

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

*20th Sunday after Pentecost  
(The 95<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this Church)  
10:30 a.m.  
18 October 2020*

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

*Opening Words*

L: Let all the earth acclaim the Lord.

**P: Worship the Lord in gladness.**

L: Let us worship God.

*Prayers of Adoration and Confession*

Holy One, Lord of heaven and earth, we praise you. You show wisdom in all your works. You show your truth in Jesus Christ, your Son. And you share your life with us through the grace and peace of your own Holy Spirit. We honour your name, and we offer our worship, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Living God, your mercy searches our hearts. You know us as we are. Hold before us a vision of the people you call us to be. Forgive the poverty of our love, the times when we have neglected your claim upon us and turned our backs on each other. Show us the path you would have us walk, the truth you would have us know, and the life you call us to live.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

**P: Christ, have mercy upon us;**

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Almighty God, we praise you for the blessings you bestow on those who look to Elmwood Avenue Church as their spiritual home. Let it always be a refuge for weary souls, a house of celebration for all of life, and a sanctuary of your peace. Remake us into a living temple of your glory; 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: "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***

Holy One, let the Word you speak today take root in our hearts and grow there; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

***The Psalm for the Day***

**Psalm 99** (*Praise for God's holiness*)

The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble!

He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!

The Lord is great in Zion;

he is exalted over all the peoples.

Let them praise your great and awesome name.

Holy is he!

Mighty King, lover of justice,

you have established equity;

you have executed justice

and righteousness in Jacob.

Extol the Lord our God;

worship at his footstool.

Holy is he!

Moses and Aaron were among his priests,

Samuel also was among those who called on his name.

They cried to the Lord, and he answered them.

He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;

they kept his decrees,

and the statutes that he gave them.

O Lord our God, you answered them;

you were a forgiving God to them,

but an avenger of their wrongdoings.

Extol the Lord our God,

and worship at his holy mountain;

for the Lord our God is holy.

*(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 22: 15-22** (*A confrontation: Caesar or God?*)

The Pharisees went and plotted to entrap Jesus in what he said. So, they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, 'Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?'

But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, 'Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin used for the tax.' And they brought him a denarius.

Then he said to them, 'Whose head is this, and whose title?'

They answered, 'Caesar's.'

Then he said to them, 'Give therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.'

When they heard this, they were amazed. They left him and went away.

L: This is the Gospel of the Risen Christ.

**P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

### *Some thoughts on the Reading*

**St Matthew 22:21** *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*

In Germany, in early days of its descent into darkness, some Protestant Christians banded together to resist the evil that had taken hold of their Nation. They gathered in the city of Barmen, in May 1934, to draft what came to be known as the 'Barmen Declaration'. And because their words took the form of a public Confession of Faith, they came to be known as the 'the Confessing Church'. The Barmen Declaration is wordy (it was written by clergymen), but its heart and soul lie in these words: "Jesus Christ, as he is attested to in scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear, trust, and obey, in life and in death." They tied the integrity of their faith to the welfare of society. But it put them on a collision course with a tyrannical State.

When some clever politicians try to entrap Jesus, they raise the topics families forbid at holiday gatherings: Religion and Politics. They butter him up. "You're a clever rabbi," they say. "Curious people want to know. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" This is what politicians call a 'gotcha' question. If he says 'yes', he'll alienate those despise Rome. But if he says, "No, it's never right to pay taxes to Caesar," they'll arrest him for sedition. But Jesus asks a question one of his own. "Who has a coin?" (He mustn't have had one himself!). Someone gives him a coin. He holds it up like a

schoolmaster. "Whose picture is this?" "Caesar's," they say. "Well, it must belong to him, then. So, why not give it back? *But...* be sure to give to God what belongs to God." They leave him, scratching their heads. But he leaves us scratching our heads, too, doesn't he?

What does he mean? Are there two separate realms, two different duties we owe? One secular, political, and public, belonging to Caesar. The other sacred, religious, and private, belonging to God? It's a typically Protestant heresy to say, "Yes, two realms, two kingdoms," and to treat faith as a purely *private* affair with God, secret, hidden from public life. "I come to the Garden alone..." The secular world encourages this. Quebec forbids its public employees from wearing religious symbols. Many self-described Protestants feel no need for public worship in a Church. And if we *do* render to God what we owe to God within a Church, it's only on the weekend. Weekends are 'me-time', private time. But weekdays? They belong to Caesar.

But what happens if those two worlds – private and public, weekend and weekday, sacred and secular – collide? There's bound to be pushing and shoving, isn't there? William Temple, when he was Bishop of Manchester, waded into a miner's strike in 1926. He wanted to apply the insights of Christian faith to labour negotiations. But the Prime Minister barked back at him. "How would *you* like it if I went to the Iron and Steel Federation and we changed the Apostles' Creed on you?" he said. "Didn't Jesus say, 'Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's?' Mind your own business."

But the Confessing Church, when they gathered at Barmen in those darkest of days, knew in their hearts that God's rule contains both realms – secular and sacred, State and Church, public and private – the way the largest Russian Doll contains the smaller ones. So, the Confessing Church said to the Fuhrer, in effect, "There's only one, ultimately, whom we hear and trust and obey, in life and in death. And that one is not *you*, Fuhrer. It's Jesus Christ. We will only render what's due to you in so far as *you* render what's due to Jesus Christ. And you can only do that by ruling justly and mercifully in the secular, political sphere. If you don't do that, we owe you nothing. In fact, we oppose you. Why? Because God's sovereignty has no borders, no boundaries, no Berlin Walls. It's all-encompassing."

The Barmen Declaration couldn't stop the horror. The Fuhrer didn't listen. Neither did most Christians. But it had an effect on our little branch of the Church in faraway Canada. Not long after the war, our own General Assembly realised we had some post-war business to sort out. Is the Church a lackey of the State, or not? They wrote a little declaration too. It's simply called *A Declaration of Faith concerning Church and Nation*. It recognizes that there *is* a rendering we owe to Caesar, yes. But that's because the true relationship between Church and State must, as it says, "derive from the subordination of *each* to Jesus Christ." In other words, it's only when each realises its responsibility to a truth higher than either of them that each can render, in good

conscience, what they owe to each other. For the sacred must, finally, encompass the secular. But *that* means, it goes on to say, that if ever the State turns tyrannical, the Church has a duty to oppose it.

But then, lest we descend on Queen's Park with pitch forks, it warns us: "*The Church must remember that the weapons of her warfare are finally out of this world.*" In other words, there's a marked difference between the power of the Church and the power of the State. It's not a difference in sphere, one private, the other public. It's a difference in the *character* of the power they wield. What did Lord Acton say? "All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Isn't that why all earthly powers – both State *and* Church – must never be absolute, but subject to Jesus Christ and his Cross? For *that's* how God's power appears in the world. His throne is a cross. The first Christians declared "*Jesus is Lord*" to oppose a world whose slogan was, "*Caesar is Lord.*"

I know. In Caesar's eyes the Cross looks weak, and the Church looks like a divided, disorganized, disintegrating institution, as ineffectual as the nameless man who stood in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square; or as helpless as a first century martyr, flogged to death because he wouldn't put a pinch of incense on the Caesar's altar; or as doomed as Dietrich Bonhoeffer praying in a Nazi Prison at the end of the war. Because he'd belonged to the Confessing Church too, you see? But as he counted down the days to own his execution, he wrote these words in a letter to his friend: "God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, God is with us, and helps us...only a suffering God can help. That is the *way* Christ is Lord."

### ***Prayers of Intercession***

Holy One, our duty and joy is to offer your thanks and praise, the devotion of our lives in service, and the thoughts of our hearts in solemn prayer.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We thank you for the gift of the Church universal, in every time and place; for making us your children by adoption and grace, for feeding us with the bread of life, and for the faith handed on to us by those who have gone before.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We give you thanks, O God, for people who, by the work of their hands and the devotion of their lives, strengthened and beautified your Church. We remember the generations who have worshipped at Elmwood Avenue Church, been baptised there, exchanged their vows of marriage there, and who, in death, were remembered before you in that sanctuary.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We give you thanks for ministers who have led your people in worship and guided their lives towards you, for elders who have ruled wisely, teachers who have taught the faith, for the aged who encourage the young by their faith and example; for the young who renew your Church by their vigour and vision.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Holy Lord, keep the door of your Church wide enough to receive all who seek love and friendship, but narrow enough to bar all envy and strife. Keep its threshold smooth enough to be no stumbling-block straying feet, but rugged and strong enough to turn back evil. Keep the door to your house of prayer a gateway to your presence.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for peace throughout the world, an end to hatred and bitter fear that leads to war, and a breaking of the power of evil, in every land and in our own hearts. By the power of your Spirit, reconcile us to yourself and to others of every colour and culture, that we may no longer be strangers or enemies, but friends and fellow citizens within your kingdom

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

O God, ever faithful, who have knit together as one body in Christ all who have been your people in every time and place, keep us in communion with your saints, following the example of faith and life of those who came before us. Then bring us, with them, to the joy you have prepared for us...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

O God, whose image we bear, whose name we carry within us; recall us to our true allegiance. Reclaim our loyalty and love.

**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**