

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

*8th Sunday after Pentecost
10:30 a.m.
26 July 2020*

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

Opening Words

L: Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.

P: They shall mount up on wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God most holy, out of love that cannot be measured you made all that is. Out of grace that cannot be exhausted you hold all things in being. And into the light that cannot be extinguished you call us to live. We worship and adore you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Merciful One, you see us truly. We confess our sins and fears. Have we been untrue to you, to others, and to ourselves? Have our thoughts, words, and deeds been empty of faith, hope, and love? O Lord, you know us. Memories haunt us of good words we could have spoken, but did not; good deeds we could have done, but did not. We want to be forgiven, and trust in your mercy. Teach us to forgive each other as well.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

God of peace, rule in our world and in our hearts, that we may abandon the warfare within our souls and with each other. Revive your hearts and restore us to your righteousness; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom with you and the Holy Spirit, be glory and honour, world without end. *Amen*

An Assurance of Pardon

L: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, has come into the world." 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

Lord of all truth, surprise us with joy, and open our minds to the movement of your Spirit, speaking through your Word; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 105: 1-11, 45b (*God's faithfulness to Israel*)

Give thanks to the Lord and call upon God's name,
make known the deeds of the Lord among the peoples.

Sing to the Lord, sing praises,
and speak of all God's marvellous works.

Glory in God's holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

Search for the Lord and the strength of the Lord;
continually seek the face of God.

Remember the marvels God has done,
the wonders and the judgements of God's mouth,

O offspring of Abraham, God's servant,
O children of Jacob, God's chosen.

The Lord is our God;
whose judgments prevail in all the world.

The Lord has always been mindful of the covenant,
the promise made for a thousand generations:

The covenant made with Abraham,
the oath sworn to Isaac,
which God established as a statute for Jacob,
an everlasting covenant for Israel,
saying, 'To you I will give the land of Canaan
to be your allotted inheritance.'

Hallelujah!

(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 13: 31-33, 44-52 (*Jesus tells parables*)

Jesus put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad.

'So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

'Have you understood all this?'

They answered, 'Yes.'

And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

L: This is the Gospel of the Risen Christ.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

St Matthew 13:44 *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field."*

Not long ago, a 'detectorist' wielding an off-the-shelf metal detector made an amazing discovery in a farmer's field in England. It was the largest hoard of Anglo-Saxon treasure ever found. There were rings, clasps, buckles, helmets, swords, and brooches, crafted from gold and silver, inlaid with precious stones.

Imagine the generations of farmers ploughing that field for centuries, oblivious of the treasure buried beneath their feet. It makes me wonder what treasures are buried in our lives, waiting to be unearthed.

Jesus' likened the kingdom of God to a man who found treasure, then buried it, then bought the field he buried it in. Why? So that, by owning the field, he could lay claim to the treasure too. The only catch is that to buy the field he must sell all he has. It costs everything. And yet, he does it with joy.

Joy can knock us off balance. Think of Jesus' parable of the man who searches for pearls. "On finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

That's not just joy, but love at work too. Fanatical love, like a collector who spends a hundred thousand dollars to own a single, unusual stamp, or Elvis Presley's belt buckle, or a rare book in pristine condition signed by its author.

We shake our heads in disbelief. Who'd spend so much on such things? Someone who loves them, that's who.

So with romantic love. Is there anyone whose reason is more unseated than a person struck by Cupid's arrow? Like fanatic collectors, romantic lovers evince a kind of madness. They bore you with excited accounts of their beloved's precious attributes, the way a butterfly collector recounts in agonising detail the precise wing markings of a rare Asian species they once saw at the natural history museum.

And yet, ninety-nine percent of the songs on the radio are about romantic love. They always have been. They celebrate the madness of total devotion. "I would walk 500 miles," sang The Proclaimers. And what did Oliver (or was it the Artful Dodger?) sing in his duet with Nancy:

"I'd do anything, for you, dear – *anything*. For you mean everything to me"

Nancy replies: "Would you lace my shoe?"

"Anything."

"Paint your face bright blue?"

"Anything."

"Catch a kangaroo?"

"Anything."

"Go to Timbuktu?"

"And back again!"

What sacrifice! More sobering, of course, is the fierce loyalty we feel for comrades engaged in struggle, as when a soldier throws himself into the fray and dies willingly in battle. "Greater love has no one than this," said Jesus, "to lay down his life for his friends." But of course, he was speaking of himself, wasn't he?

I think, deep down, we want not to be divided but single-minded, not allotting our self-expenditure in balanced little packages, the way we apportion our paychecks for bills, pleasures, and savings. Something buried within us wants to be 'bewitched, bothered, and bewildered', wooed by a love large enough to command us completely, joyfully, 'fully-madly-deeply'.

This is what it means to be 'enthused'. The ancient Greeks coined that word, 'enthusiasm'. It means 'possessed by a god'. For when we feel enthusiasm, we feel fully alive. There is no greater joy than the joy of God coursing through us.

So, maybe this parable is not really about us, then, is it? It's about Jesus, and what God does with Jesus. Like that long-buried Anglo-Saxon treasure now on display in the British Museum, the long-buried image of God in human beings has been brought to light in Jesus, fully alive, fully enthused by God.

God is the one who buries treasure in the world. God buries his own image in us. But we can't detect it, can we? Not until Jesus shows us this kingdom, this realm that's within and amongst us all the time.

It's God who redeems us, who buys back the treasure hidden in each one of us, and so lays claim to us. How? By unearthing that treasure and bringing it to light.

Do you remember that Good Friday hymn? "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

My all.

Prayers of Intercession

God most holy, in you we live and move and have our being. We pray, now, with grateful hearts, and we commit our lives once more into your keeping. We ask, we seek, we knock at your door; in our every need, grant us the first and best of all your gifts, to know you, and know we are loved by you

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for your whole Church. Look with grace and favour upon us. Encourage Elmwood's Re-opening Group as they plan for our return to your sanctuary. Eternal God, you call us to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden. through perils unknown. Give us a strong faith to go out with courage, not knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us, and your love supporting us.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for places of turmoil and civil unrest, wherever there is hunger, loss of hope, and loss of life. Be near to judge and to save wherever evil is visited upon people. Give to those who govern the nations a deeper humility, a love of service, and your wisdom to know true justice.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those treated cruelly by others, for those imprisoned without charge, and those who have simply disappeared. Watch over those who will sleep tonight without their daily bread, and will awaken hungry and alone.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for the health of all nature. God our Maker, you entrust your good creation to our delight and care. Show us the damage we do to all living things. Give us a deeper reverence for life of every kind, and change our ways. We pray for animals that suffer and starve and tremble in fear, because we treat them with cruelty and spoil their habitat. Give us gentle hands and kind hearts, to be true friends to animals, and good stewards of all life.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Comfort the sick, O Lord, bless the dying, relieve the suffering, and cheer the sorrowful, all for your love's sake.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We remember with deep gratitude those who have died, for the gift they were to the world, and for their risen life in Christ, with you in eternity. Take us, also, into your holy keeping, that no evil may befall us, nor any ill come near our home. When at last our days are ended and our work is finished, grant that we may depart in your peace, in the sure hope of that glorious kingdom where there is day without night, light without darkness, and life without the shadow of death...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy One, in Jesus Christ you reveal the bright treasure of your kingdom, spread throughout creation, in the miracle of life, and within your people. Let it be to us like a mustard seed growing to greatness, and leaven lightening our hearts in the power of your 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**