

Worship at home
September 26, 2021
18th Sunday after Pentecost
<https://pccweb.ca/moorepc/>



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joshua passing the River Jordan with the Ark of the Covenant \(cropped\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Joshua_passing_the_River_Jordan_with_the_Ark_of_the_Covenant_(cropped).jpg)

God calls us to worship:

I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever;
with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.

I declare that your steadfast love is established forever;
your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.¹

We bring our praise and confessions:

Holy One, Source, Story and Spirit of Love,
You are perfect in wisdom.
You are faithful in love.
You are relentless in seeking reconciliation.
When we feel alone, you offer community.
When we face pain, you give healing.
When danger surrounds us, you give us courage.
When we work against each another, you urge peace.
Holy One, you are the wellspring of grace and goodness.
We come to worship you in gratitude for all you offer
through Christ in the power of the Spirit.
Receive our praise this day,
and renew us to serve you in the world you love.

Holy One,
Your generous mercy became flesh in Jesus Christ.
Yet we confess that often we hold grudges and cling to the past.
We focus on what we lack and resent what others have.
We turn a blind eye to what we know is evil
and fail to act for what we know to be good.
Forgive our jealousies and resentments,
and free us from any temptation to put others down.

¹ Psalm 89:1, 2

By your generous mercy,
strengthen our commitment to follow Jesus' example day by day.

God assures us of his forgiveness:

The prophet Micah reminds us that God requires of us three things:

to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

To all who truly repent and seek reconciliation with God and neighbour
in kindness and humility, God offers forgiveness and peace.

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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

*Please remember to prayerfully make your offerings to the congregation of which you
are most associated. If you're a member/adherent of Knox-Moore or St. Andrew's,
Mooretown, please send your offering to Howard McKellar or Judy Armstrong.*

Hymn: #546 "Here is bread: here is wine"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GgysV3EZKas>

God speaks to us through his Word:

God of wisdom, you have taught us that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from you. Send us your Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to receive your Word, speaking through the scriptures. Strengthen us to live that Word as our daily bread. Amen.

Symbols

Today we'll read Joshua 3. Next Sunday, chapter 4. The next Sunday, chapter 5 unless we do something different for Thanksgiving. Nevertheless, chapters 3, 4, and 5 describe Israel's final preparations before attacking the city of Jericho.

The emphasis of these preparations was not, as one might expect, military in nature but religious. Symbols and ritual were the central concerns for Joshua and for the people of Israel.

So, let's turn our attention to the methods used by the holy warriors of the Holy God as they prepared themselves to "go in and take possession of the land that the Lord your God gives you to possess."²

READ JOSHUA 3:1-17.

1. Symbols and rituals remind us of: who we are, whose we are, and that the Living God will not fail.

They are tools of assurance: "So that you may know."

Such was the significance, for the Israelites, of the ark of the covenant of the Lord³:

² Joshua 1:11.

³ <https://earlychurchhistory.org/beliefs-2/the-ark-of-the-covenant/>



This was an ornate box carried on two poles by priests. The box contained mementoes of the faith. There were the tablets containing the law (and/or possibly scrolls containing Moses' expositions of the law – what developed into the book of Deuteronomy specifically.)⁴ There was a container containing a sample of the manna God had been providing throughout their wilderness travels.⁵ And, there was Aaron's rod.⁶ (When God was solidifying the confederacy of Israelite tribes into a nation, he chose Moses as their spokesperson and teacher-leader. God chose Moses' brother Aaron to be the religious leader, the chief priests. This, however, caused some tension amongst the leaders of the various tribes as they thought this action hinted of nepotism! So, through Moses, God had each of the tribal leaders inscribe their names on sticks which were placed before the ark in the tabernacle. In the morning, one of the sticks had sprouted a branch, leaves, and buds. This confirmed that Aaron was indeed Yahweh's choice for chief priest.)

The ark contained the symbols of God's grace; His gifts to His people: food, leadership, and law (directions to be the holy nation in fellowship with the Creator.)

Atop the ark's lid were two statues of cherubim facing the center space of the lid and bowed down in worship. Above these was said to be the Lord's throne from which He engaged with Israel and made judgment calls. Thus, the lid of the ark and the space above it came to be called the "mercy seat" or "Lord's footstool."

⁴ Deuteronomy 31:25

⁵ Exodus 16:33

⁶ Numbers 17:8-10

So, the ark was a symbol of God's grace, God's justice, and God's mercy: His gifts to His people to sustain them as his holy nation, His ability to determine right from wrong and His desire to offer kindness and forgiveness.

Grace, law, and mercy; the hallmarks of God.

When the ark was in the camp, Israelites had the assurance that Yahweh and all of his grace, justice, and mercy was in the midst of the people.

It's easy then to imagine the significance as the Israelites prepared for battle of seeing the ark go before them and stand on the threshold as they passed from their old nomadic life into their new, settled, and prosperous life:

The Lord is God of heaven above and earth beneath.

We are his children.

He is in our midst.

He will not fail!

2.

Symbols and ritual anchor our faith, inspire words to our testimony, and encourage our actions.

Disciples of Jesus have symbols: the cross, the baptismal font, the communion table, the pulpit, the Bible, the buildings. We also have ritual: worship (private or in congregation), sacraments (baptism and the Lord's Supper – which we'll be sharing on October 3rd), singing, praying, maybe even dancing.?

Symbols and rituals can help to assure us of God's grace, God's justice, and God's mercy. They remind us of God's presence and direction.

In the context of Joshua as Israel prepared to enter an inhabited landscape for the purpose of doing battle and conquering, what is a symbol of hope for one side is likely not for the other!

Given that the reputation of Israel and, more to the point, of Yahweh preceded them (as we saw last week), it is likely that the sight of robed priests carrying the ark

across the river (not to ignore that the river's flow was disrupted) incited a very different feeling for the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites than for the Israelites!

While the cross, or the manger, or a Bible, or a church building may evoke feelings of comfort, joy, and hope for some, it might recall memories of past injustices and feelings of fear and loneliness for others.

3. The purpose of religious symbols is so that you may know the way you should go; so that they may know that the Lord of all the earth is our guide in the journey; and so that you may know that among you is the living God who will not fail in His plan of redeeming His good creation. People included.

The purpose of religious symbols is to help us embrace and proclaim the message which is good news for all people: that the God revealed in the stories, poems, histories and ethical/moral codes of Scripture is the living and triune God of heaven and earth. He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is faithful to His purpose and promise.

Symbols and rituals help us embrace and proclaim the message that in communion with this creating, sustaining, and redeeming God is the Promised Land of peace, joy, and purpose that transcends our momentary circumstances.

Symbols and rituals help us embrace and proclaim the message that by the sacrifice of the Son of God named Jesus, the Lord God has driven away all that prevents our communion with Him and offers this fellowship to everyone. And that anyone can receive the benefits when they choose to accept His grace in faith.

4.

The effectiveness of the symbol depends on the degree to which the devotees sanctify themselves and follow what the symbol represents.

The symbolism of the ark was only effective in the degree to which the Israelites followed it. The degree to which their lives reflected the teachings of the Law and the degree to which they were devoted to and trusted Yahweh.

Likewise, our symbols are only effective signs of divine grace, justice, and mercy in the degree to which our lives reflect the teachings of Christ and the degree to which we embrace and trust the grace, mercy, and method of Christ and his kingdom.

A cross is a symbol of mercy when the people who wear it exude the forgiveness and compassion of Christ.

A baptismal font is a symbol of promise when those who are baptized devote themselves to worshipping, learning of and learning from the Father who calls them beloved sons and daughters in the name of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is a symbol of a different, and better, kingdom when those who wield it endeavour to live it.

A church building is a symbol of hope in the neighbourhood when the people who gather there are ruled by the grace and mercy of Christ.

In the words of the 17th century nonconformist minister Matthew Henry:

*Divine law and grace **reigning in the heart** are the surest pledges of God's presence and favour.*

So, as the Israelites raised *and followed* the ark,

we lift high the cross, [so that] *the love of Christ* [we] *proclaim*
till all the world adore his sacred name.
Come, Christians, *follow* where the Master trod,
our King victorious, Christ the Son of God.⁷

Hymn #643 “Lift high the cross”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbcBXYP4AIE>

⁷ *Book of Praise* #643 “Lift high the cross”

We respond with prayer, faith, and service:⁸

Gracious God,
you have called many people together to become the church
that bears Jesus' name.
Thank you for joining us in fellowship in so many different places,
and giving us opportunities to make a difference for Christ's sake.
Bless our congregation and our denomination,
so that we are united in mission and purpose, wherever and however we serve.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Creator God, you made all things and called them good.
May the earth be held in reverence by all people.
May its resources be used wisely,
and the fragile balance between all its species respected.
Be with those whose lives have been disrupted by wildfire, storm and drought,
and bring healing to creatures and communities struggling for life.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Comforting God,
your Son became a refugee with no place to call his own.
Look with mercy on all those who are fleeing from danger,
and find themselves homeless and hungry.
(Here you can add specific prayers for places in recent news)
Bless and protect those who work to bring relief;
and inspire generosity and compassion in hearts that have resources to share.
Guide the nations to work together to bring an end to conflict
so that little children may grow up safe and happy in their own homes.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Eternal Ruler,
all nations rise and fall in your sight.
Hear our prayers for those who rule in countries around the world,
that they may act with integrity, establish justice for all citizens,
and seek the ways of peace.
Give guidance to the new government elected in Canada this week,
to address the needs of the most vulnerable,
and to lead recovery from the pandemic in prudent and generous ways.
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God of hope,

⁸ From worship resource for September 26, 2021 available at: <https://presbyterian.ca/worship>

we bring before you the names of people and places on our hearts this day,
seeking the right gift only you can give them:

(Keep silence for 30 seconds)

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Ever faithful God,

you have knit together your people from all times and places
into the body of Christ through his resurrecting love.

Keep us in communion with all your saints,
those we have known and loved, as well as those known best to you.

Inspire us to learn from the examples of their faith in action,
and bring us together in the joy we will know in your presence.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Merciful God,

accept our prayers, spoken and unspoken,

and strengthen us to do your will through Jesus Christ,
who taught us to pray, saying:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with His blessing:

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