

Worship at home
July 31, 2022



God calls us to worship:

Responsive reading: Psalm 49:1-4

Hymn: #299 "Holy, holy, holy"

We offer our prayers:

Prayer of Praise and Supplication (*please remain standing*):

God of justice and joy,
As we gather for worship this day,
we join your whole creation to offer you praise.
We sense your glory in the grandeur of open skies and the expanding horizon.
We sense your power of new life in growing gardens and growing children.
We trust your gift of new life in Christ, rising in us with courage and compassion.
Your Spirit blows through us like a fresh breeze in the breath of prayer.
Fill us with a sense of your holiness in this hour, O God,
to renew us in our love for you
and our care for your creation.

Please be seated.

*If we say that we have no sin,
we deceive ourselves,
and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)
Yet we know that nothing is able to separate us
from the love of God in Jesus Christ.
Let us, therefore, be free to confess our sins
before the God who is faithful and just. (1 John 1:9)*

Prayer of Confession (Unison):

God of mercy;

**As we gather to celebrate your gift of love
we recall the times when we forget you
and are divided one from the other.**

**How often our thoughts, our words, and our actions
have betrayed the goodness you have shown to us.**

Forgive us.

Mend what is broken.

Heal the wounded relationships

that separate us from you,

from one another,

**and which leave us divided within ourselves;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

God offers the assurance of grace: John 3:16

We offer our lives and resources:

Offering plates are positioned as you enter and leave the sanctuary. If you'd prefer to use e-transfers, please speak with Rev. Ian, Judy Armstrong (St. Andrew's), or Howard McKellar (Knox)

God speaks to us:

Hymn:

#506 "The Spirit breathes upon the word"

Plans for your welfare

1. Over the past number of weeks, we've been studying the introduction to the book of Proverbs.

If Proverbs was written by King Solomon, as the opening verse of the book suggests, then the historical setting for the book is during the last years of the united Israelite monarchy, nearly 1,000 years before the incarnation of Christ.

Solomon lost the throne in 931 BCE, because, as the story is told, he failed to abide by the wisdom he taught and ended up turning his back on God.

The kingdom subsequently split into the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah – whose capital was the holy city of Jerusalem in which stood the temple). This marked the beginning of several hundred years of kings who led the people of God farther from God, from God's ways and God's wisdom.

Two-hundred years after Solomon lost the throne, in 722 BCE, the northern kingdom of Israel fell to the expanding Assyrian empire. One-hundred and thirty-six years later, in 586 BCE, the southern kingdom fell when the Babylonians destroyed the temple and the city of Jerusalem.

In several waves, the Babylonians forcefully removed the Israelites from Judah – beginning with the kings and queens, court officials, leaders, artisans, and craftsmen – and relocated them to other places within their empire.

This experience was known as the Exile. The Israelites were pushed away from God, and the Promised Land, and the Temple.

Today we'll read first from the Proverbs of Solomon, written ~300 years *before* the Israelites were exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon, and then we'll read from a letter written by Jeremiah to those who had been exiled into Babylon.

READ PROVERBS 4:1-9.

READ JEREMIAH 29:1-14.

The purpose of this letter was to address a situation that had arisen which threatened the faith of the exiles. Certain preachers and faith-leaders were teaching that things weren't as bad as might at first appear. This was only a temporary situation and they would soon be going back to the Promised Land.

A similar situation arose in the early years of the Christian church when preachers proclaimed that Jesus was going to be returning imminently, in other words, within their lifetime. This caused problems when people started dying and Jesus had not yet returned!

Jeremiah, however, had a much different message. He was instructed by God to proclaim that they were in this for the long haul. Seventy years, we're told.

Trying to figure out exactly where in the timeline that 70 years falls is difficult. It depends on when you mark the start of the exile. If you count it from the beginning of Babylon's invasion of Judah to the time the first exiles were allowed to return in 539 BCE when King Cyrus of Persia took over the Babylonian empire, you count 66 years which, if you round up, makes 70. Alternatively, you could count the years from when the temple was destroyed (586 BCE) to when the 2nd temple was built after the Israelites returned (516 BCE) which represents 70 years.

In some sense, the actual dating isn't what's important. The point is, the time of exile would last for a long time. So long, in fact, that most of the people who first left Jerusalem wouldn't live to see the return! If someone was 20 years old when they left Jerusalem, they'd be in their 90s before they started to return – far surpassing the expected life-span of the era (around 70 years.) So, said Jeremiah, get comfortable in your new surroundings. This is the new normal. Build homes, plant gardens, ply your trades, hone your skills, raise your children and your grandchildren, abide by God's wisdom, seek the welfare of the city without compromising the covenants. This was going to be a long time in a strange land, among people who don't care about your God nor your faith. And most of you won't live to see the return.

It's no wonder Jeremiah did not find a receptive audience among the exiles!

2. An exile is someone who has been pushed aside.

Maybe they've done or said something that offends; maybe something about their personality or temperament caused discomfort so it was easier, or maybe even necessary for others' safety, to push them away.

People can be exiled from a country when their politics clash with those of the ruling party.

People can be exiled from peer groups or families when they are deemed to be overly emotional, childish, needy, or dangerous to the group.

There is a model of therapy that suggests that almost all of us to varying degrees exile certain parts of our own spiritual make-up which, owing to past injury, are too emotional or needy, or somehow dangerous to deal with. So, we push them aside.

The process of healing in this model, is to visit one's exiles, help them heal their wounds, and bring them back into a harmonious and life-enriching relationship with all the other parts of one's personality.

Did you know that the word "heal" (which is synonymous with 'salvation') comes from a Germanic word that means "to make whole"? Healing, is the process of re-constituting that which has been torn apart.

There can be salvation only in the extent to which the dissociated parts of ourselves on a personal level, and creation on the large-scale level are brought back into harmony with the God who authors life and with one another in Christ.

3. The Lord God promised the Israelites that even though it was necessary for a time to live in exile, He would *visit* them and bring them back to the Promised Land. He would bring them back to the covenant and restore their place in His embrace.

Centuries later, when the priest Zechariah, who served in the 2nd temple which the returned exiles had built, held his infant son in his arms and realized that John would be the harbinger of the Messiah who would complete this promised restoration, he sang out:

*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has **looked favourably upon** ('visited')
his people and redeemed them.¹*

¹ Luke 1:68

And, several decades after that, when the early Christian church was struggling to figure out how both Jewish and Gentile Christians could relate to one another,

*James replied, “My brothers, listen to me. Simeon has related how God first **looked favourably on** (**‘visited’**) the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name.²*

The Lord God of Israel, of the Gentiles, of all the cosmos desires to visit the exiles – Jew or Gentile – and bring them home; and restore their place in His embrace, and heal their wounds.

To *visit* someone, in the biblical imagination, is to not merely call upon someone for coffee. Godly visiting is a powerful showing of care. A display of care that makes a difference. God visits in order to help and provide what is needed for our healing and living as His reconciled children in Christ.

God visits to provide what is needed so that we might have a future filled with hope.

And, as Zechariah sang:

*The Lord, the God of heaven and earth **has** visited us, He has redeemed us, He has gathered us from the scattered regions of the globe and from the scattered regions of our inner landscapes.*

By the incarnation and sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, The Lord God *has* visited us and has provided what is needed so that we might have a future filled with hope.

And he will visit again.

We believe Christ will return, bringing heaven to wed earth and restore all good things. At that time, those who have died will be bodily resurrected, the faithful to dwell eternally with Christ in the new heavens and earth, the persistently rebellious left to fend for themselves.

² Acts 15:14

In that age, we will continue to worship, work, ply our trades, love, and serve in ways that can be imagined only as glory.

That might not happen today.

It might not happen tomorrow.

It might not happen in my or your natural lifetime.

The Lord *will* visit his people again.

In the meantime, the Lord God has gathered his people in the name of Christ to build houses and live in them, plant gardens, start families, and be his community of healing and shalom in the midst of a world of exile and chaos.

4. We don't know when Christ will return.

We don't know when heaven and earth will be renewed.

We do know that in Christ we are children of the heavenly Father, grafted into His family tree, and empowered by the life breath of the Divine.

And, we can trust that the Lord God has plans for our welfare and not for harm, to give us a future with hope.

So, while we wait, for the health of our souls, the good of our societies, and the glory of God:

*Listen, children, to your heavenly Father's instruction,
and be attentive that you may gain insight ...
Get wisdom, do not forget nor turn away
from the words of the mouth of God.*

Thus, as we go forth in Jesus' name,
our daily tasks to pursue;
we may, in all our works, His presence find,
and prove His good and perfect will.

Amen.

We respond with prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

O God in whom we live and move and have our being
We come to you in prayer in midsummer,
to say “Thank you” for the occasions we have enjoyed so far
to catch up with family and friends;
to travel for recreation and restoration;
to enjoy the beauty of nature in landscapes we love.

Silence.

Today we remember those for whom this summer is difficult:
for communities cleaning up after storms or worried about wildfire;
for areas facing drought or the effects of flooding;
for those worried about uncertainty in the economy and the impact of the climate crisis.

Silence.

We remember those whose lives have faced crises this summer:
Through tragic death and unexpected loss...
Through critical illness or injury...
Through pain or problems that seem to have no end....

Silence.

We pray for all those who have not found rest this summer:
Those juggling more demands and fewer resources at work or at home
Those whose work or plans for the future are uncertain
Those fleeing conflict and seeking new homes in despair and hope.

Silence.

We pray for your church, O Lord,
as we seek to find healing and reconciliation with those whom we’ve exiled.

Silence.

O God, we need the embrace of your presence, each in our own way.
Bring healing and peace to our lives and to this world you love.
Open our eyes and our hearts so that we may offer healing and peace to others
in the name of Christ Jesus who taught us to pray together

The Lord’s Prayer

God sends us with God’s blessing:

Hymn: #652 “Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go”

Blessing: