

Worship at home

Mooretown Presbyterian Churches
May 14, 2023
(<https://pccweb.ca/moorepc/>, 519-813-9646)



God calls us to worship:

Call to worship: Psalm 124:8
James 4:8, 10
Psalm 95:6-7

We respond in praise and confession:

Prayer of praise and supplication:

God of life,

we praise you this day for the gift of your creation
as new life rises around us in flower beds and farmers' fields,
in the nests and burrows of your creatures.

We praise you for the gift of our lives, and for all those people –
from our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents
to our teachers and coaches and good friends –
who have encouraged us along the way.

In this time of worship,

encourage us in the present moments of our lives,
challenging as they may seem.

Refresh us with the new life you promise us in Christ Jesus
in whose name we praise you as the Spirit prays within us. Amen.

*Hymn: #321 "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

Prayer of confession (*unison*):

Merciful God,

**as we gather to celebrate your gift of love
we recall the times when we forget you
and are divided one from the other.**

**How often we have refused to believe
that you have forgiven sin
and that you promise resurrection
foreshadowed by Christ's own.**

How often we have failed to believe

that you are God;
all we, like sheep, have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way.
Forgive us, merciful God.
Mend what is broken.
Heal what is wounded.
Restore to us the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in us a willing spirit.
Amen.

God speaks to us:

We hear the gospel of God's grace: 2nd Corinthians 5:17-21

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

*Hymn: #477 "Your hand, O God, has guided"

Scripture: Daniel 7:1-14
Matthew 28:18-20
Acts 17:18-34

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

The Church's Commission

Daniel had a dream.

In his dream he saw a succession of beasts. Each beast represented a different empire that superseded the previous. Although we don't know for sure, many interpreters conclude that the first beast represents the Babylonian Empire. Winged lions are common features in Babylonian art. The Babylonian Empire is the government under which Israel fell when they were in exile. The second beast, the one like bear, could represent the Persian Empire that conquered and consumed Babylon together with Lydia and Egypt. The third, like a leopard, is generally considered representative of the Greek Empire. The leopard is a quick animal and Alexander the Great established his empire very quickly. By the time he died at 33 years of age, he had conquered and consumed not only the great Persian empire, but much of Asia as well. When he died, his empire was divided into four parts. The fourth beast is particularly horrific. It can hardly be associated with a living creature. The last beast, most people assume, represents the empire of Rome. The Roman kingdom overshadowed all of the previous empires and expanded.

Each empire vied for complete authority – and perhaps even immortality.

Then, a courtroom was set up.

The Ancient of Days took his place.

He was clothed in absolute purity (garments were white as snow)

Perfect and timeless wisdom covered his head (his hair was like pure wool).

And he sat upon the throne of holy and righteous judgement.

The court was seated.

And the record books were opened.

The Ancient of Days considered the records of the governments of the beasts.

He weighed them in the balance.

Then Daniel saw a human approach the bench.

Although he was “like the Son of Man” (i.e., human), he came “with the clouds of heaven” (that is, his origin is heaven and he came by divine will – only God travels on clouds in biblical literature; only God can control nature)

The Son of Man approached the Ancient of Days, who then proceeded to strip the beasts of *their* dominions and handed them over to the One like the Son of Man.

“All authority,” Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”

Having lived in perfect obedience to the Father;
having sacrificed his own life for the sake of God’s children;
having fought and defeated the Beast of beasts on their behalf;
having died the death of Death in their place;

the Ancient of Days has found the Son of Man faithful, has resurrected him from the dead, and has given to *him* the authority to govern and care for all earthly and heavenly realms.

There is now nothing that is beyond the authority of the Son of Man and God. Whether it be human lives, the ecological systems, the cosmos or the atoms, everything falls under his governance and his care.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of God.

I suppose you might experience a different emotional response according to your own context, but when I hear Jesus say “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me” I feel relief.

I feel like a burden has been lifted.

There is someone who knows what is right, what is good. There is someone who has the plan for redeeming and resurrecting creation. There is someone who is in command.

Once upon a time, the apostle Paul found himself in the ancient Greek city of Athens. Athens was a cultural hub of ancient Greece. It was the place of intellectual debate and philosophy and advanced thinking.

The Epicureans taught that there are no gods; or, if there are, they are uninvolved in the universe and irrelevant to human health, security, and happiness. The goal of life, they taught, was pleasure by which they meant the lack of physical pain and emotional duress. By the time Paul arrived, this teaching had become somewhat focussed on sensory pleasure: touch, smell, sight, pleasurable sounds of harp, lyre, and voice, and taste. It’s no surprise that the food and cooking company chose the name “Epicure” for itself! It conjures feelings of sensory delight and

happiness in food. “Eat, drink, and be merry” was the Epicureans’ somewhat trite slogan.

The Stoics, on the other hand, were more popular (because their teachings weren’t restrictive to the class of people who could afford lives of pleasure and ease.) They taught that there probably is a god, but it is expressed as a divine sense of reason that permeates everything that exists. The Stoics were pantheists: god is in everything and manifests as reason and self-sufficiency. The Stoics taught that pleasure was of no value, and pain was not evil. “Virtue is its own reward; vice is its own punishment” is the mantra of the Stoics.

The Epicureans taught that if there is a god, he is remote, uninvolved, and irrelevant. Salvation involves achieving pleasure with no pain. The Stoics taught that there is a divine essence of reason that permeates everything that exists. Salvation involves harmonious living with all things, based on reason and human abilities. Many other citizens of Athens worshipped a plethora of other gods, stories, ideologies, and things. As Paul travelled through the streets he noticed many altars, shrines, and idols. The city of Athens is home to some of the most impressive temples – the ruins of which can still be seen today. Above the Areopagus which was a huge theatre built for council meetings and for public debate to discuss new ideas and methods by which humankind could be saved, stood the Temple of Athena, which ruins still stand today.

Yet, of all the idols, statues, and altars that peppered the city, the one that caught Paul’s eye was an altar “To the unknown God.”

Here was a city of people searching for meaning in the chaos of life. Searching – even groping – for what is right and what is good and what will redeem and save this good earth. Some were searching in philosophy, some in various idols and deities, all (by political force) worshipped the emperors as the self-proclaimed gods and saviours. Some didn’t even know what they were looking for but so concerned were they lest a god be omitted from their homage, they erected an altar to “an unknown god!”

This is like the end of speeches in which the orator thanks various people and concludes with: “There are too many others to be named!”

However, said Paul, that’s not the case.

There is one God who has created heaven and earth (unlike the plethora of idols and altars that lined the streets of Athens). He is distinct from and transcends

the universe (unlike the teachings of the Stoics.) And yet, unlike the teachings of the Epicureans, He is able, willing, and actively engaged in the sustenance, protection, redemption, and renewal of His creation and His creatures.

There is one God who has been from the beginning, and will continue on forever.

There is one Ancient of Days.

And He has taken the authority from the emperor, from Athena, from Epicurus, from the Stoics, from everything and everyone who promises life, assurance, and meaning but without the ability to supply it, and He has given it to His Son, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God and Son of Man, the Messiah, whom He has raised from the dead!

There is someone who knows what is right, what is good. There is someone who has the plan for redeeming and resurrecting creation. There is someone who is in command.

And Jesus has, in turn, commissioned his church, based on the authority he has received from the Father, to go to all nations, baptize everyone in the name of the Holy Triune God, and teach them to obey all of Christ's teachings. And what's more, as we read in Mark's gospel a couple of weeks ago, He has promised that His church's efforts will be fruitful, that by our preaching, teaching, healing *God's* empire will be known on earth as it is in heaven, because He is with us always, even until the end of this age when Christ returns and heaven and earth are finally wed, the dead raised, and redemption completed.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been give to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, ... Amen.

This is the point at which most preachers like to stop. It's a prescription for the church. It's a prescription for what we are supposed to be doing: Because of the authority Jesus has received from the Ancient of Days, we, the church, have the authority – and command – to go and make Christian disciples of all nations.

This is our commission. It's a commission of evangelism. Of telling the news of Jesus and the presence of the Kingdom of God.

But, as we go and do likewise, we must apply it to ourselves. If we are going to encourage others to read, learn, and obey the teachings of God's Word, we must do so ourselves. If we are going to encourage others to believe that Jesus is the resurrected Son of God and Lord and Master of the universe, we must believe it ourselves.

Paul had been given the authority of Christ, by Christ to correct and fill-in the Athenians' incomplete knowledge and faith. So do we. But we need to start with ourselves.

There is one God. He exists apart from us, yet He creates all that exists. He gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. He is the author of what is good and right. And this *one* living, real, good, and able Creator and Lord has appointed to *one* man the authority to judge the world. By this one man, named Jesus, God gives the assurance that all that is good and holy will endure because He has raised him from the dead, guaranteeing the future resurrection of all believers.

Therefore, He knows what is good, right and holy.

Believe it. Learn it. Obey it. Then go and teach others to do the same.

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

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

*Hymn: #481 "Blest be the tie that binds"

*The Apostles' Creed

*Offering:

(Offering plates are presented at the Communion Table while the 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, the Lord's Prayer:

God of homes and families,
this Sunday we give you thanks for our families,
especially remembering mothers, grandmothers, great grandmothers.
We are grateful for their love and attention,
their hard work and the deep hope they have cherished for each one of us.
We honour before you each one who has mothered us
and now lives with you in your eternal care.
And we ask your blessing on each one in our family
who continues to care for us, cook for us and worry about us.
God with a loving heart,
Hear our prayer.

God of connections and compassion,
today we thank you for our friends and relations,
for the neighbours and fellow citizens who help to make our lives complete.
We thank you for glad times shared, helping hands offered, commitments
honoured.
And we pray for those around us facing particular challenges this day:
Keep silence for 15 seconds.
God with a loving heart,
Hear our prayer.

God of courage and new possibility,
today we pray for all those who feel life or love slipping through their fingers,
for those who face the loss of good health,
and for those who face the loss of good times.
We pray for communities facing upheaval through natural disaster and human
misjudgement,
and for countries facing economic turbulence and environmental collapse
Keep silence for 15 seconds.
God with a loving heart,
Hear our prayer.

God of forgiveness and renewal,
today we pray for those caught up in relationships in need of repair
and for all who seek peace and seek to make peace.

We pray for families, churches, communities and countries caught up in division.

Keep silence for 15 seconds.

Send your Spirit to bring peace to troubled lives.

God with a loving heart,

Hear our prayer.

As those who seek peace in Jesus' name, we pray together the words he taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

Choir (St. Andrew's): "Special Moments" ~ Dave and Jean Perry

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

Benediction

Congregational Amen