

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

*The 7th Sunday after Pentecost
11 July 2021*

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

Opening Words

L: Give us the joy of your saving help

P: and sustain us with your live-giving Spirit.

L: Let us worship God.

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Holy One, you are the wellspring of life. Pour into our hearts the living water of your grace, that we may be refreshed to live this day in joy, confident of your presence, empowered by your peace, and enlivened by your love; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God for ever.

God of mercy, we grieve for the hurt done by others, and we confess the hurt we have done. If we have been bitter in our thoughts, harsh in our words, and cruel in our actions; if we have been complacent in a world made ill by want and wastefulness; if we wandered from your path and passed by on the other side; forgive our sin, heal us from within, and restore us in your peace.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

P: Christ, have mercy upon us.

L: Lord, have mercy upon us.

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding. Pour into our hearts such love towards you that we, loving you above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; 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: "The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining." 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 God of wisdom, illumine our minds. God of light, shine into our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

The Psalm for the Day

Psalm 24 (*God's Sovereignty*)

The earth is the Lord's and all that fills it,
the compass of the world and all who dwell therein.

For he has founded it upon the seas
and set it firm upon the rivers of the deep.

'Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord,
or who can rise up in his holy place?'

'Those who have clean hands and a pure heart,
who have not lifted up their soul to an idol,
nor sworn an oath to a lie;

'They shall receive a blessing from the Lord,
a just reward from the God of their salvation.'

Such is the company of those who seek him,
of those who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

Lift up your heads, O gates;
be lifted up, you everlasting doors;
and the King of glory shall come in.

'Who is the King of glory?'

'The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord who is mighty in battle.'

Lift up your heads, O gates;
be lifted up, you everlasting doors;
and the King of glory shall come in.

'Who is this King of glory?'

'The Lord of hosts,
he is the King of glory.'

(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

Ephesians 1: 3-14 (*Our destiny is Jesus Christ*)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love.

He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.

With all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

P: Thanks be to God.

Some thoughts on the Reading

Ephesians 1:9 *"God has made known to us the mystery of his will..."*

If we saw a rainbow in the sky every time we stepped outside, would it bore us after a while? "Not another *rainbow!*", we'd say, and carry on with our day.

Familiarity blinds us to the 'extraordinary' shining through the ordinary things of life. We develop a 'been there, done that' feeling. Like the world-weary author of Ecclesiastes, we come to believe there's nothing new under the sun, nothing thrilling to discover about the world or ourselves.

"To be tired of London is to be tired of life," said Samuel Johnson. But he didn't blame London for this. If London bores us, it's because we're bored with *ourselves*, he thought. We've lost our feel for enchantment and renewal.

Perhaps it's because we treat life like a puzzle to be solved rather than a mystery to be lived. Puzzles are fun *until* they're solved. If we find a crossword puzzle in the dentist's waiting room, and all the answers have already been filled in, it's about as interesting as a wet dishrag. Once it's solved, a puzzle has nothing new to show us, nothing to engage our attention and intelligence.

Do we look upon our own lives this way? Do we see them as an adventure that takes us deeper into the mystery of God and the mystery of ourselves? Or do we treat our lives as a series of little puzzles to be solved? "Find work, earn money, find a partner, procreate, clean up after children, pay mortgage, go on vacation, get a dog, clean up after dog, retire, coast to the finish line, die."

Do we tell ourselves, "Once I've solved these puzzles, *then* I'll really live!" But it's just the opposite, isn't it? The mystery of life is never 'solved'. It happens around us and within us all the time. Are we missing the point of it?

The Gospel wants to draw us further into the mystery of our own lives, and into the gift of being alive. But it won't solve life's puzzles and problems. Neither does the Gospel offer seven easy steps to fix our sin and sorrow the way a plumbing manual shows us how to fix a leaky tap.

St Paul was never too interested in life's problems or puzzles. He speaks about a singular *mystery*. This mystery had a grip on him. "God chose us in *Christ* before the foundation of the world," he says. "God *destined* us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ."

That's the big story we all live inside. We're chosen, elected, destined – *pre-*destined, in fact, because this truth issues from the choice God made *before* the foundation of the world. Before we ever were, God resolved to love and redeem us. End of story? No, it's just the beginning.

Pre-destination is not 'fatalism'. It's not the bizarre idea that every little thing that will ever happen to us has been decided ahead of time or programmed in advance – as though we're toy racing cars stuck in the pre-cut groove we're 'destined' to follow until we cross the finish line.

The idea of 'predestination' isn't so much about what happens on this journey we call life. It's more about the *destination* of that journey. But our destination shapes our lives here and now.

"All roads lead to Rome," goes the saying. But that means there are many roads, many ways to get there. In the same way, many roads and many kinds of life may take us to our destination 'in Christ'.

Having and knowing our destiny gives our lives something to be *about*. This is the mystery, the *real* mystery, forever feeding and infusing our lives, forever rejuvenating them – no matter how old or bored we get. It gives our lives purpose, and with purpose comes meaning, a meaning larger and better than anything we could choose *for* ourselves or achieve *by* ourselves.

(When modern people reject religion, it's often because they believe, wrongly, that it's beneath our dignity *not* to choose everything by ourselves and for ourselves.)

And yet, if 'life in Christ' is the one destiny we share, there's still a dizzying array of choices and challenges to face along the way, many puzzles to solve and problems to fix.

Don't our lives sometimes feel as if we've been dropped in a maze, and we've been told to find our way home without a road map? There are so many pathways to take, so many wrong turns to make, so many by-ways to get lost in -- *and so many dead ends*. If only we could see our lives from a bird's-eye view, from above. We could trace the true path of life and solve the puzzle ahead of time.

But no. This is not God's way. Instead of sending us a detailed road map, or a book of solutions to all of life's puzzles (which would only bore us in the end), God shows us the mystery of his will for us, in Christ, and calls us to adventure, renewal, and discovery by moving us deeper into that mystery.

In Christ, he assures us that we *will* reach this destiny, no matter how many wrong-turns and dead-ends we take. For God has predestined us for his love, and *that's that*.

If we keep awake to the wonder of life and stay alert to *this* mystery – which is to say, if we have *faith* – we'll hear God calling us at every turn in the maze and see the 'extraordinary' shining through the ordinary things of life, whether we solve life's little puzzles and fix our little problems, or not.

Some seem to glide through life's maze with glee and glamour, others suffer and sin and scrape their knees. This too is a mystery. Either way, life will not be boring. Even its ending will be a fresh beginning. We'll arrive at the centre of the maze, know God's joy, feel God's love, and share in the mystery of God's eternal life.

Prayers of Intercession

Holy Love, in Christ you share our pain and ease our sorrow. You bind up our wounds and nurse our spirits back to health. Let such a love as yours compel us to go and do likewise, for others. But first, let your Holy Spirit intercede for us now, with sighs too deep for words.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, teach us to cherish your living body, the Church. Help us to reach upwards to your throne in worship and adoration; inwards to each other in understanding and friendship; outwards to the world in compassion and care; and down into the depths of souls, where you dwell and hold us in being.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy One, forgive us when we despair, when evil seems stronger than good, and life has lost its meaning. Do not turn us away from your presence, but show us, as never before, the power of your resurrection in the turmoil of the world.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those made ill by cancer, by ailments of body and mind, by Covid 19, and by chronic disease. We call upon your mercy to help all who suffer pain in their bodies, grief in their hearts, or loss of memory in their minds. As our Lord Jesus Christ himself suffered pain, and healed it in others, help them find their peace in him, and, by your mercy, grant them health and strength.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

We pray for those who go hungry today, for those without money for food or shelter. We also pray for people rich in material things but starving for things of the spirit, and hungry for your blessing.

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Holy One, we tremble at the slenderness of the thread that separates life from death. How fragile it is. How easily it breaks. We thank you that, in the risen body of your Son, neither the living nor the dead can be parted from you. Grant that when we come to breathe our last breath, we shall share in the communion of saints, and the glory of life everlasting...*(keep a time of silence in God's presence)*...

L: Lord in your mercy

P: Hear our prayer

Majestic Lord, you have so greatly loved us, so long sought us, and so mercifully redeemed us. Give us grace that, in everything we do, we may, from the depth of our hearts, give ourselves to you.

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**