

Worship at home

January 31, 2021



<https://paddyengineering.blogspot.com/2014/10/concrete-block-foundation-advantages.html>

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

Opening prayers and assurance:

Loving God, you are the wisdom behind all mystery,
the glory hidden in all that makes us wonder,
the strength in all that nourishes.

When our eyes are open and our spirits alert,
we experience your glory around us.

Scattered throughout the earth,
smouldering deep inside us,
radiating in acts of love,
sparks of your glory reside.

Deep is our joy each time we encounter you.

So, we gather in worship to express our reverence and praise.
Together we celebrate the good we have experienced,
knowing it all comes from your hand.

¹ Isaiah 60:1, 2

And yet, we are resistant to your grace.
There are so many times we turn away from you, O God.
We forget that food for body and soul comes from your goodness.
We focus on what troubles us and ignore the help and healing you offer.
We seek wisdom and meaning in the wrong places.
We confess we can be cruel,
 harming the earth,
 other living beings,
 one another,
 ourselves.

Forgive us.

Open our eyes to your wonder and wisdom.
 Let us find our assurance in your forgiveness and grace.
Give us the courage to live lives that overflow with your love,
 and let us find our rest in you.

In the name of Jesus Christ,
and for the glory of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
amen.

Hear the good news: Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The old life has gone away. A new life has begun. Thanks be to God.²

Hymn: #479 “The church’s one foundation”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b22S3GLaxck>
(Virtual choir of First Methodist, Huston; recorded October 18, 2020)

God’s Word read and interpreted:
Ephesians 2:11-22
Mark 1:16-20; 2:13-14; 3:13-19, 31-35

² From worship resource for January 31, 2021 available at <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

Mind the foundation

1. After his baptism and time in the wilderness, Jesus travelled throughout Galilee teaching, healing, and exorcising unclean spirits. In Mark's telling, Jesus spent quite a bit of time in boats and by the sea! As he travelled and taught, he gathered followers. Some, such as Simon, Andrew, James, John, and Levi (also known as Matthew) he deliberately invited to follow him. Others followed out of curiosity and conviction. Those who chose to believe in Jesus and what he was teaching became his disciples. Students in the manner of apprentices. A disciple closely follows the master learning not only the skills of the trade (often in the Greco-Roman world disciples were students of philosophers and so the skills of the trade would be the theories of philosophy and the skills of public speaking and rhetoric), but also the way in which they lived. The goal of discipleship was to graduate and perpetuate the master's philosophy and trade.

From among the many disciples that Jesus was gathering, he selected 12 whom he appointed as apostles.

The difference is one of commissioning and authority. While a disciple is a student along the lines of an apprentice, an apostle is someone who has been commissioned to a specific task and given the direct authority to act on behalf of the sender.

In the presbyterian system of government, each congregation commissions an elder to go to the meetings of the Presbytery and speak, vote, and serve on committees on behalf of the sending congregation. Similarly, each presbytery commissions representative elders and clergy to go to the annual General Assembly and vote, speak, and at times serve on committees on behalf of the sending presbytery. These individuals are, in some sense, apostles of the congregations and presbyteries. They have been commissioned for a particular task and given direct authority to act on behalf of the sender.

Jesus appointed 12 of his disciples as apostles. He commissioned them to be with Jesus, to proclaim the message, to heal and exorcise in his name, by his power.

With the election and commissioning on the 12 apostles, Jesus laid the foundation for his renewed covenanted community (which we call the Christian Church), much as Moses laid the foundation for Israel with the 12 tribal patriarchs. They, and the community that grew out of their teachings and examples, was to be an extension of Jesus himself.

2. Followers of Jesus in the 21st century are disciples. Apprentices to the Master. We are not apostles in the strictest sense of the label. In fact, as Paul highlighted for the Christians in Ephesus, those of us who are not of Jewish ancestry have no claim to a relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob except by His grace. However, in becoming incarnate in Jesus, God has established a new understanding of the covenant; as Paul wrote, a new humanity. To all who are willing to accept his grace in faith, God offers adoption. In, by, and through Jesus of Nazareth, we are members of the household of God and thus have access in the Spirit to the Father through Jesus the Son. This renewed household, Paul imagines as a building, a temple, the embodiment of the presence of God on earth.

And every building must have some sort of foundation.

The basement of our house is one long rectangle. It is an open space with no load-bearing walls. The foundation walls are built of concrete blocks. About half-way along the west wall is a rough patch in the concrete floor about 3' long and 10" wide. I've been told that when the basement was built, because of the length of the wall and of the concrete block construction (as opposed to poured concrete), "knee walls" were placed half way along the foundation walls. These knees rose a few feet up and protruded perpendicularly to the foundation about 3-4' into the basement space. They provided structural support for the foundation against the outside pressure of the compacting dirt and the seasonal freeze-thaw movement of the ice.

At some point, presumably with the idea to open up the basement space, someone removed the knee-wall on the western side of our house. While this renovation does make for a functional open basement, the consequence of that action has been that the dirt and ice on the outside has been very slowly pushing against the concrete blocks and the foundation wall has been gradually leaning inward.

There is no imminent danger; however, some year soon a second basement wall will have to be poured as a shield for the inner wall.

Renovations can be a good thing. Even a necessary thing. Each new generation modifies what was inherited to best suit their current context. Yet, it is important to respect the foundation, understand its construction, and recognize which aspects are essential for the integrity of the building.

The strength and integrity of the new temple; or, to put it another way, the strength and integrity of our individual faith as well as that of the collective witness and ministry of the church, depends on the foundation on which we build and on how we maintain said foundation.

3. The apostles and prophets are the leaders of the early Christian movement. Some of what we call the New Testament was written by the apostles Mark named; all was written in the tradition of the apostles. The teachings of the apostles and prophets which the church, in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have deemed to be essential to our foundation are those preserved in Scripture. They are plumb with the teachings of Jesus and thus the will of God.

Twenty-first century followers of Jesus may not be apostles, but we are disciples of Jesus and the will of God for each disciple, as it was for the apostles, is to proclaim the message of the kingdom, to heal and exorcise unclean spirits in his name, and primarily *to be with Christ*.

Jesus is the cornerstone from which walls are built up that will stand true and firm “mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of our war.”

4. Our effectiveness at reflecting God’s grace and of thus revealing each other’s belovedness in Christ depends on the structural integrity of our interior architecture.

And in this season when very little is certain, it behoves us to mind the foundation laid for us by the apostles and the prophets.

And to be with Christ.

Over the past few weeks, we’ve seen that to be with Jesus involves prayer.

It also involves preparing ourselves for the business of the morning, afternoon, and evening in whatever way makes us ready to preach the gospel of peace.

It also involves learning Jesus in the ways he has given us: by learning and obeying the written Word of God. The written word of God reveals the will of God.

As we saw last week in the parable of the sower and the seeds, at any time throughout the various seasons of the day we can become entangled in the cares of daily living or the desire for wealth, leisure, and possessions. We can feel constricted by the pressure imposed on us by ourselves or by outside influences. We can become dry and parched, our hearts can be hardened. We might start the day with every good intention of doing the will of God, but we quickly find that the foundation is being pushed inwards and we’re at risk of collapsing. And that’s without the unexpected appearance of tragedy or trauma that can collapse the foundation right from under us.

So, following from last week's sermon, I want to suggest that being with Jesus also involves the habit of repentance.

The first sermon Jesus delivered was simply: "Repent, and believe in the nearness of the kingdom of God." Likewise, we'll read next week that the early sermons of the apostles were also focussed on repentance.

Repentance is often understood negatively as a turning *away from* certain behaviours and patterns of speech and thought. That action is indeed a consequence; however, the emphasis of repentance is on *returning to* that from which you have strayed. Of turning *towards* the way of the true life.

Of recognizing when we've become ensnared in the weeds; when we are withering in the heat; when the walls are caving in.

Of taking a step back, seeking a few seconds of solitude in a deserted place.

Of doing whatever is necessary to return in the privacy of hearts and minds to Jesus and the policies of the kingdom of God.

In prayer and preparation, in learning and repentance, may the Lord grant that we each be strengthened in our inner beings with power through his Spirit, and may Christ dwell in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love.

To him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.³

Hymn #750 "How deep the silence of the soul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nCXsc4IuIiI>

(The First Congregational Church of Durham; recorded September 27, 2020)

³ Ephesians 3:16ff.

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

God of fishers and farmers and factory workers,
God of those serving in health care, hospitality and at home,
God of our offices and businesses, our stores and our streets,
our schools and recreation centres, of emergency services and entertainers,
we thank you for the many ways we can serve your purposes.
You called Jesus' first followers to change their livelihoods
and so, they did.

Today we pray for all those whose work has changed
without their choice
because of COVID-19;

for those struggling with little or no work,
whose businesses are in jeopardy,
who fear for what this year may hold.

Assure them of their value.

Give them courage and perseverance as the future unfolds.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God of the churches who bear your Son's name,
whatever denomination or perspective or tradition that shapes us,
we thank you for the fellowship we share and the gifts of the Spirit we receive.
We pray that the differences between us will not blunt our witness to Jesus
and the healing and hope he offers.

Teach us to value diversity in our discipleship
and honour what unites us,
so that the world may see Jesus reflected in all our lives.

God, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God of our cities and towns, of our villages and reserves,
God of all nations and neighbourhoods,
of all clans and tribes, cultures and families that shape our identities,
you created us for community,
to find enjoyment and support, collaboration and productivity together.
We pray for all those who suffer because others judge their identities,
their language or religion,
their orientation or ethnicity,
their social standing or lack of resources.

Guide us all to appreciate our common humanity
and find ways to learn from each other through our differences.

Help us to recognize the face of Christ in those who challenge our assumptions.
God, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God of all times and situations,
We bear on our hearts concerns for many around us,
people we know and situations we care about,
where suffering exerts its power
and challenges seem overwhelming.
Hear us in this time of silence as we open our hearts and their needs to you:

(Keep silence for a count of 30 seconds.)

Bind up the broken hearted, O God.
Bring justice for the vulnerable.
Send your Spirit of healing and hope to embrace those who need you.
We dare to ask all this because we trust in the name of Jesus, your Son,
who taught all his followers to pray:

The Lord's Prayer⁴

Hymn #642 "O Master, let me walk with thee"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SfzDBmY5pV0>

(Amy Grant)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hFrzcAy6cCM>

(Hour of Power choir)

Charge and benediction:

Peace be to the whole community,
and love with faith,
from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.⁵

⁴ Worship resource for January 24, 2021 available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

⁵ Ephesians 6:23, 24.