stronger, for one thing. Our names are so tightly entwined with the unique story of each of our lives and the mystery of who we are, that to remember someone's name, and to say it out loud, is for a moment to re-capture (dare I say *resurrect*?) the whole person, still alive in memory – a memory that's beautiful and painful all at once.

It's rather like what happens if I see you from afar, and I shout your name. In that moment, I capture you, I seize your whole attention. I *make* you turn and look. Imagine, then, if God were to say our names aloud. We'd turn and look and never look away. For we'd finally behold the knowing eyes of a pure love beholding us.

When Jacob wrestled all night with an angel in the desert, he yelled, "Tell me your name!" Because if he knew the name of this divine being, maybe he could capture it; and if he could capture it, maybe he could control it; and if he could control it, maybe it would serve him.

The same logic lies behind our human effort to capture raw energy – fire, coal, steam, petroleum, uranium – and put it to use, to be a ‘blessing’ for us. But first we have to know and understand raw energy, and how to tap it, which is the work of ‘science and technology’. But symbolically, it’s to know something’s *name*.

“Bless me!” Jacob cried. “I won’t let you go until you *bless* me! Tell me your name!”

“I won’t tell you my name,” said the divine being. For the raw energy we call ‘God’ refuses to be captured and used by us. “But I will give *you* a new name,” he says: “*Israel*.” It’s a name that means something like “one who struggles with God”; for that’s the story of Jacob’s life; it’s who he *is*.

And with that, the angel dealt him a blow, wounding him. And forever after Jacob, whose name was now Israel, walked with a limp, and his limp and his name were signs of God’s blessing,

Divine blessing is not mindless bliss, it’s not a narcotic. Neither does God’s blessing make us into placid marionettes to serve him like slaves. God’s blessing seems to happen in the boxing rings of life, in episodes of struggle and ‘push back’; or in hospital wards, through pain, fragility, and mortality ; or in those lonely desolate moments when the great questions of life assault us, and there’s nothing for it but to wrestle with faith and doubt and sorrow and ourselves and God.

In Jesus’ beatitudes, the blessed life is indeed a ‘life of sorrow and acquaintance with grief’. “Blessed are those who mourn,” he said.

There are days when we wonder: “Why am I so downcast, why is my light so dim, my heart so heavy? Don’t I have the things that make for a happy life? Am I not *blessed*?” But Jesus’ beatitudes speak of a joy that seeks us *through* our pain. “Blessed are the poor, the mournful, the meek, and the persecuted.”

When asked, “What is a saint?”, a child, thinking of stained-glass windows, once said, “Saints are the people the light shines through.” And that’s not a bad answer. Like stained glass figures, saints transmit something of God’s light from beyond – not colourless, insipid light, as through a pane of clean, clear glass, but light filtered through the colour and shape of their unique humanity; a light that does not obscure but ‘lights up’ all their quirks and eccentricities. Those flaws and weaknesses we mistook for sins are made beautiful (are they not?) when God’s light shines through them.

Isn’t this why we mourn, so deeply, when the people we love die? Each one, seen the way God sees them, is utterly *irreplaceable*. So, we mourn them; they have *died*, and that kind of mourning is life’s deepest sorrow. It touches all of us.

You open a door, and you expect that person still to be sitting there, but the chair is empty. Or it’s Christmas, and you want to buy that person a present, to say, “Can’t you see how much you matter to me?” – but they’re not there to open your gift. Or you read a good book, or hear some gossip news, and you say to yourself, “I must

remember to tell the one I *always* tell things to", but you realise afresh that person is dead, and the pain washes through you again.

"Blessed are those who mourn," said Jesus. If there's joy here – and there is -- it has to come *through* pain to find us. And that's what Jesus does.

Maybe we can think of his cross that way. His cross is God, coming as one of us, through pain, to find us, and he exchanges our pain for a promise of joy. Doesn't he show us that the more *deeply* we enter the divine, the more *truly* we become human? The more vividly the light comes through us, the more we show our true colours.

Not less human, *more human*. And if more human, then more truly ourselves; and yet more truly at home in God's 'communion of saints', as we all shall one day be. It will be the day when *our* work is done, and the fever of life is over. God will call us by *name*, and we will turn, and look, and enter our eternal rest and joy.

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, it is our chief delight to lift up our hearts to you in thanks and praise. We pray for your whole creation, for the Church, and for each other.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

By your Spirit, enliven your Church. Help us flourish with the new life you give us. Keep us alert to your presence, and stir up in our midst a longing for the coming of your kingdom, that we may rejoicing with all the saints in communion with Christ.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O God of all comfort, we commend to you those who, because of their lot, are tempted to lose heart: those who have no security of home or work; those who see no purpose in life; those who find it difficult to believe in you; those who suffer from incurable illness. Enable them to trust in you, though your way is hidden from their sight, and give them that peace which the world cannot give.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those who work for reconciliation, peace, and justice between nations and people in conflict, and for those confined to refugee camps.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for the rich ecosystems of our earth, for plants and animals, on the land and in the oceans. Help us to love all that you have made, and be better stewards of life in all its forms.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O God of life and glory, you have given us a share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Open our eyes to the radiance of your glory; and bring us to rejoice with them in your everlasting kingdom, where there is no dark nor dazzling, but one equal light: and where in light undimmed, unending, you are worshipped and adored, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever....*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

All-holy god, you call your people to holiness. As we keep the festival of your saints, give us their humility of spirit, a thirst for righteousness, and purity of heart. May we, like them, be clothed in the glory you bestow.

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**