

## Moore Presbyterian Churches January 22, 2023



\*Indicates to please stand as you are able.

### God calls us to worship:

\*Call to worship (*responsive*):

From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same  
My name is great among the nations,  
and in every place incense is offered in my name,  
says the Lord. (Malachi 1:11)

**Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.** (Isaiah 60:1)

Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world.  
Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness,  
but will have the light of life.' (John 8:12)

\*Hymn: #352 "And can it be that I should gain"

### We respond in praise and confession:

\*Prayer of praise and supplication:

Gracious God,  
You shepherd us by still waters  
and guide us along paths of justice and peace.  
You send your comfort and courage to relieve our tears and fears  
in the shadows of death.  
We offer our praise in love and loyalty  
for you are always with us.

Prayer of confession (*Responsive. Psalm 51*):

Have mercy on me, O God,  
**according to your steadfast love;**  
according to your abundant mercy  
**blot out my transgressions.**  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
**and cleanse me from my sin.**  
You desire truth in the inward being;  
**therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.**  
Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
**and put a new and right spirit within me.**  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
**and sustain in me a willing spirit.**

We hear the gospel of God's grace:

*(Pour water into the baptismal font and then say:)*

Let us rejoice, for God has put a new song in our mouths! Trust in God's enduring love and mercy, washing over us every day. Remember your baptism, and know that forgiveness is yours through the grace of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

\*Hymn: #23 "I waited for the Lord my God"

**God speaks to us:**

### Called to gather by the Word

Our first reading is a continuation of our reading through the Sermon on the Mount. Last week we read the opening section in which Jesus described for his disciples the character of those who know God's blessings and then proceeded to remind them that *they* are the light of the world. Because the Christian church is built upon these 12 disciples, it applies to us as well. We are the light of the world. Meaning: that through the life, witness, and ministry of the church the world will come to know the truth about the Triune God and His ways and means of living and redemption.

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*By the church's song, "our God is magnified, many now will see and fear, and on the Lord rely."<sup>1</sup>*

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What's at stake by our behaviour is the reputation of the Living and Triune God. And so, *righteousness* is of utmost importance. Not for our salvation, but for God's reputation.

And this is what Jesus began to describe in the second section of the Sermon on the Mount. Using examples of 6 topics dealt with by laws and traditions of the covenants (murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, retribution, and who is worthy of love), Jesus taught what is good, acceptable, and holy according to the standards set by the Sovereign of Creation.

The entire section is contained in Matthew 5:17-48. Because it is a long section, and because the *specific* examples aren't germane to the sermon – they're not irrelevant, they're just not the prime focus – I'm going to read only verses 17-20 and verse 48. I'll refer to the examples later in the body of the sermon.

READ MATTHEW 5:17-20, 48.

Our second reading is the second of Isaiah's Servant Songs.

You'll recall from last week that the prophet Isaiah wrote 4 poems in which he described the mission and ministry of an unnamed servant. This servant was to be the agent of God's grace and salvation to all nations – Jew and Gentile alike.

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<sup>1</sup> "I waited for the Lord my God", Hymn #23 *Book of Praise*.

Last week we read the first of these Servant Songs. In that poem, over and against the lifeless and ineffectual idols and deities, the Lord God presented *His* servant into whom He had breathed the animating breath of Life itself and sent him to bring His justice to the nations. The servant was anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring the right understanding and application of the Law contained in the Torah and the teachings of the prophets to the nations. He was sent not to abolish the law and the writings of the prophets, but to fulfill.

The second Servant Song is written from the point of view of the Servant Himself. In this song, the Servant speaks to the nations – the peoples from far away – to tell them why He has come.

READ ISAIAH 49:1-13.

1. The Servant is chosen by the heavenly Father, authorized and anointed by the Holy Spirit to bring the right understanding of God's laws to the nations *so that we might be re-connected with the Lord God.*

*And now the Lord says,  
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,  
to **bring Jacob back** to him,  
and that Israel might be **gathered** to him...*

This is the Servant's mission: To re-connect Israel to God.  
and not only Israel:

*It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
and to restore the survivors of Israel;  
I will give you as a light **to the nations**,  
that my salvation may reach **to the ends of the earth.**<sup>2</sup>*

The Servant's mission is to re-connect people to the Living and Triune God who created life itself.

By his words he shall gather them from the east, north, west, and south. Under the Servant's care, the newly re-gathered company shall neither hunger, nor thirst, nor be scorched by the sun.

And, because the *people* are comforted. Because the *people* know the peace that passes understanding that is ours only when we are in harmony with our

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 49:5, 6.

Creator. Because the *people* are contented in the grace of the Lord, the rest of the natural world can sing for joy and relief:

*Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;  
break forth, O mountains, into singing!  
For the Lord has comforted his people,  
and will have compassion on his suffering ones.*<sup>3</sup>

When humanity is at rest, creation can breathe a sigh of relief!

But, as long as we are disconnected from God, we cannot have peace.

*Thou hast made me for thyself, O God;  
and my heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.*<sup>4</sup>

**2.** My high school English teacher opened my mind to the insightful world of etymology: the study of the origin of words.

By learning the original meaning of words and the process by which the words we use came into being, we sometimes gain remarkable insight into what the words are meant to convey.

The word *religion* has become burdened with a lot of negative baggage.

It's often associated with lifeless institutionalism, with oppressive rules, and with the opposite of everything that faith should be.

People, sometimes with some self-satisfaction, say they are “spiritual, but not religious”; that they “follow Jesus” but they don't participate in the religious rituals and trappings, they don't belong to a church or local congregation.

When we consider the etymology of *religion*, we learn that the word can be parsed into three parts:

The prefix “Re-” describes going back to do something again, or, to put back in place what has become dislodged. Hence, we *replace* our keys on the hook after having taken them off. We *return* home after having left.

The suffix “-ion” converts a verb to a noun. This means that although *religion* is a noun, it is based on an action that is to be repeated.

The middle part, “lig”, is based on the Latin word *ligāre*, which is a verb that means “to bind”, or, “to tie.”

So, *religion* is a thing that is based on the action of re-binding, or re-tying, or re-connecting that which has become separated.

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<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 49:13.

<sup>4</sup> attributed to St. Augustine.

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*Specifically, religion is a system of beliefs and practices intended to re-connect us with God.*

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**3.** Jesus described his role as fulfilling that of the Servant of Isaiah's song. He came to gather and re-connect those who accept his grace in faith with the Living God in fellowship with whom is peace beyond understanding.

We can picture, in our mind's eye, a shepherd holding the sheep together as a flock in the pasture, finding trees to shade them from the scorching wind and sun, and guiding them to springs of water, before gathering them into the fold at night.

In the mystery of the Holy Spirit who speaks to our hearts and minds through the words of Scripture, Jesus gathers his global and eternal flock into local folds (congregations). In these gatherings, we practice religion. We are gathered in commonly held beliefs, and practices of worship, prayer, and behaviours which are intended to routinely re-connect us with the Holy Trinity in whom is the fullest experience of life.

This is religion.

And religion, freed from apathy and abuses, is good news. Religion is the Christian's song that tunes our hearts to the Lord's and tells the nations the truth about God!

**4.** The Christian faith is not an individualistic religion. It's corporate. We're called to *gather* in the name of Jesus, according to the Word of God. Whether it be in a forest, on a farm, or in a meeting house, the Servant calls us to gather in prayer, in praise, and in learning.

That being said, we are individually responsible for our own behaviours. Our own *righteousness*.

Anyone who claims that life in Christ somehow liberates you from the laws and rules of the covenants would do well to re-read the words Jesus spoke in Matthew 5!

PARAPHRASE: MATTHEW 5:21, 22  
(Those who attended Ian Mason's presentation during the Ladies' Aid lunch at Knox-Moore on Tuesday will remember how the PCC in earlier years carefully guarded who was worthy to partake of the Lord's Supper. If someone was still nursing a grudge or whose relationships were otherwise fractured could be barred from the table until

they had reconciled. Part of the motivation behind that practice of faith comes from trying to obey Jesus words in verses 23-25.)

PARAPHRASE: MATTHEW 5:27, 28  
5:31, 32  
5:33, 34  
5:38, 39  
5:43, 44.

The church is the body of redeemed/delivered/forgiven souls; the assembly of the adopted children of the heavenly Father, *gathered* in the name of Christ and equipped by the Holy Spirit to joyfully sing the song that tells the world the truth about God.

Obedience to the will of God will not redeem us. Obedience doesn't save us. Obedience doesn't absolve us of sin. Jesus has dealt with sin for us, in our place, and on our behalf by taking it upon himself and crucifying it on the cross.

What's at stake is not our salvation!

What's at stake is the reputation of the Living and Triune God – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

So, in the words of Psalm 40, Christians write the law of God on our hearts.

(i) We *read* the scriptures. Or listen to them being read through an audio book. We *read* the gospels and the psalms, the letters of Paul and the Torah (Genesis – Deuteronomy), the proverbs and the prophets.

(ii) We *think about* what we've read throughout the day. We commit the stories and metaphors, the poems and proverbs, the images and creeds to memory. We ask questions about what we don't understand: What is the connection of Jacob to Israel? What are the coastlands to which Isaiah referred? Who were the scribes and the Pharisees? And, if you don't have access to resource books or helpful websites for answers, you pay a visit to your local pastor!

(iii) We *pray*. The Servant, Jesus, gathers us Gentiles with our Jewish sisters and brothers into a familial relationship with God. In Scripture God speaks to us. In prayer we speak to God. One without the other is not a relationship. Without prayer it's lifeless obedience, computers who only act according to the inputted information. Without the Word it's idolatry, exalting humans to gods.

iv) We *joyfully sing* by our lived obedience. In the words of Eugene Peterson: we “live the read, meditated, and prayed text in the everyday, ordinary world.”<sup>5</sup>

The servant gathers us to the Lord using language. Words. “He made my mouth like a sharp sword.” He was preordained and is equipped to speak God’s truth in a way that penetrates humanity’s defences.

Provided we allow him to open our ears to the words He speaks.

Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Eat this Book*.



**We respond by affirming our faith, offering our tithes, and prayer:**

\*The Apostle's Creed (*unison*):

\*Offering:

*(Offering plates are presented at the Communion Table while congregation sings:)*

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;**

**praise him all creatures here below;**

**praise him above, ye heavenly host;**

**praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost**

Prayer of dedication

Prayers of thanksgiving, intercession, and the Lord's Prayer:

God in whom we live and move and have our being,

This week we join with Christians around the world

to pray for peace and unity, and for justice and mercy in your fragile creation.

We remember before you today people living face to face with war and

violence, especially those places where ancient hatreds burn.

*(Name those places in the news where conflict is disrupting everyday life.)*

God, speak to us a word of peace

**Embrace us with your love.**

We remember before you today people living face to face with economic uncertainty,

those struggling with rising costs of daily necessities,

and those who have lost their jobs, their savings, their homes or businesses.

And we pray for people in other regions of Canada who face different challenges than we do...

God, speak to us a word of reassurance

**Embrace us with your love.**

We remember before you today people living face to face with discrimination and social prejudice, those who are bullied at school, at work or at home,

and all those who have been made ashamed of who they are...

God, speak to us a word of dignity

**Embrace us with your love.**

We remember before you today people living face to face with illness and suffering,

those waiting for diagnosis or treatment,

those struggling with disability or delay in medical attention,

and those who know grief or fear...

God, speak to us a word of healing

**Embrace us with your love.**

We remember before you today people of different creeds and faiths,

those who seek understanding and co-operation among different religious traditions,

and those who show love to their neighbours, whatever their creed or conviction...

God, speak to us a word of reconciliation  
**Embrace us with your love.**

We remember before you today your whole creation and its many vulnerable facets and faces.

Teach us how to care for the rips and tears in the fabric of the world you love so we may live together wisely and protect the future in our attitudes and actions ...

God, speak to us a word of wisdom  
**Embrace us with your love.**

And so, in unity with your Church around the world you love, we pray together the words Jesus taught us:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **God sends us with God's blessing:**

\*Hymn: #683 "I know not why such wondrous grace"

Benediction

Congregational Amen