

St. Matthew's and Hardwood Lands Presbyterian Churches

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**January 30, 2022 ~ The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany**

**Welcome**

- † Welcome! To the fourth Sunday after Epiphany! And the last Sunday in January!
- † It is so nice to have you join in this time of worship!

**Announcements:**

- † **Thank you** for being patient with our canceling in-person services once again! It was not an easy (or unanimous) decision, but it was made out of an “abundance of caution” since covid-19 cases continue to surge in our province over the past weeks. We are praying that we will be worshipping again in-person soon!
- † **Wednesdays** ~ St. Matthew’s hosting of the Knitting and Crochet group has been postponed until at least January 26<sup>th</sup>! It usually runs from 10am-12noon in room 102 at 224 Highway 214. Come learn how to knit or crochet, help others, and share what you are working on. Come join in the fun! (We will have to check the pandemic restrictions as that time)
- † **ANNUAL REPORTS** are NOW due!
  - † Reports for the St. Matthew’s Church can be given to or emailed to Cindy Shea at [cindyjshea@hotmail.com](mailto:cindyjshea@hotmail.com)
  - † Reports for the Hardwood Lands Church can be given to or emailed to Rev. Beth at [elmsdale.hardwoodlands@gmail.com](mailto:elmsdale.hardwoodlands@gmail.com)
- † **February 20<sup>th</sup>** ~ the Hardwood Lands Church is planning to begin in-person Sunday worship services again!! Unless the pandemic restrictions worsen. St. Matthew’s will reassess before this date as well – so stay tuned!

- † **February 24** ~ the Session of the St. Matthew’s Church will meet in the church at 10:00am.
- † **February 24** ~ the Hardwood Lands Session will meet at 7:30pm in the church.
- † **Annual Meetings** ~ will be planned for mid to late March!
- † **Prayer list** – if you or someone you know would like to be included for extra prayers, please let Rev. Beth know!
- † We are also looking ahead and planning some things for 2022 – if there are any ideas for Bible Study, or a book study, or a type of group you would like to see our congregation host, please let us know!
- † Even though our in-person worship services have been canceled, our expenses continue. If you would like to make a donation to support the ministry done in and through our churches you can do so by the offering at worship services (when held), mailing a cheque, or sending an e-transfer:
  - † For the Hardwood Lands Church send to [hwtreasury@gmail.com](mailto:hwtreasury@gmail.com)
  - † For the St. Matthew’s Church send to [stmatthews.elmsdale@gmail.com](mailto:stmatthews.elmsdale@gmail.com)
  - † Please include your name and mailing address in the e-transfer for receipt purposes!
  - † Thank you again for your support!

**Thank you** for joining in this time of worship!

**Let’s take a moment to quiet our minds and focus on God!**  
*(you’re invited to light a candle to remind you Christ is with you)*

**WE GATHER IN GOD'S PRESENCE**

**Call to Worship:**

Come worship God,  
For before you were born, He knew you;  
Before you were born, He set you apart to be His servant  
He is with you and will send you out,  
and will give you His words to speak

Let us sing out our praise of God's steadfast love.  
Let us offer God all glory and honour this day and always!

**Hymn:** "Stand up and bless our Lord"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5PNggqcbMbFE>

Stand up, and bless the Lord,  
You people of God's choice;  
Stand up, and bless the Lord of hosts  
With heart and soul and voice.

Though high above all praise,  
Above all blessing high,  
Who would not fear God's holy name,  
And laud and magnify?

O for the living flame  
From God's own altar brought,  
To touch our lips, our minds inspire,  
And wing to heaven our thought!

God is our strength and song,  
Who makes salvation ours;  
Then be God's love in Christ proclaimed  
With all our ransomed powers.

Stand up, and bless the Lord;  
The Lord your God adore;  
Stand up, and bless the glorious name  
Henceforth for evermore.

**Prayer of Approach and Confession:**

Almighty and everlasting God,  
your power is incomparable, your majesty infinite,  
and your love beyond our imagining.  
You are hidden in mystery, and yet so present.  
In a hectic world, you are peace and rest.  
In a harsh world, you are tenderness and mercy.  
In the cold and dark of winter, you are light and comfort,  
and so we bring you our worship,  
for you are the Father who created us,

Jesus, the Son who redeems us,  
and the Holy Spirit who gives us life,  
our One and only God,  
to whom we offer all love and loyalty.

God, whose name is love,  
we confess our faults and failings,  
knowing you know us through and through.  
You tell us love is patient and kind,  
and you know when our patience and kindness fell short.  
You tell us love is never rude or selfish,  
and you see the times we insisted on our own way.  
Forgive us the excuses we make to ourselves when our love falters.  
Strengthen us by your Spirit so that our love is genuine and reliable.  
We pray through your Son, Jesus, and by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

God is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is God's love; as far as the east is from the west, so far has God removed our sins.  
Thanks be to God whose love and forgiveness are steadfast.  
May we live as His forgiven and forgiving people!

**GOD SPEAKS TO US**

**Time for the Young and the Young at Heart**

- † Item: mirror
- † There is one phrase in our readings today that always catches my mind and makes me wonder...
- † Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13:12 "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face."
- † In other versions they say "we see in a mirror, dimly" ... a blurred image, or we see darkly, etc.

- † One website explains: “Mirrors of the Biblical era were highly polished volcanic stones called obsidian. Some found in Turkey date back to 6000 BCE. Later, as people gained greater insight into metallurgy, highly polished metals were used, first brass, then silver and gold. Metal alloys were soon widespread, especially a mix of tin and copper.” By the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, polished silver mirrors were widely used.
- † They certainly didn’t have mirrors like we have today. Yet even the mirrors we have now don’t show an accurate reflection since everything in a mirror is backward.
- † Many believe that “we see dimly” refers to the fact that as humans we can only see who God is and how great He is dimly – we cannot fully see everything about Him. We only see part and can only know in part. But that one day, when we go to be in heaven, or when Jesus returns to the earth... then we will see Him face-to-face and all will be revealed clearly to us. This is very true!
- † We could also apply this verse to ourselves – as you look in a mirror, we only see the outside of ourselves... what others see of us (even if it is backwards). We only see part of who we are. Sometimes we get glimpses of what we’ve been through... oh, those wrinkles or dark lines or tired eyes. Sometimes God gives us insight into something in our lives, if we ask Him to show us.
- † But we cannot see ourselves as God sees us – He sees all of us – outside and inside.
- † In 1 Samuel 16:7, when Samuel is trying to figure out who God wants to anoint as king, The Lord says to Samuel... “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”
- † As you look in the mirror, remember that God made you, and that all He has made is good... therefore you are God’s good creation – no matter how you look or how you feel.
- † I pray that you will take some time today to look in a mirror and ask God to show you something good about yourself that you and others may not see... then listen to see what He says.

- † Let us pray... Dear God, thank you for making me the way I am. Help me to see the good in me that you see. Show me how you see me. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Hymn:** “Jesus loves even me”

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COtjvBc\\_baU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COtjvBc_baU)

I am so glad that our Father in heav’n  
Tells of His love in the Book he has giv’n  
Wonderful things in the Bible I see;  
This is the dearest, that Jesus loves me.

*Chorus:* I am so glad that Jesus loves me;  
Jesus loves me; Jesus loves me;  
I am so glad that Jesus loves me;  
Jesus loves even me!

Tho’ I forget Him and wander away,  
Still He doth love me wherever I stray.  
Back to His dear, loving arms would I flee  
When I remember that Jesus loves me.

*Chorus*

O if there’s only one song I can sing  
When in His beauty I see the great King,  
This shall my song in eternity be;  
“O what a wonder that Jesus loves me!”

*Chorus*

**Prayer for Understanding:**

God of wisdom, we long to hear your holy Word in new and fresh ways.

Open our ears to hear your call.

Open our minds to understand your truth.

Open our eyes to the work of your kingdom and equip us to take our part.

We pray through Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

**Scripture Readings:** Jeremiah 1:4-10  
Psalm 71:1-6  
Luke 4:21-30  
1 Corinthians 13:1-13

**Sermon:** Where is the Love?

Our New Testament readings begin where we left off last week – in Luke, Jesus is still in the synagogue – He has announced to the people assembled that Isaiah's promises of good news for the poor, release for the captives and recovery of sight for the blind have been fulfilled in their hearing. "All [who heard him] spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words which came from his mouth." But then, when the crowd began to murmur 'isn't this Joseph's son', Jesus told them that "no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown." He reminded them about the stories of the widow at Zarephath [1 Kings 17:7-24] and Naaman the Syrian [2 Kings 5:1-15]. Both of them weren't even Israelites, but had been ministered to by two of Israel's great prophets.

As one writer put it – Jesus was basically saying to his neighbours in Nazareth: 'Open your eyes! The world is bigger than you imagine. The God you claim to believe in is far too small. God doesn't just favour Israelites like you and me. God's love extends to those who are most vulnerable, the most oppressed, the outsiders, the most in need.' But on hearing this, the people in Nazareth did anything but show love...they became furious – they didn't want to believe his words, they didn't realise that Jesus was speaking the truth in love.

This is one of the passages used against people who would like to be ministers in their home churches – people in your home town may not take you seriously; they have seen you grow up; they may always see you as Gerald's daughter or Joe's son – they may have trouble seeing you in the ministerial role.

Jeremiah was leery about this as well – he was young, he had grown up in the area, would people take him seriously? Jeremiah found that the people of Judah were content to make small changes, at least on the outside, but they were

unreceptive to his calls for a more thorough change of their inner character and their conduct of daily life, to bring them back in line with Israel's covenant promises to God.

Sometimes when someone we love, tries to tell us that we are doing wrong, that we need to change our ways, we are reluctant to heed their words as well. Or sometimes, it is difficult if we have to give news like that to someone we love. It can be so difficult that those we know and love are ready to throw us off a cliff – like they were ready to do to Jesus.

However, God already knows this – that some people may want to shoot the messenger – and he promises to those who will take up his mission, he will give them the gifts they need to do it. To Jeremiah He gave his words to speak. To each one of us he gives gifts as well. *(If we were to read the verses before our 1 Corinthian passage for today, we would hear about spiritual gifts. If you have time read about them).*

When Paul writes to the believers in Corinth, he knows that there were problems with the body of Christ in Corinth. The people in Corinth were, at times rude to one another, impatient, arrogant, greedy, selfish, and unkind. This even though they knew they had been given spiritual gifts – this even though people were healed at their meetings, and the Word of God was proclaimed, and people were clothed and fed and prayed for.

Paul explains that this is not how they are to be, they are to use their gifts to build up the body, not to cause fractures. In 12:31 he urges them to "eagerly desire the greater gifts." Then in 13:13 he says that the greater gifts are: faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of these is love."

Paul states that they, or us, can have any of the gifts - gifts of prophecy, speaking in tongues, wisdom, and so on, but if we don't have the gift of love then the others are nothing.

Now I realise that this passage is usually read at weddings, because of its wonderful description of what love is and isn't. However, it is also a description of love for everyday life.

I think I have mentioned this before, but it is worth thinking about again... I can remember leading a funeral service when I was ministering on PEI, when this passage was

read, and during the message the family wanted me to speak about how their mother embodied the description of love. So I re-read the passage inserting the woman's name in verse 4-8. It really did describe who she was and how she had lived, she was an example of true 'agape' love (divine love; the love God shows for his people) – it made a huge impact!

So I want you try it today – try putting yourself in the verses. Think about yourself, and see just how much you agree with it and just how much more traveling along the road of spiritual growth and understanding you need to do. Read the passage again... (*read below or use whatever version that you are reading from*)

Love is patient. Love is kind..... I am patient. I am kind.  
I am not envious or boastful, arrogant or rude.  
I do not insist on my own way.  
I am not irritable or resentful.  
I do not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoice in the truth.  
I bear all things  
I believe all things.  
I hope all things.  
I endure all things.

That is quite something isn't it? Try saying all that about yourself once in a while. And in saying it, try to avoid the words: "most of the time" or "almost always" - as in 'most of the time I am patient and kind' or 'almost always I not rude or resentful'. Now I realise that none of us are going to say 'yes that's what I'm like ALL the time' – if we do, then we are deceiving ourselves. This is the description of perfect love, and none of us are perfect! It is God's perfect love!

It is just a way for us to compare how we are doing. It is not a list, for me to use to judge you - or for you to judge me. Rather it is for us to look at ourselves and ask – am I focussed on Christ or on myself? Am I showing the love of God to others, doing what Jesus would do here, and allowing Jesus to work through me? Or am I allowing my feelings, my frustrations, my needs, my pride, to dominate my interactions with others?

This kind of love is more than words or even noble actions (vs.1-3). It goes straight to the heart of the problems of human communication and the habits that can drive us apart: impatience, unkindness, envy, boasting, arrogance, rudeness, selfishness, irritability, resentment, deliberate wrongdoing, deceit and dishonesty (vs. 4-7). Paul declares his conviction that love can overcome all of these human failings common to us all.

This would have been a difficult message for the people of Corinth, just as Jesus' message had been for those in Nazareth, just as the Jeremiah's message to his people. Where was the love then? God's messages are not always easy; however, He sends them to us because He loves us. The trouble with love is that sometimes we try to make it into what we want, our desires, but the truth is that love can sometimes mean hearing what we don't want to hear.

Other times we read Paul's words and think, how charming – and we reduce them to sentimental greeting-cards. But Paul didn't mean to be sappy. He wrote with great passion to a community of Christian people engaged in tearing itself apart with disputes. Who was right? Whose gifts were truly crucial? Which members could they live without if things got too rough?

Many of us live, work, shop, and seek medical care in communities, and have families or friends facing the same struggles, especially during this pandemic. The same miscommunications are happening now! The same questions are at the heart of restrictions – who do we see as more important? Helping to ease people from catching or suffering with the virus... helping others from dying? Or wanting to be able to go where and do what we want, when we want?

What if we risked a dose of literalism and listened again to these sweet words and their implications? Does God's love shape our actions and inform our motives?

After all, God is love; God is spiritual so His love is spiritual; not the desires of the flesh. All love is a gift from God, but the kind of love most referred to by God and Jesus is "agape" – this is the love Paul is speaking about. It means that we should be able to approach every person, every situation with love, which is not always easy. Every person regardless of

their age – whether we think they are too young or too old; regardless of who they are – someone we know or don't know... even our enemies! There is a saying that we are nicer to people we don't know than those whom we love. I think Jeremiah, Paul, and Jesus would agree.

God does not give up on us though; He will help us to love like he wants us too. God's love is like a river – and we are part of that river; God's love flows into us, but we are not to be a pond that keeps it to ourselves; we are to be the river that lets God's love flow into us, then through us, to others. If we remember that His love is always flowing, with no beginning and no end, and that if we open ourselves to that flow, we can start to handle things and people His way.

So if we were to ask: Where is the love? It is flowing from God. Even in times when people we love would like to throw us off a cliff; or in times when we would like to throw someone else off a cliff. In times like this, we need to step back, walk away as Jesus did, and re-connect with / step into the river of love that flows from God. That flows through each one of us, as his body here on earth. And let God's love flow through us to others, so they won't have to ask: Where is the love? They will see it, hear it, and feel it in all we do.

## **WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD**

### **Prayer of the People and the Lord's Prayer**

Gracious God, your love is perfect. We thank you today for showing us the nature of true love, through your love for us – that while we were sinners you sent your Son, Jesus to save us. We thank you God for loving us when we are unloving; for caring for us when we are uncaring, and for calling to us to return to you when we go astray. Help us dear God to love one another in this way.

O God, your love is patient. We give you thanks for all those who have been patient with us, teaching us and caring for us in so many ways. We pray for the patience to love others as you have loved us.

O God, your love is kind. Thank you for every unexpected gesture of kindness we have received. Give us the courage to be kind to others, serving those who seem unkind, rude, or difficult to love in these difficult days. Remind us that each one we meet is your child, our sister or brother made in your image.

O God, your love is not arrogant, nor does it seek its own interests. Thank you for all who work to serve those who cannot fend for themselves. Strengthen those who have lost hope and confidence in their own value. Give us insight to speak the truth in love and to work for change that creates opportunities for those on the margins and respect for any who face discrimination.

O God, your love is not quick-tempered. Thank you for every occasion when someone spared us from their anger. We pray for those who are filled with anger and for all around them who face or fear violence. Raise up advocates for children and elders who are abused, and rescue those who are trapped in relationships that injure and harm.

O God, your love bears all things; it never fails. We thank you for those we have loved in this life and who now dwell in the peace and joy of your presence. Let your comfort settle on those who are bereaved or lonely this day. We remember before you those with heavy burdens, many cares, much stress, and those who find too little comfort and help. We pray especially for those who are on our hearts this day... *(take time to pray for each one)*.

Open our eyes to those in need around us and show us how to offer support and companionship, for the sake of Christ, our friend and savior, who taught us to pray together:

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 and ever. Amen.

**Offering:**

In his first letter to the believers in Corinth, Paul reminds them and us that the greatest of gifts is love.

The blessings we enjoy in life speak of God's love for us.

What we offer to God speaks of our love for the One who has reached out to us in Jesus.

May our gifts share that love with God's world.

**Doxology:**

"Praise God from Whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him all creatures here below.

Praise Him above ye heavenly host.

Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost."

**Offering Prayer:**

God of life and love, we are grateful for all you have given us in Christ and in creation, in community and in the Church that bears Jesus' name. We dedicate our gifts to you in love, trusting you will bless them and us. May all that we offer become tangible expressions of your love at work in the world for Christ's sake. Amen.

**Hymn:** "We are one in the Spirit"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ2hQtmC0d0>

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord,  
and we pray that all unity will one day be restored,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,  
we will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand,  
and together we'll spread the news that God is in our land,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will work with each other, we will work side by side,  
we will work with each other, we will work side by side,  
and we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride,

and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

*(instrumental)*

and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,  
and all praise to Christ Jesus, who is God's only Son,  
and all praise to the Spirit, who makes us one,  
and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,  
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

**Benediction:**

Go in peace - love and care for one another in the name of Christ;

- and may the love of God be upon you and within you

- may the compassion of God flow through you

- and may the tenderness and the strength of God grace you  
and the world in which you dwell both now and forevermore.

Amen

**Hardwood Lands:** Choral Amen**Elmsdale: Parting Song:** "Go now in peace"

Go now in peace, never be afraid

God will go with you each hour of every day,

Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true,

Know He will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love and show you believe

Reach other to others so all the world can see.

God will be there watching from above

Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.