

Worship at home

May 2, 2021

Fifth Sunday of Easter



image <https://www.learnreligions.com/seven-species-in-the-torah-2076450>

God calls us to worship

The Lord is risen!

Hallelujah! He is risen indeed!

Hymn: #258 “Thine be the glory”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPH7-dNrwb8> (traditional)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jItTCHchMkk> (lockdown version)

We bring our praise and confessions

Ever-living God,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;

in you we live, move, and have our being.

You speak order and harmony into our chaos.

You bring life in its fullness.

You bring joy in our toil.

And so, we bring our praise this morning.

We wonder at your works of creation.

We celebrate your resurrection from the dead.

We give thanks for your grace and mercy.

We give our lives to you.

We bring also our confession,

that in our thoughts, words, and deeds,

we have sinned against you.

We have not always loved you with all our heart, head, and hands.

We have not always loved our neighbours as ourselves.

We have not always loved ourselves as you love us.

We trust in your forgiveness offered through your sacrifice on the cross,
and humbly ask that you renew a right spirit within us.

In Jesus' name we are bold to ask these things, Amen.

God assures us of his forgiveness

Despite their rejection of Him in the Garden,
the Lord God made garments of skin for the man and his wife,
and clothed them.

For God so loves the world that He gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Believe in the gospel:
in Jesus Christ, you are forgiven,
reconciled with your Heavenly Father,
adopted into His Holy Family,
and given the Holy Spirit to begin again.

Give thanks to the Lord,
for he is good,
his love endures forever!

**In response to the gospel,
we confess our faith and offer our lives and resources**

I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried,
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

*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

Reading the Beginning through Resurrection Lenses: Obey, confess, repent, repeat

READ GENESIS 2:15-17; 2:25-3:24

1. Jesus of Nazareth, who was born 2,000 years ago to Mary and adopted into King David's family tree by Joseph, was crucified, buried, and resurrected. He is the Messiah. The Son of God. He has ascended to the throne of heaven and earth from where he lives to pray on our behalf. Anyone who is baptized in his name, along with the Father and the Spirit are gifted with a share of the eternal inheritance of Jesus Christ. And, by our commitment of faith, are proclaimed to be righteous. Forgiven. Images of the Divine. Worthy to stand in the presence of the Holy. Representatives of the King of kings in our very earthly and tangible circumstances.

And yet, we continue to think, react, and act as though none of that was true. We react in anger when we don't get our own way. We choose plastic bags or burning fossil fuels to save us a moment of inconvenience. We give way to our wants, needs, and feelings in ways that we know are contrary to God's will and which fail to proclaim the messiahship of Jesus.

We don't do so with malicious intent. Nevertheless, more often than we care to admit, the beautiful words of the apostle Paul, recorded in Romans 7:19 apply to us:

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do...

Or, as John wrote in his gospel:

This is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light.¹

In other words, human nature is such that, despite knowing God's will, despite Jesus, despite our grace-based identities as sisters and brothers with Christ by faith, despite being part of the congregation of the redeemed, we far too frequently, whether intentionally or not, choose to satisfy our own egos rather than follow the good way of Jesus.

This is humanity's conundrum.

¹ John 3:19

2. In the garden, the problem was not that man and woman were ignorant of the Lord God's prohibition regarding the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The problem was that they knew, yet chose to ignore God's Word.

Now, although the serpent shares the guilt for misusing its God-given wisdom, all the serpent did was state that the fruit would open the eyes of one's mind and grant knowledge of good and evil such as that possessed by the Living and Triune God of creation. Such wisdom, it reasoned, surely wouldn't harm them, much less kill them!

So, having been presented with the facts that the fruit would give them wisdom, that it looked appetizing, that it would not kill them, and that, yes, God had set a prohibition against eating the fruit (which they didn't understand, given all these positive qualities of the fruit, they didn't understand), the man and the woman chose for themselves to eat the fruit.

And, as they found out, they did not die. At least, not in the physical sense. They continued to breath and think and converse.

However, they soon found by experience that their living had drastically changed. They no longer had access to the tree of life. The order and harmony and partnerships of chapters 1 and 2 began to crumble. They became ashamed of their nakedness and could no longer be fully present to one another. They hid from each other behind their loin clothes, and they began to hide from God. They began to blame everyone but themselves. No, they didn't die, but despite their new-found knowledge, they discovered in hindsight that life is naught without the presence of our God.

For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

We can know God's will if we want to. It's not a mystery. If you can't read Hebrew and Greek, there are countless English translations of scripture. If you don't like the King James Version, there's the NRSV, or the NIV, or the Message. There's the Green Letter Bible that highlights in green all the verses pertaining to creation-care. There're red letter Bibles. There are print Bibles with leather covers, hard covers, paper-back covers. There are digital Bibles. There are apps that guide you through readings and highlight verses to help you with any situation you might face. There are Bibles for truckers, farmers, nurses, teens, dads, moms, and teachers. There's probably a Bible for

Canadians living by themselves on a sailboat off the coast of Easter Island! If reading's not your thing, you can get audio versions of the Bible – with or without dramatic musical soundtracks! The Christian publishing industry pumps out Bibles marketed to every demographic imaginable! Different packaging, but largely the same content.

There are places in the world without ready access to the Scriptures. Canada is not one of them. We can know God's will.

Scripture reveals for us the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. And it does so as this Living God wants to be revealed. In scripture, we meet God and his Great Design. We also meet humanity. In all its faithfulness and unfaithfulness; all of its successes and all of its failures.

The issue, therefore, is not knowing what God says, but choosing which parts to obey (and how we will obey them), and which parts we'll ignore or reject.

When Eve and Adam chose to ignore God's prohibition, they chose to reject God. Seeking wisdom in this way is akin to the prodigal son asking for his inheritance. He would have received the inheritance in time, but by demanding it ahead of time, he essentially asked that his father die so he could get on living his life his way. Eve and Adam demanded wisdom on their terms and thus chose to reject God's partnership, provision, and love.

Having wisdom; knowing good and evil is a virtue. It is what the Holy Spirit teaches throughout the entirety of the scriptures. But, by choosing to eat the fruit, they chose to do it on their own. Without God.

For though they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but became futile in their thinking. ... Claiming to be wise, they became fools.²

Such is the plight of humanity. Claiming to be wise, men and women live shameful of their nakedness. Claiming to be wise, men and women live in constant toil

² Romans 1:19ff.

among the thorns, the thistles, and the agony of childbirth. Claiming to be wise, men and women insist on living outside of the Garden of Eden.

3. This chapter in the story of Beginnings reveals this unfortunate characteristic of humankind. It also reveals a profound aspect of God's nature. Even though man and woman chose to reject God and stubbornly live in the consequence of said rejections, God never rejects us.

In the cool of the evening, the LORD God calls out to His wayward creations: "Where are you?" And, when they stubbornly demonstrate no repentance, blaming each other instead, God made for them garments of skin to protect them in the life they have chosen.

Within this story there is great pathos as the Father watches his children make their decisions and tries to help them bear the consequences as much as he's able. Much of the rest of the story of Scripture involves God calling out: "Where are you?" and repeatedly offering new garments.

By his crucifixion, Jesus has wiped the board clean. In his resurrection, Jesus mediates our reconciliation with our heavenly Father. In his ascended glory at the throne of heaven and earth, Jesus continues to pray for us and plead our case. Through the Holy Spirit who still speaks to our minds and hearts from the pages of scripture, the risen Lord offers us renewal.

Not an escape from the thorns and thistles and the pain, but a way to live without being overwhelmed by them. A way to live in the assurance that God does not sit behind the flaming sword and ignore his children who toil on this side of the gate. A way of faith that assures us that the Light has come into the world in the midst of the toil.

4. We are the creatures, not the Creator. We can't always imagine the full consequence of our actions. We will continue to miss the mark. We will continue to make bad decisions, lose our cool, overindulge.

Being a Christian is not synonymous with perfection.

The man's greater mistake was not that he ate the fruit but that he blamed both God and the woman.

The woman's greater mistake was not that she ate the fruit but that she blamed the serpent.

Neither would accept that they had willfully rejected God and God's way. Preferring their own way, they claimed to be wise and became fools.

Being a Christian; believing in Jesus, is about choosing to accept that this particular man named Jesus, born 2,000+ years ago in Bethlehem, is the Son of God, the Messiah. It's daily choosing to obey his way of life in fellowship with the Father revealed by the Holy Spirit through the written Word of God.

It's about obeying, not perfectly, but consistently.

Obey. Confess. Repent. Repeat.

Despite toils, pain, disappointments, frustrations, sickness, war, pandemics, lockdowns. It's about facing each hour, trusting God's Word, with the assurance given in Revelation:

Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God.³

Hymn #644 "May the mind of Christ my Saviour"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRTL0cMzTvs>

We respond with faith and service

Lord Jesus Christ, we draw near to you in prayer this day,
trusting that your love changes lives
and your resurrection brings hope into the world God loves.
You have drawn near to us and walk with us through every challenge.
We are so grateful for signs of hope even in the midst of the pandemic,
for vaccine distribution and recovery plans,
for generosity and creativity offered in so many surprising corners.
As we lay before you the concerns on our hearts today,
draw near to those we name, and bring the gift that is needed.

We bring before you those who are in the news headlines this week
and situations in the world where justice and renewal are badly needed:
(Keep silence for 10 seconds)

³ Revelation 2:7

We bring before you those who are in hospital or care
and all those who struggle with illness, pain or health burdens of any sort:
(Keep silence for 10 seconds)

We bring before you families under stress, relationships that are strained,
and friends and neighbours in need of reconciliation:
(Keep silence for 10 seconds)

We bring before you people seeking food, homes or jobs in these hard times,
and those worried about economic recovery from the pandemic:
(Keep silence for 10 seconds)

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn #486 "The church of Christ, in every age"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zBUAQKGyc5A>

God sends us with His blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you,
the Lord be kind and gracious to you,
the Lord look upon you with favour,
and grant you peace. Amen.