

Worship at home
March 21, 2021
Fifth Sunday of Lent

God calls us to worship

“God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”¹

We bring our praise and confession

“O, God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;
You are faithful to us through every season of the year and every season of life.
We praise you for your patience and persistence,
drawing near to us even through the times we cannot draw near each other.
We praise you for your promise of hope in Jesus Christ,
drawing life out of the grip of death.
Even as his cross looms on the horizon in this season of Lent,
we praise you for Jesus’ courage and compassion
which bring renewal to us in the midst of our challenges.
We praise you, O God, for the love that never lets us go.”²

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done, and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name.
Amen.

God assures us of His grace and mercy

Jesus said, come to me all you who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.
Friends, trust that peace and forgiveness are God’s gifts to you this day. Be renewed by
the power of the Spirit that moves with you into each new day.

Hymn #240 “Rock of ages, cleft for me”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ah6xIq4mLOI>

¹ Romans 5:8

² Adapted from worship resource for March 21, 2021 <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

We offer our lives and resources

If you are a member or adherent of either of the Moore Presbyterian congregations, please remember to submit your offering to the appropriate treasurer. For contact information, speak with Rev. Ian.

God speaks to us through His Word

READ MARK 10:32-52.

Accepting the Messiah

I want to ask you three questions:

Can you believe there was once a man named Jesus who was raised in the town of Nazareth in the province of Galilee?

Can you believe he was betrayed, arrested, rejected, humiliated, tortured, and crucified?

Can you believe, or perhaps accept, that such an experience was more than simply an episode in history? That it was an intentional act of sacrifice whereby he gave his life in place of yours and in place of the lives of many others?

The first two questions are historically plausible. The third calls for faith.

1. We are nearing the end of the season of Lent. Next Sunday is Palm Sunday which marks the beginning of Holy Week. Then there's Maundy Thursday, then Good Friday, and then Easter Sunday.

Throughout these past five weeks we've travelled with Jesus and the first disciples from Caesarea Philippi in the north through the province of Galilee and southwards through Judea towards Jerusalem. Along the way, we've eavesdropped on his private conversations with the disciples, and watched his interactions with the crowds. These conversations began with Peter's assertion that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus then expressed the terms of his messiahship, the terms of our discipleship, and the ways and means of realizing those terms.

Mark organized this material in a repeating pattern:

- a) Jesus described the terms of his messiahship:
 - his inevitable and necessary suffering, martyrdom, and resurrection.

b) The disciples say something that reveals their inability or unwillingness to accept the terms:

- In 8:32, Peter rebuked Jesus.
- In 9:34, the disciples argued over who was the greatest.
- In 10:35ff. James and John demand priority status in the kingdom community.

c) Jesus tried to clarify the implications of those terms for the disciples while purifying their ways and means:

- In chapter 8,
 - “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and the sake of the gospel, will save it.”
- In chapter 9,
 - “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and ... the one who sent me”
 - “Whoever is not against us is for us”
 - “have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another” - to ruthlessly divest the self of anything that prevents you from living as God intends you to live and helping others live in the grace and mercy of the kingdom of God.
- In chapter 10,
 - “Whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”

Throughout, Jesus stressed prayer and sacred dependence as means by which we can live these implications in the strength of God.

At the beginning of Lent, we observed that Mark has further organized this material between two stories of Jesus restoring sight. In the first story (8:22-26), the man’s sight was restored gradually. He first saw people as though they were trees, then he saw them clearly. This, perhaps, alludes to the ongoing process of maturity that is discipleship. The story at the end is an immediate restoration of sight and an immediate decision to follow Jesus wholeheartedly.

The disciples demonstrated neither gradual growth nor immediate understanding. Their responses to Jesus' terms were the same at the end as in the middle and in the beginning!

They did not want to deal with what Jesus was suggesting. Although they affirmed that Jesus is the Messiah (8:29), they refused to accept the terms and implications of that ministry. Instead, they tried to change the subject and focus on their own need of security.

“Which one of us is the greatest?”

“We silenced a man who was ministering in your name, because he wasn't part of our group!”

“Grant us to sit, at your right and at your left.”

It seems to me that the disciples' responses go beyond simple misunderstanding or even doubt. They suggest denial. In chapter 9, after Jesus said that “The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again,” we're told that “they did not understand what he was saying *and were afraid to ask.*”³ The disciples were refusing to accept the Messiah on his terms and they were refusing to accept their imminent reality.

2. Sometimes, denial might be helpful. A short-term shield behind which you can take a few breaths and find your footing. However, before long you have to face whatever is the situation. And, whether they wanted to deal with it or not, in a few short days, the disciples were nevertheless confronted with exactly what Jesus described.

Which brings me back to my question:

Can you accept that Jesus' suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection was necessary for the healing, redemption, and salvation of humanity?

Can you accept that this was not just an episode in history but an intentional sacrifice by which he gave his life in place of yours and in place of the lives of many others?

³ Mark 9:32.

To do so, one has to accept the reality of sin. That sin is a power present in every human life. We also have to accept that even though we might not be able to adequately explain it, Jesus' suffering, and sacrificial death was necessary and sufficient to break the power of sin.

3. The Presbyterian Church in Canada's statement of faith says it this way:

“Christ died for our sins.
The innocent one bore our condemnation on the cross.
He suffered and was put to death for the sin of the world.
[Full Stop.]

God's reconciling act in Jesus is a *mystery* which the Scriptures describe as
the sacrifice of a lamb,
a shepherd's life given for his sheep,
atonement by a priest.
It is also the innocent dying for the guilty,
the ransom of a slave,
payment of a debt,
and victory over the powers of evil.
Such expressions *interpret* the love of God
revealing the gravity, cost, and sure achievement of our Lord's work.
Yet that love we cannot fully explain.
God's grace, received by faith alone,
pardons and justifies, redeems and reconciles us.”⁴

The **historical event** is that there was a man from Nazareth who was tortured, humiliated, and crucified on a cross with the assent of both religious and civic authorities.

The **consequence** of that action is that we are pardoned, justified, redeemed, and reconciled in the eyes of the Triune God.

The **implications** for those who receive this grace in faith is that our lives follow a similar trajectory to that of our Lord's. Like him, we have been called for a purpose: to truthfully reveal the grace and mercy of God; to make known the reality of his kingdom; to heal, encourage, and make whole people and creation in his name. To serve for the glory of God and the well-being of bodies, minds, spirits, and environments.

⁴ *Living Faith*, 3.4.2-3.4.3. Emphases added.

4. Faith gives us the sight to see what cannot be seen with the naked eye: The love poured out in the betrayal, arrest, humiliation, rejection, and crucifixion suffered by this man named Jesus who was born by a woman named Mary and adopted into the ancient family of David by a carpenter named Joseph.

Faith gives us the sight to see that this man named Jesus is not simply a son of David, but is the Son of God.

Faith gives us the sight to see those horrific events of Good Friday not solely as events in history, but a paradigm shifting moment. A moment of inexplicably selfless grace whereby we now live no longer by the fear of losing our personal security; rather, we can live in the joy that is the knowledge that nothing we experience can separate us from the grace, mercy, and peace of God the Father in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith gives us the sight to see that even though the message of the cross may seem foolish, it is the very power of God.

Amen.

Hymn #379 “The Servant King/From heaven you came”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoFSZ_iSYO8

We respond with faith and service

Steadfast God,
in the midst of unending change and challenge,
we give you thanks for your presence to sustain us.
While we find it hard to understand why things happen,
we are grateful that you are with us.
You understand our fears; you support and guide us;
and you give us courage to face the unknown.
We give thanks that you intend goodness for us;
that your gift of faith is a solid rock which supports us;
and that prayer gives us the hope you keep working in ways seen and unseen
for goodness to prevail.

We pray for the world you love.
Send your healing Spirit to guide countries and communities
as they respond to COVID-19.
Bless the work of medical researchers and frontline health care workers
in these stressful times.
Bless the plans to offer vaccine to all who want it
and give us patience and common sense as we wait our turns for vaccination.

Send your healing Spirit to bring peace with justice to the troubled places,

- We pray especially this week for the families of those who were murdered in Atlanta.
- We pray for all who suffer hatred, heightened in the context of the current pandemic.
- We pray for those who hate. Who blame country of origin and race for the world's problems. Grant us the courage to confront such hatred with truth.

Bring care and comfort to those who have been hurt in conflict,
wisdom to those who offer leadership in their communities,
and courage to those who advocate for the most vulnerable.

We pray for mutual respect to grow
between peoples who look at each other with suspicion
and among people who have experienced painful histories with each other.

Open our hearts and minds
to those whose situations and concerns we don't understand
and bring your gift of reconciliation to us all.

We remember before you friends in grief...

(Hold a brief pause)

relationships marked by tension...

(Hold a brief pause)

those facing difficulty at work or finding work...

(Hold a brief pause)

disagreements in our church or community...

(Hold a brief pause)

concerns about the environment we depend on...

(Hold a brief pause)

We pray for the continuing ministry of the church
in our neighbourhoods and around the world.

As we prepare to celebrate Easter and Christ's resurrection,
help us plan safely and creatively.

Raise our hearts and our hopes
with the promise of new life in Christ.

Restore to us the joy of your salvation which you have secured through your sacrifice on
the cross and sustain in us all a willing spirit.

We pray through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to pray, saying:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with His blessing

"O Lord and Master, Jesus Christ,
Word of the everlasting Father,
you have borne our grief
and carried the burden of our human frailty;
by the power of the Holy Spirit,
renew in your church gifts of healing,
and send out your disciples again
to preach the gospel of your kingdom,
to heal the sick,
and to relieve the sufferings of your children
to the praise and glory of your holy name.

By your passion protect us.
By your wounds heal us.
By your death raise us up.
And bring us to life eternal.
Amen."⁵

⁵ Liturgy of Saint Mark, 5th century. Quoted in David Adam, *The Rhythm of Life*, 114-115.