

Moore Presbyterian Churches January 29, 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: #177 "Christ, whose glory fills the skies"

We respond in praise and confession:

*Prayer of praise and supplication:

God of wisdom and blessing,
On this (cold) day we come into the warmth of your presence.
Here we find shelter in the strength of your promises;
here we find welcome in your tender care.
Grateful for the protection you provide,
thankful for the comfort of your community,
we offer our praise to you.
For you give blessing when the world condemns;
you bring freedom when the culture confines.
Embrace us with your love in this hour of worship
as we offer you our love in return.
Through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

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:

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Though God knows our failings, forgiveness is ours in Jesus Christ. Rejoice and be glad for his renewing love.

*Hymn: #723 "Lord, in this broken world"

God speaks to us:

The compassionate Teacher

In Matthew 5, Jesus spoke about the importance of *righteousness*. Because the worshiping community carries the name of the Christ and represents the Living and Triune God, how we behave – how we think, speak, act, and react – matters. Not so much for our salvation as for God’s reputation. So, in chapter 5, Jesus emphasized how important it is that Christians and people of faith think, speak, and act according to what God has deemed to be good, right, and holy. And he used 6 different examples to emphasize his teaching. In chapter 6, Jesus continues the theme of behaviour that is right according to God in the arena of personal piety; of individual actions of faith: almsgiving, prayer, and fasting.

READ: Matthew 6:1-24.

The third and penultimate Servant Song is presented from the Servant’s point of view as He reflects on His ministry, the people’s response (or lack thereof), and the source of His fortitude.

READ: Isaiah 50:1-11.

We began the season of Epiphany by re-telling the story of the magi’s visit to the child Jesus and his mother, Mary. The season is so-called because the intended focus, as suggested by the story of the magi, is on the revelation of Jesus to the Gentile nations. In other words, the *epiphany* is the realization that the Messiah has come for *both* Jews and Gentiles.

Our focus over the last few weeks has been to learn something about Jesus’ mission and ministry in the world by reflecting on Isaiah’s four Servant Songs. In other words, what are some aspects of this salvation which the Messiah brings for us Gentiles, as well as for our Jewish cousins-in-faith?

One of the Servant’s ministries that has been consistently praised is his ability to teach the Law of God. To teach the good, holy, and right ways of living as set by the Sovereign of Creation.

In Isaiah 42, the poet praised the Servant for bringing the light that is the right understanding of God's justice to the bruised reeds and dimly burning wicks of the nations.

In Isaiah 49, we read of how the Servant will gather the lost sheep of the house of Israel – *and* the Gentiles – into the fold of the heavenly Father. That He gathers us in belief, in prayer, and in righteousness – behaviour that aligns with the will of God as recorded, preserved, and handed from one generation to the next in the pages of the Holy Bible.

In Isaiah 50, the prophet portrayed the Servant as a compassionate teacher whose purpose in teaching is to “sustain the weary with a word.”

In an article entitled “Career Burnout,” the Canadian Association of Mental Health described burnout as “a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress.”¹

In this third and penultimate Servant Song, we meet the Servant who is confronted by “excessive and prolonged stress.”

He has come to comfort and rejuvenate the weary exiles. He has come to re-gather them to the Lord God in worship, belief, and righteousness. He has come to offer them divine sustenance for their daily living and hope for their eternal peace.

And, for his efforts, he was ignored, rejected, and humiliated; struck, spat upon, insulted, and abused.

He saw the Lord's flock in exile – weary, dry, and dark – and he came to rescue them. Yet, they refused His grace and mercy.

*Why was no one there when I came?
Why did no one answer when I called?
Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem?
Or have I no power to deliver?*

Such continual rejection and humiliation by one's loved ones would threaten the emotional, physical, and mental fortitude of anyone!

The Servant knew first hand that to fulfil his ministry, he could not rely on his own strength.

Twice he confessed his need for the help of the Lord God.

¹ <https://www.camh.ca/en/camh-news-and-stories/career-burnout>

And, in verse 4, he confessed that in order to sustain the weary with a word, He must himself meet with the Lord God every morning and learn from Him what is right, holy, and life-giving.

*The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher,
that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.
Morning by morning he wakens –
wakens my ear
to listen as those who are taught.
The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backwards.*

The NRSV Bible uses the English word “teacher” to describe the Servant’s ministry. I think this is an unfortunate choice of translation. Almost every other Bible uses some variation of “student”, or “scholar”, or “disciple”, or “one who has learned.” In fact, the Hebrew word is “*lim-mood*” which comes from “*lah-ma*” which means “to learn.” The Servant is a disciple of the Lord God. Christ’s words are calculated to sustain the weary and comfort the down-hearted, and He speaks and does only what is taught and commanded him by the Father.

Without that regular communion with our God, we dry up like a river-turned-desert. To not listen to the voice of the Living God leaves one with as much hope as a world covered in sackcloth, with no sun!

Which is the situation of the exiles for whom the Servant laments. In contrast to the Servant’s willingness to learn from the Lord God and obey, the exiles ignore and reject.

In the Sermon on the Mount, the Servant tells us that the Father knows what we need before you ask him.

In contrast to those who feel the need to pray long and eloquent, with many words and invoking many names for God (as though God didn’t know His own name!), Jesus teaches to pray simply, privately, and directly trusting that God knows, is able, and wants to provide what you need.

But, like a wise parent, He doesn’t force His help on us.

He provides what is needed, then leaves us to choose whether or not we’ll accept His grace.

Here we have the Student-Teacher who, regardless of being continually rejected, in the strength of His Father, He compassionately and steadfastly reaches out and offers words of healing and encouragement.

Then, he turns and looks at us, at the people of faith, at the church, and asks:

*Who among you fears the Lord
and obeys the voice of his servant,
who walks in darkness
and has no light,
yet trusts in the name of the Lord
and relies upon his God?*

He wasn't addressing the non-believers or the outsiders.

He was speaking to the faithful. To the ones who never miss a festival, sacrifice, worship gathering, or Bible study.

Who among you fears the Lord *and* obeys the voice of his servant?

Who walks in the darkness with no light *yet* trusts in the name of the Lord and relies upon his God?

Notice that in Matthew 6, Jesus didn't say: "*if* you give alms, pray, or fast." He was speaking to the disciples. He was speaking to the church! He was speaking to the faithful, the religious. He assumed we are praying, fasting, and giving away our money and time! Instead, he said "*when* you give alms, pray and fast."

His question was not "When you are walking in the darkness with no light, do you pray?" Rather, it was "When you are walking in the darkness, and you don't know where you're going, and you're tired; *when* you pray, are you doing so with reverent devotion for the Living and Triune God? Are you trusting that He is able *and willing* to sustain you? Are you listening for the voice of His Servant in the Scriptures? Are you willing to obey what you hear?"

It's a question of priorities:

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Jesus is the Son of the Living God in fellowship with whom is peace beyond understanding. By His sacrifice on the cross, He has come to re-gather humanity into that fellowship. Through the written Word of God, by the illumination of the Holy Spirit, He teaches what is right, good, and holy. And He is able and willing to sustain the weary with His words.

Will you ignore Him?

Or, will you waken morning by morning to prayerfully listen for His voice, trust in His name, and learn to rely -body, mind, and emotions – on the Triune God in whom is life eternal?

Amen.

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:

Blessed are you, most holy God,
for you give release to the captives and food to the hungry.
Bless us as we hunger and thirst for your justice and righteousness.
May all who are needy find their hope in you.

Compassionate God, we thank you for your mercy.
You give pardon for our sin and call us to forgive others.
Embrace with your renewing grace those who are resentful or discouraged.
Help us serve as instruments of reconciliation when discord or conflict arises.

Righteous God, we thank you for your justice.
You watch over all who suffer and empower your people to act for good.
Bless the work of our church and its partners
to advocate for justice and dignity in our communities and in your world.
Keep safe all who live under threat of violence or struggle for life's necessities.

Caring God, we thank you for your comfort.
You strengthen us when we are weak and pick us up when we fall.
Bless us as we support and care for one another in this community.
Surround all who mourn with the warmth of your love and the light of our
hope
in Christ Jesus.

God of new life, we give you thanks for your enlivening Spirit.
You give courage to the persecuted and inspire the weary.
Bless us as we strive to make a difference as a community in Christ's name.
Unite your Church by the power of your Holy Spirit,
and strengthen our common witness with the gifts you offer us through Jesus
Christ.

And now we gather our prayers into one voice and pray as Jesus taught;

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with God's blessing:

*Hymn: #768 "Sometimes a healing word is comfort"

Benediction

Congregational Amen