

Mooretown Presbyterian Churches  
June 18, 2023  
(<https://pccweb.ca/moorepc/>, 519-813-9646)



\*Indicates to please stand as you are able.

**God calls us to worship:**

Call to worship:

Holy and generous is the Father, Creator of all things.

**Loving and gracious is Christ,  
the Bearer of healing and hope.**

Powerful and wise is the Holy Spirit,  
the Breath of new life.

**Blessed and Holy Trinity,  
we call on you today.**

Come and worship the God  
who made us and loves us all!

**We come with joyful praise  
and hopeful hearts!**

**We respond in praise and confession:**

\*Hymn: #757 "Come sing, O Church in joy!"

Prayer of praise and supplication:

Prayer of confession (*unison*):

**Merciful God,  
we confess that we have  
sinned against you  
in thought, word, and deed.**

**Preferring our own comfort,  
and thinking ourselves wise,  
we have not honoured you as God,  
and have not loved our neighbours  
as ourselves.**

**Forgive what we have been,  
amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be,  
so that we may delight in your will  
and walk in your ways.  
to the glory of your holy name.  
Amen.**

**God speaks to us:**

We hear the gospel of God's grace: 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21  
(The response to: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" is,  
**"His love endures forever"**)

\*Hymn: #431 "Jesus where'er thy people meet"

Scripture: Romans 1:1-17  
(The response to: "This is the word of the Lord" is, **"Thanks be to God"**)

Sermon: "Faith made known"

### Faith made known

The Jesus movement in Rome began within the Jewish community. We're not sure how the gospel was first heard nor who was responsible. It could be simply that members of the Jewish community had been in Jerusalem for the Festival of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit kick-started the church and then brought the message of Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension with them when they came home to Rome. In any event, it was among the Jewish community that the gospel of Jesus first took hold in Rome.

However, under Emperor Claudius, the Jews were evicted from Rome around the year 49 CE. About 16 years after Jesus' ascension and the Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Claudius died 6 years later, in 54 C.E. and was succeeded by Nero. Emperor Nero reversed Claudius' eviction edict and allowed the Jewish community to return to the city. Which included the Jewish Christians. (Later, of course, during a catastrophic fire in Rome, Nero would blame the fire on the Christians and begin the first major and violent persecution of Christians.)

With the return of the Jewish Christians to the city, came tension within the Christian community. While they were absent, Christianity grew among the Gentile citizens who had become comfortable in their place as the predominant Christian population. When the Jewish Christians returned, there was disagreement as to whose *cultural* expression of faith in Jesus was the correct one. The Gentile Christians tended to push their Jewish sisters and brothers aside because of their desire to do things like keep the dietary laws, circumcision, sabbath-keeping, and so on. We'll come back to that in a few weeks.

Nevertheless, despite this tension, the Christians in Rome had become famous for their faith. Not only did they believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah; the Saviour, and the Lord, they trusted him for their own security, they trusted the Scriptures as His Word, and they lived in obedience to the Scriptures.

When Paul wrote this letter, he had not been to Rome. This was *not* one of Paul's church plants. However, Paul had heard of their faith and he wanted to visit them. Such was the reputation of their faith that Paul wanted to come not only to preach the gospel, correct some misinterpretations, and encourage the faithful, *but to be encouraged himself!*

*I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you – or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.<sup>1</sup>*

So, Paul wrote this letter to the Roman house churches to introduce himself. In the letter he explained who he was, why he was coming, and what they might expect. His letter to the Romans is one of the most complete explorations of salvation and its implications that we have in our library of Sacred Scripture. Without having met Paul, anyone who reads this letter would know what he believed is the gospel of Jesus, why he thought it was important, what it means to the lives and behaviours of individuals, and what it means for the relationships between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

As was the custom in formal letter writing of the day, Paul began his letter with a salutation in which he identified himself, listed his credentials, and explained why he was writing.

*Paul, a **servant** of Jesus Christ, called to be an **apostle**, set apart for the gospel of God....*

Paul identified himself first and foremost as a servant. That word is actually a softened translation. The word Paul used was: *doulos* (from which we get “doula”.) A *doulos* is, directly translated, a slave. Someone without ownership rights of their own. A *doulos* is someone who has been bought to serve the buyer exclusively.

There’s a very real sense that this is a good term to use when describing Christians. Believers *belong* to God by *redemption*.

*Redemption* is the act of buying back what was lost. Of paying a ransom to reclaim what is rightfully yours.

We belong to God by nature of Him being the Creator.

Sin has severed that relationship.

Yet, by Christ’s offering of himself as a sacrifice for many, we have been bought back by the Father. We belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ in whom we have fellowship with the Father by the Spirit.

Paul, a *servant* of Jesus Christ...

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 1:11-12

In surrender to Christ's will, Paul then accepted the role Christ had for him to fill as an *apostle*.

An apostle is a delegate. An ambassador. Someone who represents the complete authority of the agency who sent them. They speak and act as though their actions were those of the sender.

Christ sent Paul to preach in his name and on his behalf.

Which means, the words Paul wrote carry the same authority as if Christ spoke them himself.

*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God concerning his Son Jesus – the descendent of David, the Son of God, the Messiah – to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name.*

Here we have Paul's general life-purpose and his intent in writing this particular letter to the Roman Christians:

His job was to *proclaim* God's message *in order to* bring about obedient faith among all the *Gentiles* for the good of their souls and for the sake of the reputation of the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit.

I don't think Paul stood on street corners with a megaphone proclaiming the gospel. We learn from the New Testament, that his methods were much more subtle – although, evidently, very effective! Paul would move into a city and stay there for sometimes 2 or 3 years. He would ply his trade as a tentmaker while talking with people about Jesus. He would attend the synagogue worship gatherings and discuss how the Messiah promised by the prophets in the holy scriptures is Jesus of Nazareth. He would speak as a guest lecturer in the halls of academia. And he would be called to debate before the city council the teaching about Jesus, his crucifixion, and his resurrection, and where he is now. And he wrote letters. As he lived and worked among the people, he would help to organize the Christians into worshipping communities, usually in the form of "house churches": small gatherings in people's private homes. Then, once the congregations were established, he would move to the next city.

He would then continue to keep in contact with the congregations by writing letters in which he would address whatever problems or conflicts may have arisen and teach how such situations should be handled in the light of the gospel of Jesus.

Whatever his method, his life work was to serve God “by *announcing* the gospel of his Son.”

Paul was not shy in making known his faith in Jesus Christ.

Nor was the church in Rome.

*I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, **because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world.***<sup>2</sup>

They didn't keep secret the reason for their hope.

People knew who they worshipped and in whom they trusted.

People knew why they lived as they did.

The church was not afraid to make known their faith!

Sometimes you'll hear someone say that we don't need to talk about Jesus and faith outside the safe confines of Sunday morning worship. We don't need to let people know, explicitly, that we live as we do because of God and God's Word. The argument is, as the song suggests, that “They'll know we are Christians by our love.” Sometimes you might hear quoted the proverb that we are to “preach the gospel at all times, and use words only if necessary.” The idea being, as long as we live rightly, others will see our actions, they'll see Jesus in them, and come to believe.

I grew up outside a town called Pontypool. Often, when I tell people that, they'd never heard of the town before. Whether or not they knew of the town, doesn't change the fact that the town is real and is a place of great importance for many generations of people. Situated around the railway tracks on part of the Mississauga First Nation's lands and the traditional territory covered by the Williams Treaties; named by settlers after their hometown in Wales, Pontypool is a town with a rich and varied history. This has been a place of historic tobacco farms, grain exports, and Christmas trees. For many Toronto-based Jewish families, the ponds within the town were for years the centre of their summer rest and recreation. For better – unfortunately, often for worse – it was the home of many of the orphaned children who came to Canada from the streets of England and placed on farms by Dr.

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 1:8

Thomas Barnardo. Near to Pontypool were sites of sometimes violent conflict between Protestants and Catholics.

Despite the town's rich history, and despite being home to generations of people – settlers and First Nations, unless I tell you about the town, you could live your entire life without knowing about Pontypool. Regardless of how much love I showed or how many Christmas trees I pruned and decorated!

If we isolate the “live rightly” part and cast away the “preach the good news” part, we have let ourselves off the hood from a potentially uncomfortable conversation, from showing our vulnerability that we need a master and a Saviour, and from opening ourselves to potential ridicule. And in the process, we have done nothing more than show others how good we are.

Kingdom living *coupled with* proclaiming the gospel allows others to believe in and call on the God in fellowship with whom is peace, hope, and joy.

Paul served God by *announcing* the gospel of his Son.

The Christians in Rome were known throughout the world for their faith. Their firm belief in Jesus. Their trust in His grace. And their obedience to His Word – recorded in the Law, the Prophets, the Writings, the Gospels, the Letters.

We need not be embarrassed about the Christian faith.

It is the power of God to bring about salvation in every sense of the word.

Provided it's not kept secret!

Provided Christians make their faith known.

**We respond in faith, offering, and prayer:**

\*The Apostles' Creed

\*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

Choir: "Hear us, O Father"

~ Don Besig and Nancy Price

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

God of the earth and all its peoples,  
in Jesus Christ, you proclaimed the good news  
that true life and peace are found in you.  
Guide your church to proclaim this good news,  
not in ways that merely please people or don't ruffle feathers,  
but in ways that bring Christ's reconciling love to divided communities  
and lives out of joint with each other.  
Shine your light into the world's hidden corners,  
exposing violence, exploitation, and bigotry.  
Reveal what dehumanizes the vulnerable and degrades your creation.  
God of the earth and all its peoples,  
**Let your light shine!**

On this National Indigenous Sunday,  
We pray for Indigenous communities across this land,  
and all around the world.  
We thank you for Indigenous leaders who lead advocate for the needs of their  
people.  
Bring healing to those who confront painful experiences,  
and build bridges of understanding among us all.  
May your justice prevail so that Indigenous communities have the resources  
needed to thrive  
and receive respect for the decisions they make.

We pray for the National Indigenous Ministry Council  
and the ministries with Indigenous people that the Council tends.  
Bless the leaders and participants in each ministry  
with the resources they need to serve their communities effectively.  
Teach the wider church what is being learned through these communities  
and deepen the bonds of faithful friendship we can share with each other.

*Consider adding a specific prayer for the Indigenous Ministry closest  
to your congregation.*

*Consult the brochure for the National Indigenous Ministry Council on  
the PCC website.*



*Keep a brief silence.*

God of the earth and all its peoples,  
**Let your light shine!**

God of healing and hope,  
thank you for your faithfulness to us in all situations  
We pray for all those who are ill or in pain,  
for the anxious and discouraged,  
for those facing death or the loss of someone dearly beloved,  
and for those struggling to make ends meet in these uncertain times.  
We pray for Presbyterian World Service & Development and its partners  
as they work to bring healing and hope to places of strife and deprivation.

*Here add specific prayers for places in need or facing unrest.*

May the mission we share in Jesus' name shine the light of your love into  
desperate lives.

God of the earth and all its peoples,  
**Let your light shine!**

God of the faithful future,  
bless this community of faith  
and guide us as we plan for the future in changing times.  
Bless students and teachers as the school year ends  
and restore them for learning with summer enjoyment.  
Grant us all times to rest and to enjoy this summer  
and replenish our hope and energy to serve in your world.  
God of the earth and all its peoples,  
**Let your light shine!**

We offer all our prayers, spoken and unspoken,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to say together:  
**The Lord's Prayer**

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

\*Hymn: #765 "We've a story to tell to the nations"

Benediction

Congregational Amen