

Mooretown Presbyterian Churches
June 25, 2023
(<https://pccweb.ca/moorepc/>, 519-813-9646)



*Indicates to please stand as you are able.

God calls us to worship:

Call to worship:

To you, O God, we lift our hearts.

Listen to our voices and answer.

The Lord is good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love.

God does wondrous things with grace and mercy.

So let us glorify God's holy name together!

We come to worship God in love and loyalty.

We respond in praise and confession:

*Hymn: #305 "God who stretched"

Prayer of praise and supplication:

God of grace,

you created our minds to grow in wisdom.

You created our hearts to expand with love for you and your world.

You created our voices to sing your praises forever.

Fill us to overflowing with your Holy Spirit,

so we may worship you in spirit and in truth,

bold and unafraid to follow Jesus,

even when challenges confront us.

In this time of worship,

assure us of your presence with us

and reveal to us the path you open before us,

for we live to serve as your people

wherever you lead. Amen.

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: #495 "The heavens declare your glory"

Scripture: Romans 1:18-2:11; 3:21-26

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

The Righteousness of God

1. General revelation and rejection

Paul looked at the world around him. He looked at people murdering other people, at relationships crumbling, at jealousy, envy, unholy sexual passions and attractions, deceit, slander, rebelliousness. He looked at the human experience and he concluded that this is what happens when human beings consider themselves to be near-divine and thus refuse to honour God as God.

Paul observed that although we can know God by observing our natural surroundings; although we can conclude by prayerfully attending to our observations of our natural surroundings that there is a God and even come to understand some of God's eternal power and divine nature, more often we have a tendency to reject God. Instead of concluding that there is a God who is real, good and able; who is holy, powerful, gracious, and just, we conclude instead that what we see, what is "natural" is divine. We give the credit due to the Creator instead to the creation. Even that expression, "the natural world", denies the presence of God. It denies the supernatural influence in the development of what we can see, taste, touch, feel, and hear.

Paul observed that we're more likely to give credit to "Mother Nature", or "the universe" than we are to God.

And, if not that, then we inject the creation with the qualities of the Creator.

Instead of observing the complexities and qualities of human life and conclude that the One who created us must possess wisdom, and grace, and insight beyond our imagining, we conclude that human beings are, in and of themselves, divine.

*Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal **human being** or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles. ... they exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.*

Thinking we are near-divine, we do what exalts us.

When left unchecked, this practice becomes wholly self-seeking. What is "right" becomes whatever is "right" for *me*. Whatever makes *me* feel good, whatever vindicates the offenses *I've* endured. Whatever satisfies *my* desires.

We begin to not only look out for Number 1, but looking out for Number 1 becomes laudable. We applaud those who "do you", who "do what's right for you."

*They knew God's decree, ... yet they not only do [the things that are contrary to God's decree] but **even applaud others** who practice them.*

2. Example

In his book *One Drum*, Richard Wagamese wrote of an Ojibway story in which the earth was washed clean by a global flood. During the flood, Muskrat, Loon, Beaver, and Sky Woman took refuge on the back of a turtle. Muskrat dove down to the bottom and came up with a handful of mud. Sky Woman then took that handful of mud, and worked it into the back of the turtle. The mud grew and grew, eventually becoming the new earth. Because the flood waters were so deep, although Muskrat succeeded, he died in the process. Sky Woman recognized his sacrifice and breathed new life into him. As the new earth became established on the back of the turtle, things began to grow. The first plant that grew was tobacco.

Tobacco thus became one of the sacred plants of the First Nations people. It is a symbol that the Creator continues to perpetuate life. It is also a symbol of sacrifice because the new earth depended on the Muskrat's willingness to sacrifice his own life. Also, in order to get tobacco, one has to plant it, cultivate it, harvest it, and dry it. It requires time and effort. It requires sacrifice. Even if you don't grow your own tobacco, you have to give up some money which you have worked hard to acquire. It requires sacrifice. In ceremony, tobacco is offered as accompaniment of prayers of thanksgiving for life, and for the sacrifice that gives life.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition there is also a story of a great flood that washed the world clean of its impurities. As the flood waters subsided, and the new earth emerged, the first steward of this new earth was a man named Noah. Being "a man of the soil", when Noah emerged from the ark, the first crop he planted on the new earth was a vineyard. From the grapes that grew he made wine. Wine, therefore, became a symbol throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition of God's promise of creation and of new-creation. It is a symbol that the Creator continues to perpetuate new life.

In order to get wine, one must plant the grape vines, cultivate them (over several years before the first crop arrives), harvest the grapes, press the wine, and let it age. It requires effort, time, patience, and commitment. It requires sacrifice. Even if you don't grow your own grapes, to procure the wine one must give up some money

which you have worked hard to acquire. It requires sacrifice. Wine is a symbol of the sacrifice that gives new life.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, he chose bread and wine as the central symbols. When we share the Lord's Supper, also called, Holy Communion, also called the *Eucharist* (which means "thanksgiving"), we give prayers of thanksgiving to God through Christ for the sacrifice that gives new life. The red wine is the same colour as blood and so it's a symbol of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross, the "sacrifice of atonement by his blood" by which we, through our faith, are made right with God. Justified. Clothed in God's righteousness. Welcomed into the communion of the Trinity in which fellowship there is peace beyond understanding.

Tobacco is a sacred and healing symbol that accompanies the prayers of thanksgiving to the Creator for the sacrifice that ensures and gives new life.

Wine is a symbol that accompanies the prayers of thanksgiving to the Creator, *through Christ* for the sacrifice that ensures and gives new life.

There are differences. The two expressions of faith aren't carbon copies of each other. But, did you see the similarities?

Sadly, the powers that were when the Christian settlers arrived, did not.

When the Christian settlers arrived in North America, they encountered the indigenous people. Backed as they were by empire and by the Christendom church, they had built up in their own minds a vision of their own importance. While they wouldn't have said so, in many practical ways, they were worshipping the creature (themselves, the empire, the Christendom church) rather than the Creator. They thought themselves imbued with divine wisdom. Thus, claiming to be wise, they saw the ceremonies and the offerings of tobacco and concluded, without realizing the significance of the ceremonies, that they were merely godless pagans.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools. What followed was malice, slander, gossip, heartlessness, and worse.

3. God's patience and righteousness

As with a parent whose child continues to rebel and refuses to acknowledge the relationship, eventually they have to step back and let their child go it alone. So, argued Paul, God let his children try to do life on their own.

God doesn't force us to believe in Him, or honour Him as God, or obey His Word to us. When we refuse enough times, God's response is to leave us to our own devices.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their heart ... For this reason God gave them up ...

And yet, like a loving Father, God doesn't leave us completely. He provides the means for reconciliation and patiently waits for us to repent and receive His grace.

While the day is yet to come when Christ will return "to judge the living and the dead," at the present time God has revealed his patience and his righteousness by the twin facts that The Day has not yet come, but the day of Christ's sacrifice *has* come.

Because light and dark cannot occupy the same space;

because holiness and evil can't coexist;

because we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God,

God took it upon himself to balance the scales, terminate sin's tyranny, and open the way for us to rejoin communion with the Holy and Triune God in fellowship with whom is peace beyond understanding.

If God were to abide sin, or ignore it, he would not be a just god. Because He is Justice itself, he cannot condone sin. So, Jesus gave his life in sacrifice so that we, through him, would be made right.

There is an interesting difference in the two stories. After Noah drew his first vintage he drank to excess. He became blindingly drunk and passed out, fully naked. A symbol of shame.

Noah's story is one of utter humanness. Complete, fallen humanity.

He was given the gift to be the father of the new humanity. And he fell down blind drunk.

All have fallen short of the glory of God!

So much humanness in the Noah story.

And it beckons to us to humility.

Have you ever noticed that “human” and “humility” have the same origins: *humus*. It means earth. Ground. Dirt.

Just as Adam, the first man, carries the same name as the dirt from which he was formed before God breathed life into him.

We are not God. We are the creatures, not the Creator. We are of the soil.

We exist solely by the Divine Breath and God’s grace.

Life goes on because of God’s grace.

Life goes on because Jesus gave himself up as a sacrifice of atonement so that we could be made “at one” with the Creator of life; made right before God; restored into the communion of the Holy Trinity in which fellowship is peace beyond understanding.

4. Repentance and thanksgiving

A couple of weeks ago we derived a formula in which we said that the power of God to affect salvation; the ability of God to affect salvation, is the product of the force of the gospel applied to our daily joys, sorrows, and struggles over the course of our present-age lifespans.

The application part is learning the Word of God. Working it into our minds and emotions, and actions.

Time and again, the Word of God calls us to repent from self-seeking pride and turn towards God in genuine and regular thanksgiving by which the Holy Spirit shapes within us humility.

Paul observed that central to humanity’s struggles is their failure to honour God as God **or give thanks to him**.

Gratitude moves us out of our own limited and self-seeking perspective to be able to see what Christ has done by the cross, and what He is doing in the mystery of the Holy Spirit.

Richard Wagamese wrote of a ceremony in which you prayerfully reflect on your experiences. Whenever you think of something for which you are grateful, no matter how insignificant it seems, you place a pinch of tobacco in a piece of cotton cloth. Gradually your string of tobacco pouches grows with each prayer of thanksgiving. And you begin to realize how much God has done and is doing for you. And you begin to trust that He will continue to bring life.

Whenever we share the sacrament of the Eucharist, we say, in a rather formal way, the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving by which we remember what God has done, is doing. And we begin to trust that He will continue to bring life.

I guess the call of discipleship in this part of Paul's letter is to find ways to adopt the habit, or find ceremonies by which you and I can remember to give thanks to God, honour Him as God, and thus worship and serve our Creator through Jesus Christ by whose sacrifice we are justified.

Amen.

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

O God, we offer you our gifts in thanksgiving. Pour out your Spirit upon them and upon us. May the gifts we offer bear the fruit of your Spirit in every life we touch in Jesus' name. Amen.

Prayers of thanksgiving, intercession, the Lord's Prayer

God of compassion and courage,
In our weakness you are strength.
In our sorrows you are comfort and peace.
We thank you for your embracing presence in our lives.
Embrace each situation we lay before you today with your steadfast love.

We thank you for moments of joy that break into our lives,
for love given and received,
for friends who furnish our life with meaning and happiness,
and for family who embrace us with love and understanding.
We pray for those who cannot feel joy today,
for any estranged from family or friends,
for those feeling stress as the costs of living rise,
and for those who face any kind of loss.
Embrace us all with your mercy, O God,
And give us grace to respond to needs around us.

God of the nations,
We pray for our country as Canada Day approaches.
We give thanks for peace and plenty in this land
and for resources to support those facing difficulties in our communities.
Challenge those who govern to share resources as a generous global partner,
and commit to international efforts to preserve the earth for future
generations.
Guide leaders to set fair policies that protect vulnerable groups,
and ensure equity and dignity for all.
Embrace us all with your mercy, O God,
And give us grace to respond to needs around us.

Eternal God,
We thank you for your people in every age
who have entered into your heavenly presence,
especially those dear to our own hearts.
Thank you for memories that inspire us,
for love and laughter shared and lessons learned.

Hear us now as we offer prayers in silence for the concerns on our hearts this day...

Silence for at least 10-15 seconds.

We sum up our prayers, spoken and unspoken, in the words that Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

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

*Hymn: #328 "This is my Father's world"

Benediction

Congregational Amen