

Worship at home

November 14, 2021

25th Sunday after Pentecost

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

God calls us to worship: Psalm 95

We bring our praise and confessions:

Lord of Light and Life,

we come before you in wonder and awe,

eager to praise your name and enjoy in your presence.

You are the source of all that is good and true,

the essence of love.

You bring gifts of peace and healing into troubled lives.

You show us the way to love friend and enemy alike,

to build a better world together.

In this time of worship, inspire us to believe our work in Jesus' name makes a difference.

So may we live to bring you glory, O God,
now and always.

God of mercy:

you have called us to be thankful

for your good gifts to us,

but too often we have taken them for granted

as if we deserved them.

You have called us to be hopeful

through the gospel of Jesus Christ,

but too often despair has come upon us,

and the cares of the world

have weighed us down.

You have called us to be joyful

in the wonder of your presence among us,

but too often we become mired in the mundane

and lose the gift of reverence.

By your saving power, O God,

enable us to celebrate your love for us

with joy and thanksgiving.

God assures us of his forgiveness:

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Friends, through God's mercy, our sin is forgiven. May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

**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 #298 "Glory be to God the Father"

God speaks to us through his Word:

Holy One, you are the Source of Wisdom for the ages. Prepare us to learn from your Word. Open our minds and hearts to the scriptures by the illumination of your Holy Spirit, that we may grow wiser as we listen, and serve you more willingly as we live.

Vineyards you did not plant

READ HEBREWS 4:1-11
 JOSHUA 23:1; 24:1-33

This might change in the coming weeks, however, at this moment in Ontario's plan of re-opening, any facility that requires proof of COVID vaccination is able to lift the restrictions on the number of people who can gather in said facility. Restaurants, gyms, casinos, and so forth. Churches are not required to demand proof of vaccination to enter and take part in worship services. What this means, is that anyone can take part in our worship services providing we don't exceed the seating capacity that allows for 6 feet of distance between worshipers.

At the time of writing this sermon, church leadership (session), can choose to require proof of vaccination which would then allow us to lift the capacity restrictions, *but* limit who could attend to only those who have the proof of vaccination.

The elders of each congregation, therefore, have to discern what is the will of the Triune God over against the will of the gods of the nations, for their particular congregation in this particular time of history: require COVID passports and lift capacity restrictions, or, require capacity restrictions and leave attendance open to anyone who can come?

Serving the Lord, the God of gods, worshiping Yahweh, remaining loyal to Jesus the Christ, is a matter of discerning.

What is of the Lord versus what is of the gods of the nations?

We have now come to the end of the story of Joshua.

This is the story of the Creator, the Lord, the God of gods reclaiming what has always been his portion and the resultant blessings for those who worship and obey Him.

This is revealed for the reader back in chapter 5. Joshua was prepared to go in and do battle against the inhabitants of Canaan – beginning with Jericho – when he saw

a man standing before him with a drawn sword. Joshua asked the man: “Are you one of us, or one of our adversaries?” The man replied: “Neither, but as commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.” In other words, the real battle that takes place which was mirrored by the battles between Israel and the nations, is the battle between Yahweh and the gods of the nations who have taken His land and His people.

This is the story of Yahweh, the God of gods, going to fight for his creation: his land, his people, his way of life, his kingdom.

We’ve seen that the story presents several challenges for 21st century readers. Two significant challenges are the divine sanction for Holy War and the annihilation or removal of anyone who refuses to accept Yahweh as God and His ways as the ways they’ll obey. And coupled with this is the proclamation that Yahweh has given to the Israelites vineyards they did not plant, land on which they did not labour, and towns they did not build.

Israel had no more claim to the land than did the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites other than that the Lord God of gods had chosen them to be His agents for reclaiming and restoring His kingdom on earth in this small part of His creation. Their existence in the Promised Land was a gift. It was their inheritance from the Creator. But it was not theirs to do with as they wished. In the land they could have peace with God. They could have hope that God was who God says He is. They could love the Lord their God. They could know the joy that is the relief of realizing that the God of the ages fights for them, in their place, and on their behalf. But the land has always, continues to be, and will always belong to God. They are there as its caretakers.

This is the story of the God of creation, redemption, and sustenance reclaiming what is His and working with people to make the earthly realm a mirror image of the heavenly realms.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

It is also a story of faith. And in particular, the *choice* of faith.

You don't have to accept that this particular God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who revealed himself to the world in Jesus of Nazareth is the God of gods – or as the psalmist put it: the King above all gods; the Supreme God. You don't have to accept that He is the Creator who holds the depths of the earth and the heights of the mountains in his hand and in fellowship with whom is peace, joy, love, and hope that transcends circumstances. You don't have to accept that His ways are the good ways, and you don't have to obey His ways.

Many people don't.

CTVNews published an article on October 30th which cited a recent report from Statistics Canada indicating that in 2019:

- 68% of Canadians 15 years old and older have some kind of religious affiliation,
- 54% of Canadians reported that religious or spiritual beliefs are *somewhat* or very important to them (which suggests that nearly 1/2 of the Canadian population couldn't care less!),
- 30% reported engaging in some form of individual religious activities (prayer, meditation, reading of holy literature, etc.) at least 1x/week,
- 23% reported attending a group religious activity (such as a worship service or prayer meeting) at least 1x/month.

One quarter of the Canadian population are what we might call actively involved in religious practices. And half the population are completely unaffected by any belief or thought of anything spiritual/supernatural.

You don't have to believe that the God of the Bible is the Creator, the Lord God of gods in fellowship with whom is peace, hope, joy, and love everlasting.

But that is precisely the story of Joshua. It's the story of a God who is not only real, but who fights for His creation. Who cares so deeply that He will allow neither human rebellion nor spiritual malevolency to undermine His people and land from living the Garden of Eden life He's always intended. It's the story of a God who will shake the mountains, split the heavens, and dry up the chaotic waters so that his children can receive and enjoy their inheritance: Rest. Peace that transcends circumstances. Joy that is fellowship with the Creator.

Should you choose to believe this, and accept the inheritance God offers here-and-now as well as in the eternal future there is the responsibility of being careful that your decisions, actions, and thoughts are in line with God's will and the rule of His kingdom.

Serving the Lord, the God of gods, worshiping Yahweh, remaining loyal to Jesus the Christ, is a matter of discerning.

What is of the Lord versus what is of the gods of the nations?

In June of 2021 the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted two definitions of marriage. The denomination now holds that marriage can be understood as a covenant between a man and a woman *or* as a covenant between two adult persons regardless of gender or sex. This means that each individual session and each individual minister must now discern which of these definitions is in line with the will of God for their particular congregation and context at their particular time in history, or, maybe, that the will of God involves trying to hold these two definitions in tension.

What is of the Lord versus what is of the gods of the nations?

This is the challenge of Joshua. As members of God's family through His grace in Christ received by faith, we are heirs of His promised rest. We have no more right to that fellowship than the Israelites had to the land of Canaan. It is a gift. It is an inheritance. The eternal rest which we can begin to experience now because of what Jesus did for us, on our behalf, and in our place on the cross, is a vineyard which we did not plant. And Joshua encourages us, as we live in that vineyard, and continue to learn more and more of its blessings, that we choose this day whom we will serve.

If we choose to serve the Lord, then we need to learn the holy habit of discerning with our head, heart, and hands what is of Christ over against what is of the gods of the nations.

For the health of our souls, the good of the nations, and the glory of God,
amen.

Hymn #654 “O God of Bethel, by whose hand”

We respond with faith and prayers:

God of Our Past and Our Future,
God of Healing and Hope,
We come before you with grateful hearts,
trusting that you walk with us through all the times of our lives.

So, we pray today for those who face danger and despair in these times:
We remember before you those living with hunger,
communities struggling with the impact of drought, storms and earthquakes,
and all those for whom the pandemic is unrelenting.
We remember people caught up in unrest and violence
and those whose lives are directed by forces beyond their control.

(Keep a time of silence)

We pray for all those working to relieve suffering in these lives
and those who work to bring justice and peace:
God, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We pray for all those facing fear or frustration,
wrestling with sorrow or discouragement in any area of their lives:
For those who live with illness or pain...
For those bearing chronic conditions or disability...
For those who know the grief and change of bereavement...

(Keep a time of silence)

And we pray for all those who work to bring healing and comfort
and agencies which offer support and care to those who suffer:
God, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We pray for all who feel helpless or hopeless in this present time:
For those struggling to make ends meet or trying to find employment...
For those caught up in the pain of misunderstanding or broken relationships...
and for those working through situations of conflict at home or at work...

(Keep a time of silence)

We pray for all who offer guidance and support in the midst of such difficulties
and for those who have skills in reconciliation or mediation:

God, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

God of Our Past and Our Future,

God of Healing and Hope,

Help our congregation and churches everywhere
as we regroup after months of pandemic isolation
to engage each day with faithfulness and creativity.

Where we need correction, show us a new way;
where we need love and encouragement, draw near.

Whatever our challenge, stay with us on our way
for we are the followers of Jesus who pray together in his name:

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.