

## Moore Presbyterian Churches February 26, 2023



\*Indicates to please stand as you are able.

### **God calls us to worship:**

\*Call to worship:

O God, you are a hiding place for us;

**you preserve us from trouble.**

Let the faithful offer prayer and praise to God,

**for in times of distress, God is with us.**

The Lord will teach us the way we should go;

**God's steadfast love always surrounds us.**

So let us be glad in the Lord and rejoice in worship!

**We will sing for joy with psalms of praise.**

\*Hymn: #194 "Come, let us to the Lord our God"

### **We respond in praise and confession:**

\*Prayer of praise and supplication:

God, our Creator and Companion,

Your love is as fresh as the new day,

rising like the sun to guide us.

In Jesus Christ, you walk with us to challenge and encourage us,  
revealing our weakness yet offering us hope.

We praise you for such gifts!

In this time of worship, open us to the new possibilities you create  
for the world you love.

With the power of the Holy Spirit, energize us to embrace the future,  
trusting in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer of confession (*Unison*):

**O Lord, our God,**

**you created us**

**to be your partners in creation,**

**but we confess**

**we're not happy being partners.**

**We prefer to have our own way.**

**We like to manage the world**

**without your guidance.**

**We are often tempted**

**to satisfy our own desires**

**without counting the cost to others,**

**or to the earth itself.**

**Lord, have mercy on us.**

We hear the gospel of God's grace:

The Apostle Paul declared our hope, asking the question:

"Who is in a position to condemn?"

The Answer?

"Only Christ – and Christ died for us; Christ rose for us; Christ reigns in power for us; Christ prays for us."

Trust this Good News.

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and set free by God's generous grace.

\*Hymn: #189 "As when the Hebrew prophet raised"

### **God speaks to us:**

Prayer for understanding:

God of Life, open our minds and hearts to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we listen to your Word in Scripture. Speak your truth in ways that open our minds and hearts to a deeper understanding of your Living Word. Silence within us any voice that is not yours. Still within us the operation of any spirit that is not yours.

Scripture: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Psalm 32

Romans 5:12-19

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

Sermon:

## The Great Exchange

1. Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Scripture affirms that this was the catalyst for everything that detracts from life – whether it be physical illness, emotional duress, mental and physical exhaustion, violence, or the simple natural process of decay.

*...sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.<sup>1</sup>*

Although the serpent is not without guilt in this event, he did not force Eve and then Adam to eat the fruit. That's not to say he didn't get blamed. In fact, the second consequence of The Fall was that Adam and Eve began to blame everyone but themselves for what had happened. A few verses later in Genesis 1, we read:

*The man said, 'The woman **whom you gave** to be with me, **she gave me the fruit.**<sup>2</sup>*

Adam began blaming God for the presence of Eve in his life. Failing to acknowledge his own complicity in the events, Adam called evil what God had called good. And then he blamed Eve for leading him astray. Eve, in turn, blamed the serpent.

The serpent forced neither Eve nor Adam to eat the fruit.

He did, however, play on their doubts.

The serpent made them doubt God's Word that they would die having eaten the fruit. And, it should be noted that, having eaten the fruit, Adam and Eve didn't drop dead there and then. Had they done so, the story would have ended right there. There would be no more humanity.

They did not, immediately, die. The most immediate consequence of their action, and their subsequent so-called enlightenment, was that they saw their nakedness.

Whereas before the representative humans were perfectly comfortable in each other's company fully exposed and vulnerable, now they were ashamed.

This shift marks the first consequence of Sin: Relationships become strained and broken. Rather than being comfortable and safe in each other's presence, now they're guarded. They sewed together fig-leaf shields to hide themselves from each other. Then they began to tell half-truths and blame others for their action. Not too

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:12

long after, in chapter 4, we read about feelings of jealousy and rejection entering the human experience, soon to be followed with murder.

Even though they did not *immediately* die after eating the fruit, as the serpent said, the ultimate consequence of submitting to the power of Sin is everything that detracts from life: “pride that asserts itself against God, indifference towards God and neighbour, untruthfulness, greed, lust, laziness, gluttony, envy, selfish anger”<sup>3</sup>, and yes, ultimately death.

The serpent also played on their desire.

He emphasized how good the fruit looked, and how desirable were the outcomes of eating the fruit.

Although the serpent is not without guilt, humanity ate – and eats – the fruit of our own accord.

**2.** There is some thread woven into the fabric of the human personality, some deep-seated *desire* to possess the promises of the fruit, an instinct to possess the knowledge of good and evil.

The statement of belief of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, *Living Faith*, describes sin as not so much what we do or don't do, as it is that within us which drives us to do or don't do.

*Sin is a **power** present in every human life, even at birth.*<sup>4</sup>

Sin is not so much what we do, as it is the power present within us to *desire* to be gods unto ourselves.

If we can possess the knowledge of what is right and wrong, we won't need any external deity.

One of the problems, however, is that human beings tend to want what is right for *our own selves*, and maybe our loved ones and immediate circles of influence. Which means, that when we attempt to wield that knowledge independently of God, we mix it all up. What is evil, we call good; what is good we call evil. Thinking we are doing good we do evil; thinking we are abstaining from evil we abstain from the good! And we might not even realize it.

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<sup>3</sup> *Living Faith*, 2.5.4

<sup>4</sup> *Living Faith* 2.5.4

A classic example of this is when the medieval, renaissance, and enlightenment, and even industrial revolution-era Christians, particularly in the European context, backed as they were by the political and economic interests of the empire – and later of the industrialists, read the command in the first creation story, wherein God commanded the man and woman to have dominion over creation and subdue it. They took that to mean that the resources – trees, fish, wildlife – exist for *our* use. God has given us an abundance! We are given the divine sanction to subdue them and whip them into control. By God’s decree we can level old growth forests for our navies and farms, take all the cod out of the oceans, and trap the beaver for our hats. Thinking we were doing good in following God’s explicit command (which, happily, made us wealthy and politically powerful), we actually did a tremendous evil with which we are still coming to terms.

As Paul wrote in the first chapter of Romans: Although we *know* God, we *resist honouring* Him as God – that is, we resist trusting and following His directions – and so, claiming to be wise, we become fools.<sup>5</sup>

**3.** Whatever else it may be, the Genesis reflection on Adam and Eve, the “original sin” and its consequences, is also a reflection simply on the state of humanity.

The world is not as it should be.

Jealousy, shame, fear, selfish anger, murder are not the way relationships are supposed to operate.

*...sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned.*<sup>6</sup>

Sin is an observation on the state of humanity.

The gospel is that there really is a God who so loves His creation that He’s not content to leave it in this state of death, nor is He interested in retributive justice. God is more interested in *restorative* justice.

In the 8 verses we read from Romans 5, Paul used the expression “free gift” 5 times.

*... the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man’s trespass, much more surely have the grace of God*

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 1:21, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 5:12

*and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for many.*<sup>7</sup>

By the cross, Jesus made the Great Exchange. By the cross, Jesus accomplished through his sacrificial actions what is necessary for God to forgive the guilt of sin, to restore our place in His steadfast love, to declare us *justified*, and to restore unto us the joy of our salvation.

*For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*<sup>8</sup>

And this is a free gift. What God requires of us is our trust that this is so.

This cuts against the grain of most thinking, and indeed of the common sense of justice. What it means, is that the guilty – when they recognize their complicity, acknowledge their sin, and accept God's grace – are declared, by God, to be innocent because someone else, namely Jesus, served their time. This is not retributive justice wherein the guilty pay for their crimes. This is *restorative* justice.

This is gospel!

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*The holy and Triune God has acted through the cross to restore His beloved children to their right relationship in His steadfast love.*

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4. Psalm 32 reminds us that when we recognize our complicity in sin, when we are willing to trust that God is able to help, when we acknowledge our need to Him, He promises to surround us with His steadfast love and bring us out of the guilt and into the joy of His redeemed creation.

The season of Lent began this past Wednesday.

The day before is "Shrove Tuesday" or, as is more popularly known: Pancake Tuesday. *Shrove* is an Old English word that is related to the verb *shriven* which means to hear a confession. To *shrive* (if I've conjugated correctly into the present tense) is to make one's confession or, to *acknowledge one's sin*. To *shrive* is to acknowledge one's participation in and submission to the power present in every human life that contributes to the brokenness, decay, and death of this age.

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<sup>7</sup> Romans 5:15

<sup>8</sup> Romans 5:12-19.

As we set aside these 40 days to remember why Jesus had to come in the first place and why his crucifixion is necessary to God's good work of redemption, the season of Lent invites us into a season of coming to terms with our complicity in Sin.

The Irish church of the 8<sup>th</sup> century recognized that even though, by God's grace, we may be redeemed and adopted, reconciled members of God's holy household, until Christ returns Sin still tries to wield its power within us. Christ has won the war by the cross, yet Sin still tries to fight its battles! We may start the day convinced that today will be a day of holiness and purity, yet when we lay down at night we are too well aware of the times we acted in response to the instinct of Sin instead of the power of the Holy Spirit.

In his book, *Following the Celtic Way*, Church of Scotland minister Ian Bradley wrote that for the Irish church of the early middle-ages, "Reconciliation with God was viewed as a *lifelong* process of therapy and healing."<sup>9</sup> Reconciliation was a recurring process of moving away and then coming back to Jesus through confession and its partner penance. These two holy habits were therefore understood not in a punitive way, but in a restorative. A way to clear one's mind and heart and get back to the Holy Way of Christ without guilt, trusting he's already forgiven sin. Bradley wrote that:

*Penance was seen as the medicine of the soul, every bit as important as the medicine dispensed by physicians to heal the body.<sup>10</sup>*

Whether it be in the arena of public worship through the congregational prayer of confession together with the gospel assurance of pardon, or in the privacy of our own hearts and minds as we commune with our Triune God in prayer accompanied by the Word of God, or whether in the confidence of another person – be it a pastor or friend – so that they together, in the name of Christ, can "help each other with mutual counsel and consolation,"<sup>11</sup> acknowledging one's complicity in sin will not gain forgiveness. Jesus has already done that for us, in our place, and on our behalf on the cross.

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<sup>9</sup> *Following the Celtic Way*, 102.

<sup>10</sup> *Following the Celtic Way*, 97.

<sup>11</sup> Howard Rice, *Reformed Spirituality*, 126.

Confession of sin prepares us to recognize and receive the grace God offers, thus completing the journey of reconciliation and restoring to us the joy His salvation.

*While I kept silent, my body wasted away ...  
Then I acknowledged my sin to you, ...  
and you forgave the guilt of my sin. ...  
Many are the torments of the wicked,  
but steadfast love surrounds those  
who trust in the Lord.<sup>12</sup>*

Amen.

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<sup>12</sup> Psalm 32



**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:

Lord God, we offer our gifts in thanksgiving for all the goodness you provide.  
Bless our gives and our lives so that we become a source of goodness for  
others, in the name of Christ, our strength and our hope. Amen

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

God of all life and each life,  
we offer you thanks for all the ways we meet you in our daily lives:  
in a word of encouragement, (*brief silence*)  
an insight into truth, (*brief silence*)  
an answer to prayer. (*brief silence*)  
Thank you for a breath of calm in the midst of stress,  
and an offer of support when we need it. (*brief silence*)  
Thank you for a sense of accomplishment that our work matters  
and moments of rest and relaxation to renew us. (*brief silence*)  
Thank you for all these signs that you love us,  
understand us and walk with us, Loving God.

Our gratitude for your love reminds us of the need for your mercy in the  
world.

And so in times of silence we pray for:

The world and the people and places in the news this week  
(*silence for a count of 10*)

Leaders facing difficult decisions and balancing different needs in complex  
situations  
(*silence for a count of 10*)

Your church and congregations facing new challenges and opportunities for  
mission  
(*silence for a count of 10*)

Our work places and our community facing many needs and pressures  
(*silence for a count of 10*)

Our family, friends and neighbours, especially those facing hard choices these  
days  
(*silence for a count of 10*)

And for ourselves, offering to you our own concerns  
(*silence for a count of 10*)

Thank you for your grace that embraces all for whom we pray, O God.  
In the week ahead, help us notice your hand at work in our lives and in this  
troubled world.

We offer our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who taught us to  
pray together:

**The Lord's Prayer**

**God sends us to serve and witness with God's blessing:**

\*Hymn: 197 "Forty days and forty nights"

Benediction:

Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.

And may the blessing of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit be with you all now  
and forevermore.

Congregational Amen