

Worship at home

August 28, 2022

Service of blessing for school staff and students



God calls us to worship: Psalm 111

We respond in praise, confession, and supplication:

Prayers:

Praise and supplication:

God of all generations,
you are the Source of all life and the strength of our lives.
You know us through and through.
In Jesus Christ, you entered our lives
and showed us how to live with hope and generosity.
Through the Holy Spirit, you nourish us each day
to inspire acts of hospitality and kindness to those we meet.
As we worship you,
fill us with your living water to refresh our faith
and make us a blessing to others
as we serve you in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Confession (*said in unison*):

**Merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart, mind, and strength;
we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.
In your mercy
forgive what we have been,
amend what we are,
and direct what we shall be,
so that we may delight in your will
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your holy name.
Amen.**

Assurance of grace:

We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hear and believe the good news:

In Jesus Christ, sin is forgiven.

In Jesus Christ, we are reconciled with our heavenly Father.

In Jesus Christ, there is peace.

Accept his grace,
and be at peace.

*(The response to: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" is: "**His love endures forever.**")*

Hymn: #300 "Father, we love you"

God speaks to us:

Reading: Hebrews 13:1-21

*(The response to: "This is the word of the Lord" is: "**Thanks be to God.**")*

Confidence

Deeds of love and hospitality, kindness, generosity, and acts tangible help are sacrifices that are pleasing to God. Thus concludes the sermon to the Hebrews:

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.¹

The Presbyterian Church in Canada follows this example. The back of your bulletin features a passage from the PCC's statement of belief that says:

We serve and love God
by the service and love of creation
especially the care of the needy.
Every kind of work
that is honest and serves others is a vocation from the Lord.

Whether as soldier, sailor; tinker, tailor; doctor, lawyer; parent, pastor; farmer, or teacher, *every* kind of work, undertaken in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ confessing and praising the name of the living and triune God and helping other members of creation is a vocation from the Lord and a sacrifice pleasing to God.

The 13th chapter of Hebrews is an encouragement for Christians to continue in their vocation and Christian ministry even in discouraging/disheartening contexts. However, the preacher was careful to point out that to pursue outward vocations and ministries without considering our emotional and mental health, our soul-health, is to court fatigue, discouragement, and burn-out.

The sermon to the Hebrews was addressed to an audience of Jewish and Gentile Christians who were, frankly, discouraged. Their lived experiences contrasted their expectations of the rewards of faith. Teachers were publicly confessing that the Jesus who had been crucified only a few decades earlier outside the walls of the Holy City is, in fact, the resurrected and ascended Messiah! Shop keepers were using their profits to buy blankets for the murderers in prison and claiming that the love of the crucified Messiah compels them to do so! Families were, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, opening their homes to strangers! And, in consequence, their families, friends, and the religious communities in which they grew up were shunning them, firing them from their jobs, casting them out of the camp. They were discouraged. Some had already renounced the faith.

¹ Hebrews 13:16

It was a hard time to be a Christian.

The preacher knew what we are struggling to learn now, that it is folly to consider only our outward actions and physical health without also considering the inward state.

In order to withstand stress, anxiety, and discouragement, exercise, sleep, and diet are critically important. God has given us physical bodies and it behoves us, for our proper functioning and enjoyment of life, to look after them.

But, even with strict physical regimes and rigidly regulated diets, on this side of the Resurrection, our bodies wear out.

Instead, our contentment in our various walks of life, and our confidence to pursue our vocations especially in anxious or discouraging contexts, are inner matters. They are matters of the heart.

“Every kind of work that is honest and serves others is a vocation from the Lord.”

Yet, to persevere in our vocations in a way that reflects the joy of Christ in a world of chaos, requires that not only our bodies be strengthened by food, exercise, and sleep, but our hearts be strengthened also.

So, the preacher warns us to beware of any kind of teaching that elevates anything other than God’s grace to an agent of salvation and strengthening.

Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food....²

He went on to evoke the Day of Atonement sacrifices in which an animal would be slaughtered outside of the camp (in the years of the Israelites’ wilderness wanderings) or, outside of the city (when once they had settled in the Promised Land), and the blood would be brought into the tabernacle/temple to be offered to God on the altar before the holy of holies. A goat was then produced upon whose head the yearly accumulation of the sins of the people was symbolically placed and the goat was driven away into the wilderness. Thus, the people were reminded each year that God has forgiven sin. When Jesus was crucified on the cross, he was thus

² Hebrews 13:9

sacrificed outside of the city's walls. Thus, Jesus is the totality of all the atoning sacrifices.

The significance of all this is that with sin forgiven by God's grace, we can, by faith, be reconciled with the Living and Triune God who has promised perpetual comfort, strength, and protection:

I will never leave you or forsake you.

Jesus' sacrifice on the altar of the cross is the act of grace and mercy that reconciles us with the Father, so that we can say with confidence:

*The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.
What can anyone do to me?*

Being *strengthened in our hearts by God's grace* thus becomes a matter of belief. It's about you and I believing that the Jesus who gave his life on the altar of the cross is the same Christ who strengthened the hearts of the 1st century Christians to whom this sermon was addressed, who strengthened the hearts of John Calvin and John Knox, and he is still the living Christ who both wants and is able to strengthen your heart today so that you can continue to do His good work despite anxiety, opposition, and stress.

Now, faith is neither a feeling nor a magic formula.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached that faith doesn't operate automatically. It's not something that will kick-in as soon as we're in trouble like the ABS in our cars. We have to put it in operation ourselves in whatever situation we find ourselves. He states that to do this we first refuse to be controlled by the situation and the feelings that arise in response. Secondly, we remind ourselves of what we believe to be true. Then, as a colleague of mine likes to say, we "get up, dress up, show up, never give up" and know that in the process, the Lord is with us.

One of the primary resources we have to do this is praise.

Praise doesn't depend on feelings or circumstances.

Praise is the spoken, sung, and remembered affirmation of the reality, goodness, and ability of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So, the preacher encourages us to continually offer sacrifices of praise to God. This act not only glorifies Him, in doing so we realign our own perspectives with that of Christ's.

As the new school season looms on the horizon, go to Jesus, sing his praise, and let him strengthen your heart with His grace so that you will be able to face the year ahead with confidence, saying as your feet touch the floor in the morning and your head hits the pillow at night:

*The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.
What can anyone do to me?*

For the good of your souls, the health of our societies, and the glory of God,
Amen.

We respond in thanksgiving, intercession, and faith:

Prayers and blessing (*congregational response is: Lord, hear our prayer*):

At the beginning of a new school year, O God,
we offer thanks and praise for the gift of new beginnings
and for the opportunity to learn, to explore, and to wonder.
We pray for teachers, students, and staff
that this year might be rewarding for all.
Be with us as we face the challenges of new tasks,
the fear of failure,
the expectation of family, friends, and self.
In our learning, may we grow in service to others and in love for your world.³

Almighty God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
you are the source of all wisdom and knowledge.
We ask you now to bless those who seek to learn, their teachers, and all staff
who work to keep our schools safe, clean, and productive.

Lord, hear our prayer.

For students as they look toward beginning this new school year,
grant them the gifts of wisdom and understanding,

Lord, hear our prayer.

For teachers, that they may share their knowledge with gentleness, patience,
and concern for their students,

Lord, hear our prayer.

For parents, the first teachers of their children,
that their faith and love may be an example to us always,

Lord, hear our prayer.

For all those who work to clean and maintain
our schools and grounds,

Lord, hear our prayer.

For bus drivers, volunteers, and support staff,

Lord, hear our prayer.

For the administrators, boards,
and all who make decisions that affect the students,

Lord, hear our prayer.⁴

For our seminaries, professors, and students,
grant them confidence, courage, and compassion
as they strive to prepare for lives of ministry in your holy name.

Lord, hear our prayer.

(Invite any teachers, students, and staff to come forward)

³ *The Book of Common Worship*, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 274

⁴ Adapted from <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/prayers/view.cfm?id=722>

Lord our God, in your wisdom and love
you surround us with the mysteries of the universe.
In times long past you sent us your prophets
to teach your laws and to bear witness to your undying love.
You sent us your Son
to teach us by word and example that true wisdom comes from you alone.
Send your Spirit upon these students and their teachers
and fill them with your wisdom and blessings.
Grant that during this academic year
they may devote themselves to their studies
and share what they have learned from others.
Grant this through Christ our Lord.⁵

Our Father...

(Congregation stretches out their hands in blessing and says in unison:)

**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.**

Hymn: #306 "Praise God from whom all blessings flow"

God sends us with God's blessing:

⁵ <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/prayers/view.cfm?id=722>