

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

*The Second Sunday of Easter  
11 April 2021*

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

*Opening Words*

L: Give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good.

**P: God's steadfast love endures forever.**

L: Let us worship God.

*Prayers of Adoration and Confession*

Living God, you make and mend all things; in your love we find our purpose. Risen Christ, you calm our fear and breathe peace into our hearts. Holy Spirit of God, you give us power to love and joy to live. We praise and acclaim your majesty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God forever.

Holy One, you raised Jesus Christ from death so that we may be brought to new life. Breathe your peace into our hearts. Heal us where we are worn out and tired. Help us not to nurse old wounds but to forgive them, and to seek forgiveness from those we have wounded. Wake us from the sleep of sin and cast out of our fear. Restore us to the joy of your salvation and help us to live in your light.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

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

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Eternal God, you have shown your glory by raising Jesus from the dead. Raise us to new life in him and empower us to serve you. May your words be in our mouths, your strength in our arms, and your love in our hearts, that we may be worthy disciples of Jesus Christ, the living Lord, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen*

*An Assurance of Pardon*

L: "Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone, and a new life has begun." 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 understand the scriptures, and fill us with wonder at the presence of the risen Christ; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

***The Psalm for the Day***

**Psalm 133** (*The Blessings of Unity*)

How very good and pleasant it is  
 when kindred live together in unity!  
 It is like the precious oil on the head,  
 running down upon the beard,  
 on the beard of Aaron,  
 running down over the collar of his robes.  
 It is like the dew of Hermon,  
 which falls on the mountains of Zion.  
 For there the Lord ordained his blessing,  
 life for evermore.

*(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***

**Acts 4: 32-35** (*The Common Life of the Early Church*)

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

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

### *Some thoughts on the Reading*

**Acts 4:32** *They were of one heart and soul...everything they owned was held in common.*

In Thornton Wilder's story, *The Matchmaker*, Dolly Levi says, "Money is like manure. It's not worth a thing unless it's spread around."

In the Church's early days, all the wealth was spread around. More than that, a spontaneous 'Communism' erupted. There was no private ownership. All the wealth was '*common-wealth*'.

The empty tomb had changed them. They were 'of one heart and soul' now, not because they felt they should try harder to get along, 'the way Jesus would have wanted', but because they belonged to the one heart and soul of their Risen Lord.

This made them feel each other's needs as keenly as their own. "As many as owned lands or houses sold them. They laid the proceeds at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need," says the Acts of the Apostles.

Karl Marx condensed this into a slogan. "*From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.*"

But what does this mean, really? It means the community must say this to you: "Whatever you have it in you to give, *that you must give.*"

"What, my money too?"

"Yes, your money too. You must give away the *value* of the work you're best suited to do. In other words: '*From each according to his ability.*'"

But there's more. The community must also say this to you: "Whatever it is you need to thrive, that *we* must give to *you.*"

"What, money too?"

"Yes, money too. We must give you the *opportunity* to do the work you're best suited to do. In other words: '*To each according to his need.*'"

Cue the cigar-chomping Capitalist. "This is all a dangerous delusion," he shouts. He has been trained like Pavlov's dog to snarl at the word 'Communism'. He has a point, though. As an economic theory, Communism has shown us its shortcomings whenever it has been tried. More than that, Communism hasn't been able to stop itself from turning 'totalitarian'. Its tyranny has caused more misery and death than we can possibly imagine. Its feeling of 'one heart and soul' must be artificially imposed, like unconvincing dogma, often at the barrel of a gun. Its common life doesn't arise from our feeling of spontaneous unity in the body of the Risen Lord.

Cue the card-carrying Socialist, then, who shouts, "Hang on, *Capitalism* is a disaster! It bestrides the world like a Colossus. The more it's released from regulation, the more it poisons nature, makes poor people poorer, and enriches the already-rich."

He has a point too. How does every game of Monopoly end? One person owns everything. Is this a great 'system' for humans to flourish in? Not if you're one of the

losers, which, by the odds of lottery, most of us would be. Or are we really going to claim that our own 'hard work', and *only* hard work, will make us healthy, wealthy, and wise?

Nonsense. Hard work is always called for, yes. But big wealth comes from extracting and owning the value of *other* people's hard work. Hard work alone won't get us there. Investing well will, using whatever private capital we can scrape together. Perhaps, that way, we can avoid being one of the many losers. Losers are evicted from the Monopoly board. They have no real estate. The winners own it all now.

Social inequality must have many causes, yes. But surely this is one of the largest. Jesus may not have been a card-carrying Communist, but neither did he die to defend Capitalism and the ravenous greed that fuels it.

Greed lives in all of us, of course, though few will admit it as openly as Gordon Gekko, played by Michael Douglas in the film *Wall Street*: "Greed is good. Greed is right. Greed works," he says. He means that greed works for *him* and his shareholders. It doesn't work for downsized employees whose wages he has cut, or the vast swaths of nature ruined by the unregulated industries he invests in – industries protected from prosecution by the political lackeys he's bribed.

Private vice cannot yield public benefit. That is foolish, vicious dogma. We have seen the work of greed. Greed is not good. Generosity is good. Feeling another's need as keenly as our own is good – *difficult*...but good. In our best moments, we know that.

The Communism of those first Christians was, indeed, *spontaneous*. No edict descended from the Supreme Soviet. The Komintern dispatched no orders. It sprang from their collective heart and soul.

If we dig beneath our contested economic theories, we'll find the heart of the matter. For it lies *within* the human heart. This is where the Risen Lord still does his best work. No change in economic theory moved the first Christians to live the way they did; it was a change in their hearts and souls, wasn't it?

Justin Martyr, who lived a century after Jesus, described this change. "We who once took most pleasure in increasing our wealth and property now bring what we have into a common fund and share with everyone in need."

But this generosity isn't just 'economic', it's cultural and personal too. "We who once hated and killed one another and *would not associate with people of different tribes because of their different customs*, now live together and pray for our enemies."

The Church's 'wealth' is a tiny drop in the vast ocean that is our economy. Our clout is less than negligible. If we believe economic power is all that matters, then the Church does not matter. But woe to us if that's what we believe. "Money is like manure. It's not worth a thing unless it's spread around." *Generosity matters more.*

I can make that claim – and so can you – because our Lord is Risen. We'd do well to look into our hearts, to remake our lives around the new reality of an empty tomb, and 'share one heart and soul' in the Risen Body of his Church.

### *Prayers of Intercession*

Living God, for you no door is closed, no heart is locked. Draw us beyond our doubt and fear, till we see your Christ and touch his wounds where they bleed in others. We lift them up to you.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Holy Lord, breathe life and peace into your whole Church. Awaken your people, that we may rise with Christ, and go into the world to serve him where he already is. Give your Church courage to speak his truth in love, live with justice, and to love mercy.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Send your peace to places of conflict throughout the world today. Heal suffering and undo injustice. Half the world diets, the other half hungers; half the world is housed, the other half is homeless; half the world pursues profit, the other half loses out. Let your justice make demands upon us, to mend and heal our world.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

And as the springtime of the earth renews life all around us, we pray for the careful stewardship of the land and sea and air. Help us to care for the bounty you have given us, and to share it fairly with all.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for the world, for those badly hurt in the battle of life, and those who have fallen to the wounds of despair. We pray for those who have lost the battle for their health, their livelihood, their patience, and their faith. Breathe your peace into every suffering heart. Though they feel ready to give up, revive and restore them all.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We pray for those who are bored and restless, frustrated by social distancing, and angry at the imposition of inactivity upon their lives. Grant them strength to wait patiently, and to seek your meaning in all moments, even this one.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

Holy God, your Son touched the ill, and healed them. We pray for all whose work puts them in touch with illness. Be present to those whose jobs seem menial and unimportant to the world, but matter very much to you.

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

We remember before you those whom we have loved, who have died. We are grateful for each one, for the gift they were to the world, and for everything you made them to be, by nature and by your grace. Though we mourn them now, uphold us with the hope of our last awakening, when, in the presence of the Risen One, we will share with them in his resurrection...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*....

L: Lord in your mercy

**P: Hear our prayer**

God of peace, you have taught us that in returning and rest we shall be saved, in quietness and confidence shall be our strength. By the might of your Spirit lift us up to your presence, where we may be still and know that you are God; to whom, with the Son and the Holy Spirit, be glory and praise, world without end.

As our Saviour has taught, 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**