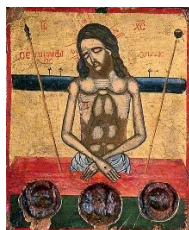


## Moore Presbyterian Churches February 5, 2023



\*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)

### We respond in praise and confession:

\*Prayer of praise and supplication:

Holy One, Light of the world,  
Even in the cold of winter, your creation amazes us.  
We praise you for blessing the world with such beauty  
and giving us a place within it.  
Just as months of winter renew creation for springtime growth,  
renew us with your Spirit in this time of worship  
to grow in faithfulness and service.  
Grant that our lives can reflect the light of Christ into these challenging times.  
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:

\*Hymn: #368 "Let Christian faith and hope dispel"

**God speaks to us:**

READ: ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

### The Suffering Servant

1. Arguably the most recognizable symbol of Christianity is the cross. We paint it on our church's walls. We wear it as jewellery. We sign it over us to invoke the Trinity's protection and blessing.

Within the Roman Empire, crosses symbolized something else. They symbolized fear, shame, guilt, and the power of the Empire. Crosses were popular tools for executing criminals and enemies of the state. However, so horrific was the torture and death of the convicted individual that there are relatively few written records of crucifixions.

In her book: *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ*, the Episcopalian priest, Fleming Rutledge, quoted a scholar by the name of Martin Hengel who said: "Crucifixion was widespread and frequent ... but the cultured literary world wanted nothing to do with it, and as a rule kept quiet about it."<sup>1</sup>

*He was despised and rejected by others;  
a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity;  
and as one from whom others **hide their faces**...*<sup>2</sup>

The cross is anathema. It's a curse. It's offensive. It's a tool of torture, humiliation, and horrifically slow and painful death.

And, when the individual suffering thereon is the Christ, it is the tool of our redemption!

*The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.*<sup>3</sup>

*He was wounded for our transgressions,  
crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,  
and by his bruises we are healed.*<sup>4</sup>

The Servant suffers for the sake of those he redeems.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Hengel in Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the death of Jesus Christ*, 82.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 53:3.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 53:11.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 53:5.

2. In the last of the Servant Songs, Isaiah presented one of the most complete reflections on the sacrificial and redemptive ministry of the Servant of God's grace and salvation.

As we've been looking at the other three Servant Songs, we've learned that the Servant's purpose is to *gather* all people to the Lord by *teaching* the right understanding and application of God's law. This connection with the Triune Lord and Creator is necessary for our health, and vitality; our wholeness, and hope.

Understanding and obeying the law of God shapes us into God's holy community whereby we reveal the truth of God.

However, it doesn't address the root of the problem.

The reason we are dissociated from God, and the reason there is burnout, illness, violence, and brokenness, is sin.

Sin is often thought of as bad behaviour or disobedience to God or rebelliousness. Words like "iniquity" and "transgression" which have to do with overstepping the bounds of a legal system; with guilt; with disobedience are often used synonymously with sin. Although these are manifestations of sin, they don't really explain sin.

*Living Faith* describes sin as: "a power present in every human life, even at birth."

Sin is an embedded force that causes us to act and react in ways contrary to God's.

*Sin a power present in every human life, even at birth. It issues in such things as pride asserting itself against God, indifference toward God and neighbour, untruthfulness, greed, lust, laziness, gluttony, envy, and selfish anger.*<sup>5</sup>

*Living Faith* continues: "Because we are sinful the societies we live in are sinful. There are no exceptions: every system is flawed. We are part of the evil of the world, of its violence, neglect, injustice."<sup>6</sup>

*Presbyterian World Service and Development* is one of the Presbyterian Church in Canada's responses, in the name of Christ, to the consequences of sin.

Remember, sin is a power present in every human life that insists we are gods unto ourselves. Sin insists that we don't need some other Being telling us how to live; we don't need some Holy Book telling us who we are.

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<sup>5</sup> *Living Faith*, 2.5.4, 2.5.6

<sup>6</sup> *Living Faith*, 2.5.4, 2.5.6

The preacher of my home congregation once said that his least favourite song was Frank Sinatra's "I did it my way." That phrase captures the mentality that is the outworking of sin. "I don't need God; I'll do it my way thank you very much!" "I'll do what's right for me."

And because we are not islands unto ourselves, the power present in every human life dissipates into the societies in which we live with the inevitable results of inequality, selfish depletion of forests and fisheries, poverty, illness, broken relationships, etc.

"There are no exceptions: every system is flawed. We are part of the evil of the world."

In their mission statement, PWS&D acknowledges that participation in the evil of this world: "In a world with too much poverty, injustice, and oppression ..., we recognize the interrelation between our affluence and the sufferings of others." In other words: "Because we are sinful the societies we live in are sinful.... We are part of the evil of the world..." They go on to say that they "undertake development, emergency and refugee activities that restore human dignity, ease the pain of want, promote self-help and encourage community cooperation that benefits us all."<sup>7</sup>

**3.** It's very tempting, when dealing with a text like Isaiah 53, to jump to the application; to jump to the conclusion that just as the Servant suffered for the redemption of Israel, and just as Jesus suffered for the redemption of the church, the church suffers for the good of others. We all ought to live out of a place of sacrificial love; of putting our comforts second to the needs of others. And, of course, that is a consequence of living a life of faith in and obedience to Jesus. The church is called to embrace Christ's love and life for the good of others in His name. In His name, by His power at work within us by the Holy Spirit, we bring His sacrificial healing and redeeming love to our families, to our neighbours, to our friends, and to the world. As PWS&D strives to do and in which work we can participate when we make offerings in the name of Jesus to PWS&D.

It's also tempting to jump over the sufferings of the Servant; to jump over the humiliations and beatings Jesus endured during "Holy Week"; to jump over the cross of Good Friday and jump straight to the Resurrection. To jump to Easter. After all,

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<sup>7</sup> <https://presbyterian.ca/pwsd/mission/>

we live 2,000 years after the historical crucifixion and resurrection! There's a reason why Protestant crosses are empty of the figure of Christ: He's not there! The tomb is empty! Jesus is resurrected! It's tempting to jump to the Resurrection, to skip over the cross and say that because He is no longer on the cross nor in the tomb, we now live in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life! And then to go forth and be the beacon of that hope in the world. That too is one of the consequences of the life and ministry of the Servant and proclaiming that hope dovetails with the application I just mentioned of giving our time, skills, and resources for the good of others.

But there's a reason why the authors of the four gospels devoted more ink and attention to Jesus' passion – to His last days in Jerusalem and His suffering – than they do to anything else. The gospels have sometimes been called passion narratives with introductions!

Jesus didn't jump to the resurrection.

He didn't wave a magic wand and “poof” all the evils were gone.

He entered into humanity's suffering. He grew up before us, drawing sin into himself as a young plant draws water from the dirt in which it's planted.

And, on the cross, he paid the punishment that makes us whole.

It often seems difficult for many Christians to sit with that truth.

We want to jump to the immediate application.

We want to put on our boots, get out in the mission field – wherever that may be – and get it done! Preacher Scott Hoezee once said in a seminar I attended that the “can-do attitude that so identifies the North American mindset is one of the great enemies of the Gospel of Grace.”

What we are dealing with here is the suffering of *one* individual. For all the work we may do to heal and bring dignity and comfort to others as indeed we are called to do, it is not our work that mediates redemption. Our work merely points to the redemption wrought by the Suffering Servant.

*One* man took upon himself the sin that infects all of humanity and by extension all of creation.

*One* man suffered for the redemption of many others.

It is one person, not humanity, not the church, but Jesus.

*Jesus paid it all,  
All to Him I owe;  
Sin had left a crimson stain –*

*He washed it white as snow.*

4. The cross is an offensive symbol. On it, a man who, if he was just a man, had led a sinless life, was brutally killed. And, when we read the passion narratives in the gospels – the stories of his last days, we learn that the way his death was orchestrated, was as Isaiah described, through a miscarriage of justice. Pontius Pilate wanted him released, but the crowds who were stirred up by instigators, called for his crucifixion despite the lack of evidence to his guilt.

There He hung, by nails driven through his hands until he asphyxiated.

And, through this event, we are redeemed – when we accept his grace in faith.

We might not be able to explain it in a way that satisfies our own sensibilities and curiosities, let alone those of others.

Nevertheless, “the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Jesus of Nazareth is not simply a super-man, a perfectly pure, innocent, sinless human being.

He is the Messiah.

His suffering began when he was baptized into our sin-filled reality. When he hung on the cross, he wasn't a perfect Innocent. He was the sacrificial lamb who absorbed all of humanity's sin in himself.

The Servant suffered for our redemption.

By His bruises we are healed.

*Man of sorrows, wondrous name  
for the Son of God who came  
ruined sinners to reclaim:  
Hallelujah! Gracious Saviour!*

Amen.

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

\*Hymn: #210 “Man of Sorrows, wondrous name”

\*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 of justice and righteousness,

Thank you for the gift of your son Jesus Christ who came to live out your love in this world. Thank you for his words and deeds which continue to challenge and guide us today.

He called us to be light for the world and salt for the earth.

We thank you for the ministries undertaken through Presbyterian World Service and Development and its many partners,

for the light they bring to lives under so many different pressures, and the necessities they provide to sustain communities and make hope tangible.

And so we pray for your world with all its wonders and its worries, which rest on our hearts and yours:

We pray for those who need your justice, Lord:

For those who sleep on the cold streets,

those who do not have enough to eat,

and those who worry about how to make ends meet for their families.

*(Keep silence for ten seconds...)*

We pray for all those facing violence,

In their homes or communities,

for nations engulfed in conflict

and for places struggling to recover after flooding, drought, storm or unrest.

*(Keep silence for ten seconds...)*

We pray for refugees and political prisoners;

for children who must work instead of going to school

and for parents who long to give their children a better life.

*(Keep silence for ten seconds...)*

Sustain each of these people with your hope

that their needs can be fulfilled and rights restored.

Empower us to use our resources to do what we can for them,

and give strength and courage to advocates and aid workers  
who bring hope to birth in many places.

We pray for all who need your healing touch, Lord:  
For people who are confused or afraid,  
for those in hospitals and nursing homes and those who care for them,  
for all who are dealing with long-term disability or mental illness,  
long Covid and the many illnesses circulating this winter.  
and for those who have encountered loss through the death of a beloved,  
change in circumstance or disappointed hopes.

*(Keep silence for ten seconds...)*

Surround each one with your peace and comfort  
so that hope for healing will be renewed each day.

Compassionate God,  
Make us salt and light for the world, not by presuming we know best how to  
fix others  
but as compassionate and caring neighbours, unafraid to reach out.  
Encourage us with your grace and inspire us by your Holy Spirit,  
for you are always with us.

We gather all our prayers into one voice, praying as Jesus taught us:

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

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

\*Hymn: 351 "There is a fountain opened wide"

Benediction

Congregational Amen