

Responsive Call to Worship

Jesus Says: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Responsive Prayer of Approach and Confession

One: Let the same mind be in us that was in Christ Jesus.

Many: He emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.

One: God has highly exalted him and given him the name that is above every name,

Many: So, at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

One: In our worship, we bring glory to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Many: We humble ourselves in praise, and offer ourselves in service in Jesus' holy name.

One: We praise you God, for you are like the seasons, always familiar yet always new. And as the seasons change, we see that you are still at work in the world, transforming hearts and situations.

Many: We praise you for all you do to repair injustice, bringing peace to places of hostility, working for goodness to prevail among neighbours and nations.

One: You have shown us the true face of power in Jesus Christ, reaching out with healing and hope to touch desperate lives.

Many: We worship you alone, O God! Let us see the face of Jesus in this time of worship, and fill us with renewed energy and insight this autumn, so that we may love you and our neighbour more faithfully.

ALL: Set us apart from the world, that we may serve your world; this world that you have loved so much, through sacrifice, suffering and death, then into resurrection and transformation. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

O Lord, you love us, therefore we seek to know how to better love you and as disciples, learn to better love our neighbours.

Lord of love, today we confess our sin of indifference. We want to be responsible yet we fall short, our spirits yearn for a wild made right, but we are fatigued and distracted by all that is less important.

O Lord you judge us so that we can know the way to walk by faith.

You place us within the needs of the world and next to its suffering, so that we may offer love, support and help, yet too often we turn away so we don't have to see pain, suffering or injustice, even when the evidence is right before our eyes.

O God, you have given us much, yet too often we hide in that comfort and don't like to feel discomforted.

Eternal God, each of us is connected to injustices which lie from deep in the past; and in the present, injustices are near and far away, yet we deny our human connection and don't want to feel responsible.

We need you O God, and your strength and perseverance so that we may by grace and strength receive your great mercy and be made new.

Forgive us, Lord. And now teach us a new way to live. Give us courage to love others as you love us, and to respond to the cries of others with the humility we have witnessed in Jesus. In whose name we pray, Amen.

Assurance of Forgiveness

The prophet Micah declared that God requires of us these three things: to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. Whoever trusts in God and receives Jesus as Lord and Saviour, and who also reject indifference and evil in the world while prayerfully working humbly to seek reconciliation with God and neighbour, to you all, God offers forgiveness and peace.

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Prayer for Understanding

Give us your Spirit of wisdom, O God, so that we might hear your Word speaking through the scriptures with ears that understand and hearts filled with love. Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 21:23-32

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" And they argued with one another, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'

But if we say, 'Of human origin,' we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet." So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

"What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'

He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go.

Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you.

For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Sermon

The passage today asks the question: who has authority? The religious leaders of Jesus day saw his power and authority and saw it as a threat to their own power and authority. They wanted to know, by whose authority was he doing this?

Jesus knows there are two sources of authority for human beings. The authority that comes from human power and authority that comes from God. But how do you tell the difference?

I think the church has often assumed that it could always discern its own sources of authority. Yet on this Sunday closest to Orange Shirt Day (September 30th) we must pause and reflect on whether or not we can truly discern one source of authority from another.

Orange Shirt day is September 30th and I got this quotation from the Orange Shirt Day website (<https://www.orangeshirtday.org/about-us.html>):

Orange Shirt Day is a legacy of the St. Joseph Mission (SJM) Residential School (1891-1981) Commemoration Project and Reunion events that took place in Williams Lake, BC, Canada, in May 2013.

Orange Shirt Day is a legacy of this project. As spokesperson for the Reunion group leading up to the events, former student Phyllis (Jack) Webstad told her story of her first day at residential school when her shiny new orange shirt, bought by her grandmother, was taken from her as a six-year old girl.

The annual Orange Shirt Day on September 30th opens the door to global conversation on all aspects of Residential Schools. It is an opportunity to create meaningful discussion about the effects of Residential Schools and the legacy they have left behind. A discussion all Canadians can tune into and create bridges with each other for reconciliation. A day for survivors to be reaffirmed that they matter, and so do those that have been affected. Every Child Matters, even if they are an adult, from now on.

The date was chosen because it is the time of year in which children were taken from their homes to residential schools, and because it is an opportunity to set the stage for anti-racism and anti-bullying policies for the coming school year. It is an opportunity for First Nations, local governments, schools and communities to come together in the spirit of reconciliation and hope for generations of children to come.

I think the greatest struggle facing the church in every age, is when we disciples find ourselves wrestling with the question: *"By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"*

But isn't it a good thing that we wrestle with these questions? It is a **must-do** part of discipleship. Even if the question at hand divides us, scares us or leaves us bewildered, we have to do it. For if we do not wrestle with questions of authority we may miss something important.

We always want to believe that our vision for ministry, our vision for outreach, our vision for declarations are given by God's authority speaking to the church, through the Holy Spirit in the pattern of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet when we look back on the history of the church, while we see so much beauty, so much sacrifice and faith, we also have to admit that when things went wrong, they really went wrong. And it when we got it 'wrong' it almost certainly was a question of getting the 'authority' part wrong.

When it comes to residential schools it blows my mind that the church could have ever been involved with the forceful removal of children from their parents. I am glad that the stories are now being told of residential school history because when I grew up in the public school system in the 1980's and early 1990's I can recall no public education on this. In fact, what I remember is our history text books telling me that in Canada we avoided the massacre of Indigenous people that diseases most, if not all, colonial histories around the world.

Canada was different, I was told, but were we really? No.

But it is so easy to see with hindsight! The residential school system had nothing to do with making Christian disciples, it had to do with Europeanising the Aboriginal people of Turtle Island (North America).

This is what God revealed to us in the church's 1994 confession:

We confess that The Presbyterian Church in Canada presumed to know better than Aboriginal peoples what was needed for life. The Church said of our Aboriginal brothers and sisters, "If they could be like us, if they could think like us, talk like us, worship like us, sing like us, and work like us, they would know God and therefore would have life abundant." In our cultural arrogance we have been blind to the ways in which our own understanding of the Gospel has been culturally conditioned, and because of our insensitivity to Aboriginal cultures, we have demanded more of the Aboriginal people than the Gospel requires, and have thus misrepresented Jesus Christ who loves all peoples with compassionate, suffering love that all may come to God through him. For the Church's presumption we ask forgiveness.

The part that I am most interested in, is the section that reads *...we demanded more of the Aboriginal people than the gospel requires ...* it tells me that upon reflection, we got the source of authority wrong. It was from our culture and not from the gospel. It was an authority that had its source in power and not obedience.

When confronting the question of authority Jesus tells a parable. In the parable there is a vineyard owner with two sons. When asked to labour in the vineyard the first son says, "no" but obedience overcomes him and he goes to work. The second son says 'yes' at first but then decides not to work in the vineyard.

If the vineyard in the parable is the Kingdom of God, then the vineyard work is to cultivate gospel lives and as every Christian knows, this is hard work. This is why the second son only says he wants to do the hard work in the vineyard, but in the end does not want to do the work. The other important thing is inheritance and privilege. The son who doesn't work probably sees himself as a privileged owner and does not want to do the work -because he is a boss. He already has authority as a son, from his father and so why go to work?

In the eyes of Jesus, the chief priests and elders are like that second son. They already have all the authority, why should they have had to investigated the ministry of John the Baptist. Shouldn't he have come to them for the right to baptize?

Jesus' challengers had the 'yes' of authority, but no obedience to working the vineyard of God. The only people who were really willing to do the work of investigating the source of authority of John's baptism were apparently the prostitutes and tax collectors. John did not conform to the image of the 'religious' and so did not fit in to the authority in the eyes of the chief priests.

For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Over time, the privilege of authority and all of its responsibilities will often degenerate into a source of control or a 'right' to power. Unfortunately it is only then that we humans can clearly see the source of authority. And it is often too late for everything except confession, forgiveness and reconciliation.

I cannot say I am surprised by the fact that young Phyllis (Jack) Webstad had her orange shirt confiscated because I imagine that it did not fit with the vision for the schools because it did not fit with the authority that shaped vision for those schools.

Much like the chief priests who thought John lacked the conformity required for inclusion so too did the power people in the Residential Schools see Phyllis' shirt too nonconforming to be included. And because of this, now our only avenue is continued confession, appeal for forgiveness and hope of reconciliation.

I believe that the only way to see the source of authority in the church, is witnessed in the actions of those claiming authority.

Is that person willing to do the hard work of kingdom building?

Or is their authority dismissive as it clings desperately to power?

Is that person willing to change their mind, when they do the hard work of of kingdom building and realize that their authority was misplaced?

Or is that person too interested in being right, rather than seeing the truth?

Is that person willing to shed the privilege of being a child of the vineyard owner and do the hard work of keeping the vineyard?

Or is that privilege causing them to declare that they are exempt from doing the hard work of keeping the vineyard?

When we see the example of Jesus we know that the privilege of authority comes with the heaviest of responsibilities and work in the vineyard of God.

And so we look back ... and we must take responsibility ... and we must put our hope in grace through the One who has given us the way of reconciliation.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

Loving God, we bring you our gifts, grateful that we have something to share, glad to be part of a network of mission and mercy which circles the earth. Bless all the ministries supported by the gifts, which you give us to share. We pray that congregations and ministries in Canada and around the world will receive all that is needed to be fruitful. We pray that we, Presbyterians, Sharing our gifts, will fulfill your vision for mission in our congregations. Uphold our congregations with these offerings and multiply their impact throughout the world, In Christ's name. Amen.

Prayers of the People

God of our past and our future, God of healing and hope,
We come before you with grateful hearts,
trusting that you walk with us through every situation.
Today we pray for those who facing danger and despair in these times:
those living with hunger that never ends,
those facing daily unrest and violence,
those challenged by the coronavirus pandemic and measures to control it,
and all those anxious about their future...
(Keep silence for 15 seconds)

And we pray for those who work to relieve suffering in these places
and those working to bring justice and peace.
Bless them all with your courage.

We pray for all those wrestling with sorrow or discouragement in any area of their lives;
For those living with illness or pain;
For those bearing up with chronic conditions or disability;
For those who know the grief and change of bereavement...
(Keep silence for 15 seconds)

And we pray for all those who work to bring healing and comfort
and agencies which offer support and care in our community.
Bless them all with your compassion.

We pray for all who feel helpless or hopeless in this present time:
For those facing unemployment, struggling to make ends meet;
For those caught up in the pain of misunderstanding or broken relationships;
For any working through situations of conflict at home or at work...
(Keep silence for 15 seconds)

And we pray for all who offer guidance and support to face these challenges
and for those who lend skills in reconciliation or mediation
Bless all these with your wisdom and patience.

God of our past and our future, God of healing and hope,
We pray for the ministries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada,
and for national and international staff members who represent Christ in our name during
such challenging times.

We pray for our own congregation and the churches of our Presbytery and Synod,
and for ministers, elders and other leaders who seek wisdom for decision making.
Help all of us engage each day with faithfulness.
Guide us, encourage us, and inspire us to meet the challenges before us
and give us the commitment to keep following Jesus, who taught us to pray together, saying:

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,
and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen

Commissioning (PRAYER ON ORANGE SHIRT DAY from Kairos Website)

Vibrant God
Your creation explodes with the colours of the rainbow
Your peoples reveal the beauty of diversity
We remember today when the joy and dignity of a precious child was destroyed.
We lament today for the childhoods lost through the residential school system.
We mourn for the spirits crushed and the futures compromised.
Celebrate the hope and joy of every child
Tell the stories of resistance that make us stronger
Build the bonds of solidarity to ensure “never again”
In the name of the one who was child among us
Amen