

Worship at home

October 10, 2021

20th Sunday after Pentecost

Harvest Thanksgiving

Communion

<https://pccweb.ca/moorepc/>



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:

God of all creation,
in this season of thanksgiving for the harvests of the earth,
we are struck by the beauties of autumn,
leaves in bright colours, birds flying south in formation, fields ripe with produce.
Such beauty speaks of your goodness,
your desire to provide what each beloved creature needs.
As we gather this day,
renew our sense of thanksgiving for what you give to us
in the fruitfulness of creation,
and in Christ Jesus who teaches us how to walk wisely on the earth you made.
For all your good gifts we honour you with thanks and praise,
now and always.

God of our lives,

¹ Psalm 89:1, 2

when we give thanks for your good gifts around us,
we know that we enjoy an abundance many cannot even imagine.
Yet we confess we do not always see the blessings in which we share.
We worry about the future,
if we can recover from the pandemic,
whether we will have enough for our families to flourish.
Forgive our fears of going without,
and our failure to be grateful for how much goodness is already ours.

God assures us of his forgiveness:

Be at peace this day.
Jesus, our High Priest, knows the temptations of the human heart. From the throne of grace, he offers us mercy in our weakness. His strength renews us in faithfulness.
Thanks be to God.

**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: #807 "We plough the fields and scatter"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWohii4uuIo>

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.

READ JOSHUA 5:1-15.

Rituals, Thanksgiving, and Holy Ground

1. This was not the first time the Israelites stood on the edge of the Promised Land. We usually talk about the Israelites' 40-year sojourn in the wilderness. What we often forget is that most of what we know of that experience happened in the first 2 years. During the first 2 years after escaping from Egypt, Israel travelled to Mt. Sinai, received the Law, built the tabernacle, instituted many worship practices, and travelled to the southern edge of the Promised Land; of the land of Canaan.

However, it seems that 2 years was not enough time for humanity to learn how to be God's holy nation. Two years was not enough time for them to learn that they can trust the Lord God and His ways whole-heartedly. Because, as Moses and the first generation of redeemed Israelites camped at the southern border of the Promised Land, Moses sent 12 men (one from each tribe) to spy out the land. (Sound familiar from what we've read thus far in Joshua?) The 12 spies returned with favourable reports about the land and terrifying reports about the local warriors.

The congregation then began to doubt the leadership of Moses and Aaron, and even the efficacy of God. They complained:

Would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? ... would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?²

Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua (the son of Nun)³, tried to convince the rest of the people that despite the formidable nature of the Canaanite warriors, the Lord God would ensure their success and would come true on His promise. Despite their attempts, the fear which the reports of the other 10 spies incited caused the Israelites to turn their thoughts to mutiny against Moses and Aaron and thus rebellion against God.

² Numbers 14:2-3

³ Numbers 13:1-16ff.

Just as when a parent cannot reason with their child and has to let them make their own mistakes, because the Israelites believed that there was no way they would ever possess the land and they would instead die in the wilderness – in essence believing that God was impotent and untrustworthy – the Lord God shrugged his shoulders as if to say: “Have it your own way!”

Indeed, to quote from Numbers 14:

‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘I will do to you the very things I heard you say: your dead bodies shall fall in this very wilderness; and of all your number, included in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have complained against me, not one of you shall come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.’⁴

So, despite the pleas from Moses, Aaron, Caleb, and Joshua (whose book we’re now studying), the Israelites turned their back on the Promised Land to return through the wilderness toward Egypt.

God is not impotent nor is He untrustworthy. His ways are good and his plan to redeem both his land and his people will not fail in spite of human shortsightedness, fear, and sin. Over the next 38 years, the Lord gradually turned them around, reformed them as His holy nation, and brought the next generation into the Promised Land under Joshua’s leadership.

Now that the Israelites have crossed the Jordan River, that plan of redemption has in some sense been completed. At least, it’s reached a major milestone.

The Lord has reclaimed his people, shaped and sanctified the holy nation through 38 + 2 years of wilderness wanderings, and has brought them to inhabit his holy land.

Joshua and the Israelites mark this momentous occasion by resuming long neglected rituals:

- The males of this new generation were circumcised according to the covenant as a sign of their holy identity as Yahweh’s redeemed people. Now that they had arrived in the promised land, they no longer bore the disgrace of being perceived by the Egyptians to worship an impotent God. And, God’s reputation is vindicated because of it.

⁴ Numbers 14:28-30

- Passover was celebrated. The community was restored.
- As they began to eat the crops of the land of Canaan, the manna ceased. They were home. Here they were no longer nomads. Here they would live in communion with the Lord God who created the heavens and the earth and all that is therein.

These were rituals of joy. Of relief, of praise, and of thanksgiving.

2. Which makes this an appropriate passage on which to meditate today.

Tomorrow is the harvest thanksgiving festival. With a sense of relief and praise we give thanks to God for once again providing us with the crops we need to live.

Today we celebrate the uniquely Christian ritual of thanksgiving called the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. A ritualized meal that is often simply called the *Eucharist*, or, the Thanksgiving.

In this sacrament we give thanks that by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ – the final and complete Passover lamb, he has provided us with all that we need for this life to transcend the confines of our temporal existence. In Jesus we have fellowship with the Lord God. In Jesus we have wholeness and joy that reaches beyond happiness and sadness. By his sacrificial death we have life eternal. By his sacrificial death we live on holy ground.

What's more, as I said last week, it's been months (I think nearly or slightly over 2 years!) since we've shared the sacrament of the Lord's Supper together as God's redeemed people in the name of Jesus the Christ. We have and we continue each to experience the Pandemic differently. Some of us have been spared much of the fatigue, anxiety, and heartache that others have endured. Some of you have suffered greatly working on the frontlines or fighting the virus yourself, or grieving someone who died by its curse. Nevertheless, the challenge of the wilderness is to recognize that regardless of our momentary circumstance, God is advancing His kingdom and His plan of redemption. When we share the sacrament we do so with the recognition that there is nothing – not even a pandemic – that can prevent us from receiving the love of God through Jesus Christ.

When Israel resumed the Passover on the plains of Jericho, they must have given tremendous thanks that there was no earthly circumstance that could prevent them from receiving the love of God, should they choose to accept it.

There is, however, a noteworthy juxtaposition in these events.

While Israel was celebrating and giving thanks, the kings of the Amorites and Canaanites were paralyzed by fear!

Although things were looking up for the Israelites, the same could not be said for the Canaanites!

Which begs the question: When we give thanks, for what are we thankful?

Have you ever said the words: “When I think of what other people put up with, I’m just so thankful.”?

Are we thankful because we are not like those other people?

Are we thankful because we don’t have to endure what others do?

Are we thankful because somehow, we ended up in the easier chapters of history?

Maybe it doesn’t matter. Maybe gratitude is gratitude independent of the reason. But I want to suggest that if we are grateful because life is relatively okay for us, we create an unconscious barrier between us and others. And it’s easy then to begin to wonder if God favours us a little bit more than others.

3. Although they were celebrating the Passover and giving thanks for God’s blessings, Joshua still wondered if God was on their side.

Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?

Joshua asked the man.

How many wars have been fought with the conviction that God is on our side? What is right, just, and holy is on our side! The other side is evil, corrupt, disobedient, lazy, disgraceful, dirty.

*Are you for us, or for the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites,
Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites?*

Whose side is God on?

Notice the man's answer in verse 14:

"Are you for us, or for them?"

"Neither; but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come."

God is neither on the side of the Israelites nor the Canaanites, but on the side of His kingdom; His plan of redemption; His purpose to reclaim what is rightfully his; His end of renewing the Eden of heaven and earth.

4. When we share the Eucharistic feast and give thanks; when we're savouring our second piece of pumpkin pie, are we giving thanks because our life at the moment is slightly easier than someone else's? Are we giving thanks because we're not the Canaanites? Or, are we giving thanks that the Lord God who created heaven and earth is real, is able, and that the heavenly army is committed to our earthly struggles and will guide them towards the final goal foreshadowed by the resurrection of Jesus the Christ?

By the sacrifice of Christ, the war has been won even if battles continue. Sin, death, and the devil are defeated. When we accept his grace in faith, we are united with our heavenly Father by the bond of the Holy Spirit and in that fellowship there is the holy ground of peace that transcends our momentary circumstances.

*All who hunger sing together;
Jesus Christ is living bread.
Come from loneliness and longing.
Here, in peace, we have been led.
Blest are those who from this table
live their days in gratitude.
Taste and see the grace eternal.
Taste and see that God is good.⁵*

Hymn #534 "All who hunger, gather gladly"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRKqwoFCzro>

⁵ "All who hunger, gather gladly", Sylvia G. Dunstan, #534 *Book of Praise*

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper:

This is the Lord's table.
Our Saviour invites all those who trust him
to share the feast which he has prepared.
O taste and see that the Lord is good.

Let us pray.

Holy God, Creator of heaven and earth,
with joy we give you thanks and praise.

You commanded light to shine out of darkness,
divided the sea and the dry land,
created the vast universe and called it good.
You made us in your image
to live with one another in love.
You gave us the breath of life
and freedom to choose your way.
You set forth your purpose
in commandments through Moses,
and called for justice with righteousness in the cry of the prophets.
Through long generations
you have been patient and kind to all your children.

How wonderful are your ways, almighty God.
How marvelous is your name, O Holy One.
You alone are God.
Therefore,
with apostles and prophets,
and that great cloud of witnesses
who live for you beyond all time and space,
we lift our hearts in joyful praise:

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.*

*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.*

We praise you, most holy God,
for sending your only Son Jesus to live among us,
full of grace and truth.
Sharing our joy and sorrow,
he heals the sick and is a friend of sinners.

Obedying you,
he took up his cross and died that we might live.
We praise you that he overcame death
and is risen to rule the world.
He is still the friend of sinners.
We trust him to overcome every power that can hurt or divide us,
and believe that when he comes in glory
we will celebrate victory with him.

Therefore, in remembrance of your mighty acts
in Jesus Christ,
we take this bread and this cup
and give you praise and thanksgiving as we proclaim the mystery of faith:

*Christ has died,
Christ is risen,
Christ will come again.*

Gracious God,
pour out your Holy Spirit upon us,
and upon this bread and wine,
that we, and all who share this feast,
may be one with Christ and he with us.

Here we offer ourselves to be a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to you.
In your mercy,
accept our praise and thanksgiving.
Fill us with the joy of eternal life,
that we may be your faithful people
until we feast with you in glory.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all glory and honour are yours, almighty God,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Hear now the words of institution recorded by the apostle Paul:

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1st Corinthians 11:23-26)

When we break the bread,
it is a sharing in the body of Christ.

When we bless the cup,
it is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

These are the gifts of God
for the people of God.

The Lord's Supper is shared with "This is the body of Christ... This is the blood of Christ..."

Let us pray.
Eternal God, we give you thanks for this holy mystery
in which you have given yourself to us.
Grant that we may go into the world
in the strength of your Spirit,
to give ourselves for others
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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.