

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

*9th Sunday after Pentecost
10:30 a.m.
2 August 2020*

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

Opening Words

L: One does not live by bread alone;

P: but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Gracious God, in your wisdom you made us, in Jesus Christ you came to redeem us, and through your Holy Spirit you sanctify us for him. Give us breath to sing of your majesty, and, with all creation, to praise you as the true life of all; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, our one true and living God.

Forgiving Lord, you are the searcher of human hearts. We confess our sins to you. When your face is hidden from us and we forget your mercy in the blindness of our hearts, show us your grace and favour. Cleanse and heal us. Deliver us from proud thoughts and vain desires. By your mercy, draw us to yourself, so that in humility we may draw near to you, confiding in your grace, and aspiring to heaven's joy.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us;

P: Christ, have mercy upon us;

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

O God, you alone judge rightly and with mercy. Make us swift to do your will, and slow to judge our neighbour, that we may walk as those who follow the way of the cross; 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: "If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is." 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

Startle us with your truth, O God, 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 17: 1-7, 15 (*A Cry for Vindication*)

Hear a just cause, O Lord; attend to my cry;
 give ear to my prayer from lips free of deceit.
 From you let my vindication come;
 let your eyes see the right.
 If you try my heart, if you visit me by night,
 if you test me, you will find no wickedness in me;
 my mouth does not transgress.
 As for what others do, by the word of your lips
 I have avoided the ways of the violent.
 My steps have held fast to your paths;
 my feet have not slipped.

I call upon you, for you will answer me, O God;
 incline your ear to me, hear my words.
 Wondrously show your steadfast love,
 O saviour of those who seek refuge
 from their adversaries at your right hand.
 As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness;
 when I awake I shall be satisfied, beholding your likeness.

(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 32: 22-31 (*Jacob wrestles*)

The same night, Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him.

Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.'

But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.'

So he said to him, 'What is your name?'

And he said, 'Jacob.'

Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.'

Then Jacob asked him, 'Please tell me your name.'

But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name?' And there he blessed him.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.'

The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

P: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Some thoughts on the Reading

Genesis 32:24 *"Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until daybreak."*

When the sun finally rose on his 'dark night of the soul', Jacob and his attacker collapsed in a heap, panting for breath. It was a stalemate.

Was it God? Was it an angel of God? Or had Jacob wrestled all night long with himself, his own memory and conscience? Maybe it was 'all of the above'. Every wrestling with God is a wrestling with our own true selves, and vice-versa.

"Tell me your name!" cried Jacob.

But his adversary would not. Instead he gave Jacob a new name. He called him *Israel*. Why? "Because you have striven with God and with humans, and you have prevailed," he said. And forever after, God's people have belonged to this 'house of Israel', this family of people whose struggle and striving with God have been a source of blessing to themselves and to the world. For Jacob wrestled a blessing from this encounter. But it cost him. He walked with a limp until the day he died.

What kind of God wants to wrestle us? God is a breathtaking, intimidating reality who overshadows and overwhelms our lives. God can't be toyed with or manipulated. Couldn't God force his will on us?

But no, God welcomes our struggles and strivings. God may even be their source. There's a dark side to God's presence, more baffling than our sunny, sing-songy portraits of him can know. But we can only experience it at night, in silence, once the

sun has gone down, just as we can only see the stars of the Milky Way in the darkest hours of the night. The stars are always there, aren't they? But sunshine hides them.

There's a side of life *we* would keep hidden but *God* would bless. Only, the blessing can't happen in sunshine, when all is bright and happy.

Down the centuries, many Saints have followed where Jacob went. They've met God not when life is sunny, but at its darkest moments. They wrestled with God. They wrestled with themselves. They wrestled with faith and unbelief, hope and despair, forgiveness and failure. They wrestled and they *would not let go*. And forever after they wore the bruises inflicted by God's love. This was their blessing.

Jacob had always been a 'striver'. He had always wanted to make a 'name' for himself. God honours this, for God had chosen him. But it's not how Jacob planned it. Blessings never are the product of our careful planning, are they? Jacob doesn't *make* a name for himself, he's given one instead: *Israel*.

He limps home bruised but blessed. And I have to believe that the bruising and the blessing go together.

So many of us rush to religion hoping it will take away life's sting. We plead with God to bandage the wounds that pain us. We want divine anaesthetic for the ache of life.

But what if our blessing – *our* identity, our *name* as baptised Christians – is not immunity from wounding, but courage and wisdom to bear the wounds we have? For each of us is wounded by life, one way or another. And all of us need forgiveness, just as we have people we need to forgive. We need to understand and accept ourselves too.

How often this deeper understanding comes, not from our bright successes, but from our dark failures, our 'fallings-down', and our wrestling with memory and conscience in the darkest hours of the night.

Knowing God and knowing ourselves is what wisdom is all about, and those two kinds of knowing always go together. They give us, not greater power to conquer the world, but wisdom to understand ourselves and to love each other; perchance to suffer and bear our wounds as Jesus Christ bears his, and to rejoice that he shares them with us.

Isn't that, maybe, blessing enough?

Prayers of Intercession

Loving one, your touch makes this world holy. Open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendour of creation, and in the beauty of human life. We cherish your blessing, and would share it with each other and the world all around us.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for your whole Church, and lift up the needs of the Churches in our neighbourhood. Increase our friendship with each other. Help us, together, to hold onto

the truth embedded in our common faith, to live with courage in this troubled time, trusting in your love, and with hope for a future inspired by your grace. Renew our faith in this high calling

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Loving Lord, hold with kind hands all who feel unwanted, rejected, or alone. We pray for those facing any kind of trial, for those who live in private worlds of despair or grief. We pray for those whom you love dearly but the world does not love; for those whom we pass by on the other side, who have no share in this world's wealth; and for those who fit in nowhere. Be near them, and move the hearts of your people to care more deeply for them.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those whose bodies have outlived the health of their minds, and for those who feel their life has become an bearable burden and a terrible sorrow. Bless and keep them in your care. Refresh them with your Holy Spirit. Help them believe they are still a blessing to others.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for war-torn regions of the earth, for victims of terror and random violence. We pray for peaceful solutions to the conflicts that bedevil our world, and for the healing of ancient animosities.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

God of all wisdom, help those who bear the burden of leadership in government. May your own Holy Spirit so direct their counsels and actions that they may hear the cries of suffering people. Cause your justice, through them, to roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We give thanks for those who have died. We praise you, O God, for the hope that is ours in Christ; hope for the world as it shall one day be, and hope for the life beyond this world, where your saints rejoice in your presence without ceasing ...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ, be near us to defend us, within us to refresh us, around us to preserve us, before us to guide us, and above us to bless us; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God for evermore.

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***