

Worship-at-home

January 17, 2021



<http://blog.adw.org/2015/11/but-the-word-of-the-lord-remains-forever-a-homily-for-the-33rd-sunday-of-the-year/jesus-in-prayer/>

Call to worship:

Arise, shine; for your light has come,
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.

Candle is lit.

For darkness shall cover the earth,
and thick darkness the peoples;
but the Lord will arise upon you,
and his glory will appear over you.¹

Hymn #746 “What a friend we have in Jesus”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LarFhGeE-ac>

(Acapeldridge)

Prayer and assurance:

God ever creating, ever loving, ever leading,
You are stillness when we are frantic;
You are truth when we are confused and perplexed.
You give us freedom when we are paralyzed by fear;
You send us light when we stumble in the darkness.
You are love when we feel lonely and empty.
For all that you are, all that you have been, and all that you will be for us,
we praise you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
We turn to you in worship,
to listen for your voice and seek your way for us.²

¹ Isaiah 60:1, 2

² Worship resource for January 17, 2021 available at <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

Believe the good news! In Christ, God has offered us forgiveness for all our sins. Trust that this forgiveness is for you, return to seek the Lord with all your heart, mind, and soul, and know that God's steadfast love and grace endure forever.

Hymn #500 "Open my eyes, that I may see"

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

(Hayes Barton Baptist Church)

God's word read and interpreted:

READ MARK 1:21-2:12

The Beloved's Prayer

1. The very first line of Mark's gospel reads: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

That may sound somewhat benign to us as 21st century North American readers; however, what Mark has done with those words is radically challenge his readers' sense of loyalties. As we learned last week, the emperors of the world in the first century often viewed themselves as specially anointed to rule (chests). Even more, they understood themselves as being nearly divine themselves so they would be referred to as sons of the gods. So, here we have Mark declaring that Jesus – the man who was born to Mary and adopted into the family of Joseph – is, not only a christ but The Christ. He declared that Jesus is the Son of God, not merely metaphorically but literally: his Father is the almighty God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who claimed him not only as his Son, but the Beloved Son.

So, Mark is calling us to examine our loyalties and beliefs. With the birth of Jesus, God has reclaimed his creation and has reinstalled his kingdom. A kingdom whose core policy is the forgiveness of sin. A kingdom whose citizens are beloved. Full stop.

That's the context in which Jesus taught in the synagogues and in private homes. And it's the context in which he conducted his healing and exorcising ministry. What he is doing by these acts is demonstrating the validity of his claim. If the kingdom of God is a reality, then the ungodly spirits have no right to occupy His beloved citizens. And they know it! The Beloved Son of God has no need to give the demons a podium: "Be silent, and come out of him!" Furthermore, in a society which understands illness to be a consequence of sin, the best way to demonstrate that sin is forgiven is to reverse the effects of the illness.

And that's what Jesus does. He extinguishes the fever and restores movement to the paralytic all the while assuring them of their usefulness, their worthiness (or, in liturgical parlance, their cleanliness) and their forgiveness.

2. With the re-ordering of creation according to God's ways and means, catalyzed as it has been by the birth of Jesus, forgiveness of sin has been assured in Jesus' name and whatever detracts from life – be it illness or demon – is not worthy of controlling our thoughts and actions.

3. On first reading, what we just encountered seems like several stories of healings strung together. If you read the text carefully, you'll notice a lot of movement in the story, and parallel movements. It began in the synagogue of Capernaum and moved to the private home of Simon and Andrew. Then, it moved into the synagogues of Galilee before moving again to a private home in Capernaum (possibly Jesus'). Synagogue → private home; synagogues → private home. Serving as a kind of mini-sabbath between these two blocks, the narrative moves us out of the city to a deserted place.

Here we see Jesus rising in the darkness of the morning, seeking solitude, and praying.

One of the reasons I chose the picture headlining this liturgy is that it depicts Jesus in this moment of prayer. What I found striking is that he's not in any particular prayer-posture. He's not kneeling. His hands aren't raised. He's sitting on a rock and looking out at the city, at the wilderness, and at the rising sun.

Mark didn't tell us what Jesus said, nor which strategy for prayer he used, nor which posture he assumed.

Mark didn't try to formalize Jesus' prayer.

He simply recorded, that Jesus prayed.

In silence.

In solitude.

The Beloved Son sought his heavenly Father.

4. By omitting almost every detail of Jesus' prayer, we might imagine Mark inviting us not to study and dissect his words, but to follow the example of the Beloved Son. To go to a place where we can be with our thoughts in the presence of God. And in solitude, to seek the Lord. By the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, we learn that prayer goes beyond making requests and following a format. Sometimes we speak, more often we listen. In this dialogue God reveals for us the uniqueness of our own

souls and thus what is helpful and what distracts. Maybe you kneel and recite. Maybe you stand and sing. Maybe you sit and contemplate. Maybe you walk and talk. Maybe you stretch and breathe. Maybe you combine your study of scripture with outside counselling. Maybe you alternate your styles of prayer in different seasons of your life.

In Ephesians 6, the apostle Paul urges Christians to put on our feet “*whatever* will make us ready to preach the gospel of peace.” One can spend an hour every day in deep contemplation and be personally blessed with indescribable mystical experiences; yet, when you respond to an interruption with anger or impatience, of what value were those experiences?

In whatever way we pray, our prayers ought to help us go about the kingdom work of demonstrating the forgiveness of Christ with patience, compassion, kindness, gentleness, and humility. Otherwise, our prayers are about as helpful and Spirit-led as the scribes’ lectures!

In the midst of disease and demons, the Kingdom of God has come near by the birth of Jesus. Prayer roots our self-understanding in the belovedness and forgiveness of Christ and thus opens us to be channels of hope and witnesses of his light.

Whatever were his prayers that morning, Jesus was rooted in his belovedness and thus prepared for the busyness of the day ahead. And, when he was interrupted, he was not disturbed. He merely rose and began his ministry with grace that is a sign of assurance that sin is forgiven.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.
Ever one God, now and forever.
Amen.

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

Zoom worship: keep this time as silent prayers with music background

God of all life and each life,

Each week our prayers combine with those of people in many different places.

We face many different challenges and also a common challenge,

responding to the pandemic, though in so many different contexts.

We thank you for honouring all our prayers with the gift of your Spirit,

so that we can find strength and wisdom we need in you.

We remember before you today people living face to face with war and violence, in those places where hatred has been stirred up

and fear stalks people on their own streets;

And we pray for all those displaced by violence,

seeking refuge among us or in camps and communities around the world:

God, speak to us a word of peace:

Embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people living face to face with so much economic uncertainty,

for those who have lost their jobs or worry what may happen as this year unfolds:

God, speak to us a word of reassurance:

Embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people living face to face with discrimination and social prejudice,

for those who are bullied at school, at work or at home,

for those who are made ashamed of who they are:

God, speak to us a word of dignity:

Embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people living face to face with illness and suffering, for those struggling with disability, made more complex these days,

and for those who know grief or anxiety, especially those cut off from comfort or support by months of pandemic isolation:

God, speak to us a word of healing:

Embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today people divided by differences of race or creed, of culture, gender or generation:

and we pray for all those who seek to build bridges of understanding and co-operation across differences:

God, speak to us a word of reconciliation:
Embrace us with your love.

We remember before you today your whole creation and its many vulnerable facets and faces. Teach us how to care for the rips and tears in the fabric of the world you love so we may live together wisely:
God, speak to us a word of wisdom:
Embrace us with your love.³

Hymn #784 “Thy kingdom come – on bended knee”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFzbxnMnxZc>
(Chet Valley churches)

Benediction:

May the love of the Father,
the grace of the Son,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you,
now and forevermore.
Amen.

³ Worship resource for January 17, 2021 available at <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>