

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

*Trinity Sunday  
30 May 2021*

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

*Opening Words*

L: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

**P: Heaven and earth are full of God's glory.**

L: Let us worship God.

*Prayers of Adoration and Confession*

We bind unto ourselves this day the strong name of the Trinity; by invocation of the same, the Three-in-One and One-in-Three. You are the font of all creation, eternal Father, Spirit, Word. You are the source of all salvation, salvation as of Christ the Lord. Glory be to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Merciful One, help us to face all that is not right within us, within your Church, and within your world. When we turn our back on you, turn us back to you. If there is anything false within us, correct it by your truth. If we are indifferent to the suffering of those we dislike, kindle the flame of your love. If we are blind to our own injustice, mend us with your righteousness and heal us with your peace.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

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

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Eternal God, through your Word and Spirit you created all things. In Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, you reveal your salvation in all the world. Through your Holy Spirit you give us a share in your life and love. Keep us firm in this faith, and fill us with the vision of your glory, that we may serve and praise you all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen*

*An Assurance of Pardon*

L: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." 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, open our minds to the movement of your Spirit, speaking in your Word; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

***The Psalm for the Day***

**Psalm 29** (*The Voice of God in a Great Storm*)

Ascribe to the Lord, you powers of heaven,  
 ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.  
 Ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name;  
 worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.  
 The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;  
 the God of glory thunders;  
 the Lord is upon the mighty waters.  
 The voice of the Lord is mighty in operation;  
 the voice of the Lord is a glorious voice.  
 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedar trees;  
 the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon;  
 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf  
 and Sirion like a young wild ox.  
 The voice of the Lord splits the flash of lightning;  
 the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;  
 the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.  
 The voice of the Lord makes the oak trees writhe  
 and strips the forests bare;  
 in his temple all cry, 'Glory!'  
 The Lord sits enthroned above the water flood;  
 the Lord sits enthroned as king for evermore.  
 The Lord shall give strength to his people;  
 the Lord shall give his people the blessing of peace.

*(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*

### **Isaiah 6: 1-8** (*Isaiah's Vision of God in the Temple*)

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.

Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’

**L:** This is the Word of the Lord.

**P:** Thanks be to God.

## *Some thoughts on the Reading*

**Isaiah 6:1** *In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty.*

Something happened in the Temple that day. The glory of God appeared. The Temple filled with smoke and rocked on its foundations.

Winged seraphs flew in circles. They covered their eyes, so terrifying was this sight, but so wonderful too. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts,” they sang. “The whole earth is filled with God’s glory.”

Something happened in Isaiah that day too. His glimpse of God’s glory shocked and shook him into a deeper understanding of himself and his world. That’s what encounters with God can do. “True and sound wisdom consists of two parts: knowledge of God and knowledge of *ourselves*,” said John Calvin.

We may think we ‘know’ all about God, but if it doesn’t lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves, we’re not yet wise. On the other hand, we may think we already know all there is to know about ourselves. We’ve discovered our ‘personality

type'. We've stared deeply into the mirror, and maybe our navels too. But if we haven't yet opened ourselves to the experience of God, we're not yet wise.

"The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God...'," says Psalm 14.

With fear and trembling in the presence of Holy Glory, Isaiah's first word is not *wow*. It's *woe*. "Woe is me," he cries. "I'm lost. I'm a man of unclean lips."

It's a painful moment of self-knowledge. God's technicolour glory points up the greyness in himself. He sees that greyness all around him too. After all, it's "the year that King Uzziah died." His world is in transition and crisis. So is ours. Isn't it always?

In his *Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis says of the mighty Aslan (the Christ-figure in those stories), "He's not a *tame* lion, you know." God's glory could never be tamed by the likes of us, any more than we could choreograph the Northern Lights. The God that Isaiah glimpses is beautiful and terrifying. This makes Isaiah feel small, soiled, and vastly insignificant in the vast scheme of things. That's because he is.

This is often the way with visions of God's true glory as opposed to those 'New Age' visions of rainbows, sunsets, and calming waterfalls. Visions of God are not sedatives. They *slay* people. In the devastating presence of God, we may feel ravaged. "Woe is me. I am lost. For I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips. Yet my eyes have seen the Lord of hosts!" he cries.

But the seeing is 'two-way'. "I see you too," the vision seems to say. "You feel small, insignificant, and 'unclean'. *So you should*. But I know you. You're beloved. And you're destined to partake in my glory too."

In Isaiah's vision, a seraph takes a burning coal from the altar and touches it to Isaiah's mouth, the organ of speech, as if to cleanse his 'uncleanness' by cauterising his lips. Now his speech will be true and pure, as a prophet's words ought to be.

Now he feels, as never before, the irresistible force of God's claim upon his life. And with that claim comes a call. God's voice thunders through the smoky clouds of incense. "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?"

"Here am I!" shouts Isaiah. "Send *me*."

Let's not neglect the fact that all of this happens in the Temple, the place of *worship*. A lot of us grew up believing the purpose of 'Churchgoing' is not to worship God well and truly, but to receive moralistic instruction in 'being good'. We may have got hung up on the idea that God is a truant officer with an obsession for hygiene.

But 'being good' (whatever *that* is) must come 'second' in living the Christian life. It's important, yes, but it derives from something more important still, which is *worship*.

Worship happens when we envision Divine Glory and humble ourselves before God. It happens when we're so shaken by this that we're stunned into a clear vision of ourselves, too. This is the very opposite of boring. If we're bored by being in Church, maybe *we're* the problem.

Annie Dillard, an American writer, asks, "Why do people in Church seem like cheerful tourists on a package tour of the Absolute? We're like children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT. We should all be wearing crash helmets. For the sleeping God may awake someday and take offense, or the waking God may draw us to where we can never return."

*How* we live has so much to do with our vision of *who God is*. If we're the fools who say, "There is no God!", we've hoodwinked ourselves into living for whatever holds the *status* of 'God' in our shrivelled, myopic vision of life. We'll bow, instead, before any power that impresses and *claims* us. We'll deny this, of course, because we're not yet wise enough to know either ourselves or God. We're just foolish enough to think we do.

If that's us, we are of all people most to be pitied. Be sure that *some* power 'out there' claims us for itself. Something calls us to spend ourselves completely in its cause: fame, power, family, nation, career, wealth, or our own bruised ego? Make no mistake, everyone worships. *Everyone*.

*True* worship can only happen through a vision of the *true* God. How important this is! Worshipping well will coax our true selves out of hiding, small and trembling as we are, yes, but seen now by Holy Love.

But how would we ever enjoy this vision unless it were shown to us? Jesus Christ is our saving vision of God's life and love. The truth we see in Jesus Christ is the truth that God *is*. The work that Jesus does is the work that *God* does. That's the loud claim the New Testament makes. It's a glorious vision. It "demands my soul, my life, my all."

Which brings us back to Isaiah, scared out of his wits by God's glory in the Temple, but also enthralled and called.

"Here am I. Send me."

Maybe we could say this too. One day.

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

Holy One, you call us into being and uphold us in love. You pour forth your Spirit into all of life, and guide us with Holy Wisdom You invite us, your troubled people, to gather the world's needs into our hearts and bring them before you.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Living Lord, we pray for your whole Church. Since we cannot gather to see each other, help us to see ourselves as rays from the one sun, branches of a single tree, and streams flowing to one ocean. Keep us close to you, and therefore near to each other. Strengthen our place within the whole body of Christ. Make us ever joyful to know, and love, and serve you.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for those who have had enough, for those who are sick of being sick, and for those who believe they will never be happy again. Help them to be in love with life, to wrestle with its chaos and pain, and not to give up, but to live with hope in the face of incurable illness and unanswerable questions. Let your Holy Spirit heal them if that may be. Above all, be near them.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for artists and authors, musicians and actors, scientists and engineers, builders and designers, labourers and business managers, teachers and pupils, helpers and healers, and for all who commit their minds, bodies, and spirits to make good, creative use of this life. Help us to dare our own purpose true, and to be daring to make it known, for the common good and for your glory.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Creator of Life, all things exist through your Word and live in the energy of your Spirit. Show us how to love not only our pets and gardens, but all animals and birds, all fish and insects and reptiles, all green and growing things. You made the soil, the sea, and the sky. When we vandalise the earth that you commissioned us to care for, stop us in our tracks.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Holy One, we can never forget those whom we have loved, who have died. Help us, as you helped them, to trust in your grace, to live justly in this world, and to rejoice in the world to come, where, with all the saints, we shall find rest in your love and reason for everlasting praise...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Holy God, holy and immortal, show us the glory in the grey; the glory that clarifies our vision and lights up our hearts when night falls. Show us in every storm, in everything we touch, and in everyone we meet, a vision of your glory in the Temple of your love; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God for ever.

As our Saviour Christ has taught us, so we pray:

**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**