

## Worship at home

*October 4, 2020*

Series: "Gratitude: More than an Attitude"

**Call to worship:** Psalm 90:1, 2; 95:6, 7

**Prayers of praise, confession, supplication:**

Great and gracious God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit;  
you are the alpha and the omega,  
the beginning and the end.  
In you we live, move, and have our being.

Far too often we struggle to accept and trust  
the implications of that statement.  
We are frequently overcome with fear;  
we are frequently mired in the mundane.  
Far too often we allow the lingering effects of sin  
to control our reactions,  
our thoughts, and  
our behaviours.

Meet us during this time of worship.  
Surprise us with your grace.  
And encourage us to find our identity not in temples and ritual,  
but in our name which you gave and which was once hurled as an insult: Christian.  
Little Christs.

For the sake of your glory,  
and in the name of our Lord Jesus, the Christ.  
Amen.

**Assurance of pardon:**

While it is true that we have sinned,  
it is a greater truth that we are forgiven  
by the sacrifice of Jesus, the Christ.  
To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say,  
in Jesus Christ, your sin is forgiven.  
Thanks be to God.

**Prayers of thanksgiving:**

Great and gracious God,  
the stresses and the worries of living in the shadow of so much  
that seeks to destroy your good creation  
are continuously with us.

And we lament.

We lament because we have lost our sense of community.  
We lament because we have lost the gathering of Christ's body in worship.  
We lament because we have lost environmental security.  
We lament because so many people hurt.  
We lament because the reality we live  
    so often doesn't match the kingdom vision you give in the gospel.

Then we remember when you wept at the grave of your friend,  
when you prayed tears of blood in the garden,  
when you hung, forsaken on that cross.

We remember when the women went to the tomb,  
    and found it empty.

When you stood on the beach,  
    and invited us to breakfast.

When you breathed your spirit into our souls,  
    and said: "As the Father sent me, so I send you."

And we give you thanks.

We give you thanks for your compassion,  
    that causes your Spirit to groan along with all of creation.

We give you thanks for your steadfast love,  
    that invites us to walk under the easy burden of your yoke of grace.

We give you thanks for your mercy,  
    by which you have forgiven our sin by your sacrifice.

And we give you thanks for the moments of grace  
we've experienced over the past months:

- for meaningful connections and relationships made during purposeful, mask-making work,
- for moments of laughter and the deep joy of watching the laughter of children and grandchildren,
- for technology that allows us to connect and support friends and family at a distance,
- for the generosity of strangers to travelers,
- for the human senses that trigger memories of your past grace,
- for people who are able and care enough to provide and deliver food,
- for deliverance from the darkness of depression in unexpected ways,
- for leaders who co-operate and listen to medical experts while working for the common good,
- for the safe reunion of family members separated by closed borders,
- for the community-minded volunteers of Captain Kidd Days and the donors who produced an abundant harvest for our local foodbanks, local organizations for mental health in children and youth, and local athletics despite COVID restrictions,

These things we pray in the name of Jesus Christ,  
Amen.

**Hymn #300** “Father, we love you”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QItVKW6wXdo>

**The Word of God read and interpreted:**

John 12:20-28

Psalm 137:1-9

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11:17-34

Thanksgiving born of Lament

Throughout this series of sermons, we’ve been using as our base the question of Psalm 137: “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” The foreign land in which the church in Canada is living is, broadly, the culture of post-Christian Canada. In addition, the experience of exile has now been sharpened by the threat and implications of the coronavirus. Taking our cue from the psalms, one way by which we can sing the Lord’s song in this foreign land is by learning to give thanks to the Lord in all circumstances.

The Old Testament sacrifice of thanksgiving teaches that giving thanks to the Lord is holistic and embodied. It uses all of our senses to savour and create memories of the moments of grace in which we personally encounter the goodness of the Lord.

Last week we learned that gratitude is also a cognitive engagement with this goodness. By engaging our minds, we can clarify the specifics of those moments of grace so that we can clearly and audibly give thanks to the Lord in a way that might build up the faith of others and invite them to join their “Amen” to our thanksgiving.

Today is World Communion Sunday.

Communion, also known as the Lord’s Supper, is a Christian sacrament which borrows elements from both the sacrifice of Passover and the sacrifice of Thanksgiving. Together with baptism, this sacrament binds the church together with Jesus, and perpetuates its existence in every age. Another name for the sacrament is the Eucharist, which word has as its root *charis* or, grace; a gift, a goodness unearned, freely given. In this sacramental meal, Jesus freely gives his life and strength. It’s a mystery of grace in which our Lord offers himself to us and joins us to himself. It’s a mystery of grace which can be received only in faith and acknowledged best in thanksgiving.

Had the coronavirus not intensified the foreign landscape of exile with its barriers of masks, physical distancing, and locked sanctuaries, today we would have the deep joy of sharing the Eucharist with our sisters and brothers around the world.

Now, I know that we have made the choice to lock our sanctuaries. And I know that there are a variety of means by which communion could be celebrated. We could do a Zoom or Youtube service in which I offer the prayers and blessing and you watch from home and eat your privately prepared elements. For those who are privileged with easy and reliable access to the technology, this would have been a blessing. However, it also divides our congregation. Those who have access can eat, those who don't go hungry. Alternatively, I could mail a liturgy by post and everyone could recite the liturgy in the privacy of your own home and go ahead with your own supper.

However, since we shared communion over Zoom on Maundy Thursday, I've been struggling with what the apostle Paul called "discerning the body." What he meant by "the body" is up for discussion. Some people contend he was referring to the sacramental body of Christ present in the bread. Others, that he meant the church, the fellowship of believers. Both interpretations have validity. In light of the larger context of the passage, the latter interpretation makes a lot of sense. Paul implored the Corinthians to look critically at what they were doing when they gathered to supposedly share the Lord's Supper. Those who were the movers and shakers within the congregation, the ones with the connections, the ones whose family built the pews, the ones who were the personal friends of the host in whose house they met; they had first access to the food, and they ended up overstuffed and drunk. The others who maybe had to work a full day and so got to the table late, maybe because of their social standing, they stood on the sidelines until the first sitting had their fill (which would have been the *cultural* norm), were left with little to eat when they made it to the table. The 'haves' got to overeat, the 'have nots' went hungry. So, Paul implored them: Is it logical to suppose that Christ was truly worshiped, indeed could you even say Christ was present in this divided chaos of a meal?

The verb of which he implored the Corinthians to be mindful is the verb "to discern." It means to learn about the whole by dissecting it into its parts and studying carefully the individual elements. To discern the body is to consider all the various meanings and expressions of the

sacrament and separate the true symbolism from the false. *To expose what is essential and what is extra or even detrimental.*

As much as within the Body of Christ each believer must take responsibility for their own relationship with Jesus, their own faith, and their own discipleship; and as much as taking communion has a personal, mystical element by which we are individually joined with Christ, the Lord's Supper is a physical, embodied, and communal sacrament. It uses bread and wine served on physical dishes and eaten in the presence of the sights, sounds, and smells of brothers and sisters.

To try and celebrate the sacrament in any way other than in the physical gathered body of Christ is to in some way ignore or at least trivialize the reality of our present situation.

In this *temporary* period of history, that body has been dismembered by an army we can't see with the naked eye.

The world is out of kilter and, in no small way, we have lost what many people of faith rely on to bring meaning and hope into our lives: we have lost the gathered church. Like Israel in exile when they could no longer go up to the temple for the feasts and sacrifices, we have lost what is for many of us, our connection to our God.

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God's Word to his people teaches us that the initial response of Jesus' disciples to crises is to look inward and honestly identify and express in prayer to the God who cares, our true emotions. A large portion of the prayers which make up our prayer book known as the Book of Psalms are laments. Throughout the prophet's writings there are numerous examples of laments. We have, in our sacred library, an entire book that is itself a lament. Lament is the first faithful response to crisis and loss.

In lamenting we pay attention and, in prayer, give expression to our true ball of yarn that is our emotional landscape. Maybe you're feeling isolated or vulnerable; helpless or overwhelmed. Maybe you've had experiences that leave you awed by the grace exhibited by other people. Maybe you're grateful for our front-line workers and teachers. Maybe you're annoyed by the actions of others or numbed by information overload. Maybe you're feeling confident in our leaders. Maybe you're frustrated and saddened because you can't properly mark the death of a loved one. Maybe, in the midst of everything, you feel inspired. Maybe you're

feeling disillusioned because COVID has exposed the vulnerabilities of the things you thought were solid.

Lamenting exposes the tension between the vision of the kingdom of heaven and the reality in which we live.

Lamenting also exposes the possibility that God also grieves.

When Yahweh looked upon the sorry state of humanity, he was “grieved to the heart” (Genesis 6:6).

When Jesus arrived at the grave of Lazarus, he wept (John 11:35).

When Jesus arrived at Jerusalem, he wept (Luke 19:41).

When Jesus realized there was nothing more that could be said, in silent anguish in the garden of the Gethsemane he prayed until his blood sweated from his pores (Luke 22:44).

In Romans 8 the apostle Paul imagines the Holy Spirit joining the wordless laments of the entirety of creation.

Maybe, like us, Yahweh is trying to wait in the unpleasant space between vision and reality while He struggles to discern the essentials from the extras; what must be kept, and what must be released. And maybe, in that realization that reality doesn't fit well with the vision, God is weeping along with his children.

If there is a goal of discipleship, it is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and strength. But a god who ignores his creation in the midst of crises; a god who offers tidy, pious solutions that don't necessarily mesh with reality, is not a god worthy of our love.

However, the God who revealed his name to Moses and revealed his person as Jesus of Nazareth, is not an emotionless idol nor an empty philosophy. God, who is Trinity, cares so much for His creation to not abandon it but to enter its sorrow and weep with it, for it, and on its behalf.

In lamenting, as we expose our true emotions, as we struggle to live in the tension between the reality of our sorrow and the vision of the kingdom, we find a God who both refuses to trivialize the sorrow and refuses to give up on the vision.

On the darkest night when the sorrow of the world was laid on his shoulders, when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and started something new. A new

community. A signpost to the new Jerusalem when heaven and earth are finally and indisputably wed.

Jesus wept by the rivers of Babylon,  
yet he never forgot Jerusalem!  
Re-creation came through Creator's grief.  
Covenant came through Yahweh's lament.  
Resurrection comes through Jesus' sorrow.

Lamenting in faith – refusing to let go of promises of the Gospel and the vision of the kingdom of heaven while holding them in tension with the reality of our fears, our frustrations, and the situation in which we are living – opens for us the possibility that God is in our midst and that new life will be born. Not necessarily a restoration of what once was. After all, resurrection is not resuscitation. Resurrection is not a revival of the old. Resurrection is a reclaiming of the essential components and putting them back together without the waste bits as the new heaven and the new earth.

As we lament, disciples of Jesus hold to this ambiguous tension, we learn to discern the presence of God's grace from the noise of a fearful world, and we give thanks.

To the Lord who weeps alongside of us.

To the Lord who knows our sorrow.

To the Lord who knows the way through the valley overshadowed by grief to the new heaven and earth and the joyful marriage feast of the Resurrection.

Glory to God; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

**Hymn #674** "In the bulb there is a flower"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf8scdXKh00>

**Blessing:**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit  
be with you.

Amen.