

# Worship

August 6, 2023

10:00 a.m.

Knox, Moore



Call to worship: Psalm 124:8; 95:6, 7

Opening prayers (adoration, supplication):

Mysterious and merciful God,  
we praise you for all the ways you offer us abundant life.  
When the sun rises and the earth blooms around us,  
we are thankful for your gift of a new day.  
When evening falls and we find ourselves in a lonely place,  
we count on your presence for comfort.  
For the times you show us the way and give us guidance,  
we praise you.  
For the healing you offer when we are broken and hurting,  
we rejoice.  
Your grace satisfies us in every situation,  
and so we worship you  
for you are the Source of life and love, comfort and courage  
day by day by day.  
Receive our prayers and praise, O God,  
this day and every day, now and always.

**Confession (unison)**

**Merciful God,**  
**we confess that we have**  
**sinned against you**  
**in thought, word, and deed.**  
**Thinking ourselves wise,**  
**we have not honoured you as God,**  
**we have resisted believing in you,**  
**we have refused to obey your Word,**  
**we have failed to trust your gospel.**  
**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.**

Assurance of God's grace and mercy: Romans 8:1  
(The response to: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" is, "**His love endures forever.**")

**\*Hymn: #422 "Sing a new song unto the Lord"**

Sermon:

Help me pray!

Last week we talked about the Paradox of the New Life. By Christ's sacrifice of atonement, sin is forgiven and its power, together with that of death and the devil is undermined. When we accept His grace in faith, the Righteous Judge declares us innocent, clothed in Christ's righteousness, and reconciled with Himself. This is what we call the teaching/doctrine of *justification*. And yet, very often we find ourselves doing things that are more influenced by sin rather than by Christ's righteousness.

We then talked about *sanctification*. Sanctification is the process by which the Holy Spirit conforms us to the image of Christ as we strive to learn and live by God's Word in this present age.

In chapter 8, Paul carried on the theme of living in the paradox of the New Life. In these verses, Paul grounded his readers in this present age between Christ's particular resurrection that has happened, and the general resurrection that is yet to come when Christ returns. In this age, Paul argued, there are two governing principles, or laws, by which we can organize our interior and thus exterior lives; our emotions, thoughts, reactions, speech, and actions. There is the law of the holy, just, and triune God of whom the Spirit is the active person in this passage, or the law of sin – represented by "the flesh."

READ ROMANS 8:1-39.

One of the common struggles that seem to burden many Christians is prayer. It's awkward. You feel exposed and vulnerable. You don't know whether to stand, sit, kneel, or lie prostrate. Do you close your eyes? Bow your head? Look to the sky? What do you do with your hands? What do you say? Whether praying with someone else, in a small group, or even privately, prayer is often a continual struggle. And although there may sometimes be moments of incredible peace, inspiration, sometimes even ecstasy, often there is a lot of tedium, dryness, and feeling burdened.

And, evidently, the struggle's not new!

Paul himself, the giant of Christian spirituality, struggled with prayer.

*...for we do not know how to pray as we ought...*

He included himself in that statement. "We do not know how to pray as we ought."

Before we get to how God, in His mercy, helps us with this struggle, we need to notice that Paul's very brief reflection on prayer is couched in a much longer reflection about the New Life empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Paul contrasted life "in the flesh" with life "in the Spirit." Passages like this are often interpreted as though there is the physical nature and the spiritual nature, that they are separate and that the latter is good but the former is bad. That line of thinking came from Greek philosophical thought and is not in accordance with the revelation of Scripture. Through His written Word, God affirms that the physical as well as the spiritual is sacred. It's what He proclaimed to be good at creation. It's what He redeemed in the physical sacrifice of Christ. And, it's what He will resurrect when Christ returns for the wedding of heaven and earth when God's home is unchallenged and eternally among us mortals, as foreshadowed by Christ's own physical resurrection.

We learn from God's written Word that the spiritual is intimately interwoven with the physical in one holistic body. They're not meant to be separated. Peace is the reconciliation of all essential elements: us with God, us with one another, and us with ourselves (our body, emotions, thoughts; physical and spiritual.)

And, it's good!

The Holy Spirit will never contradict God's Word. Paul was not therefore advocating a duality of nature between the physical ("of the flesh") and the spiritual.

How we are to read this passage, is that Paul was trying to describe was not two distinct natures of existence, but rather two distinct *organizing principles* by which people might allow their lives to be governed. Or, to use Paul's words, two *laws*: the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus or the law of sin and death, shortened to "the flesh." Either with the mind set on the way of the Triune God or with the mind set on the way of sin that refuses to acknowledge God or honour Him as God and instead exalts the self and all our immediately felt desires and needs.

Paul argued that the New Life with which we're blessed through the grace of Jesus Christ as redeemed, justified, adopted, and being-sanctified children of the heavenly Father when we receive the free gift in faith, is a life intertwined with the way of the Holy Spirit of God.

In fact, he went a step further.

Christians are *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit.

*...the Spirit of God dwells in you...*

If you are a Christian, this is a proclamation of fact. It is part of the good news. It is part of salvation.

If you have accepted in faith the free gift of justification – of forgiveness by the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and of adoption which the heavenly Father offers to us, into his holy family as siblings and joint heirs with Christ, then there is therefore no condemnation and the Holy Spirit dwells in you.

I think it's worth sitting with that for a moment.

There's not much I can say about that without going into an academic discourse on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. That has value, but it also runs the risk of demoting the Holy Spirit from a person of the Trinity to a concept. And, the Holy Spirit's not an idea. It's a person. A spiritual person, but a person nonetheless. The Holy Spirit is part of the divine self, of the Living God, and the Holy Spirit dwells in you when you are in Christ Jesus.

This is something that each one of us has to sit with for ourselves until we come to realize what that means in our own lives.

I'm sure you can think of Christians you know who are victorious in life and those who are burdened in life. Maybe you can identify yourself in these categories. The victorious Christian is the one who is able to get through life: the struggles, the sufferings, the joys, the sorrows, without being overwhelmed by them. Without giving into anger, and jealousy, and malice, and lust and all these works of sin. Who can get through life and face all the challenges, whatever they may be, with love and hope, peace and patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-

control – the fruits of the Spirit. The victorious Christian is the one whose living exemplifies their belief that “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed.” Those who are able to do so are the ones who can say with Paul that “we are more than conquerors”, because they are living not by the governance of the flesh but with their mind firmly set on the gospel truth, the good news, that the Holy Spirit dwells in them. The Spirit of God’s own self!

And, if that’s the case, if the Spirit of God dwells in us, then what have we to fear? “If God is for us, who can be against us?” It’s good news!

But it’s also something we have to figure out for ourselves.

And, I think that’s what distinguishes the victorious living from the burdened living. The degree to which we have set our minds on this fact – it’s not by setting our minds on it that we can will the Spirit to enter our souls, the Spirit is already within us! I don’t like prayers that ask God to “send the Spirit”, or “Spirit of God, descend upon my soul.” The Spirit of God is already within us! God doesn’t have to send him. He already has! What’s left is for us to be open to the Spirit’s presence, power, and promptings. To be receptive to the movements of the Holy Spirit. To set our minds on the fact that the Spirit of God dwells within us. So what have we to fear?

That’s why, when I remember, I’ll pray that our eyes, ears, and hearts be open to the Spirit’s promptings, rather than that the Spirit come upon us.

If we can get that truth from the page, into our brains, and into our hearts; if we can get it and the reality behind it to dictate our thoughts, our reactions, and our actions; if we can set our minds on the things of the Spirit, then in Christ’s name and by the Spirit’s power, we become more than conquerors and there is nothing that will separate the love of God from us, because the Holy Spirit is within us.

This is the grounding proclamation which Paul then used to talk about prayer.

*...we do not know how to pray as we ought...*

But, it’s okay. In God’s mercy,

*The Spirit [dwelling within us] helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.*

There is a beautiful image here. The word Paul used, 'help', carries the sense of lending a hand. When you have a heavy load to lift, you ask someone nearby to come over and "lend a hand." What that means is they pick up one end of the load, and you pick up your end, and the two of you carry it together.

That's what Paul wrote about prayer. Prayer can be a heavy load. There's a great deal of responsibility. We're coming before the throne of the God of heaven and earth to ask for our own needs, to ask for the needs of others, the needs of creation itself to give thanks, to offer Him our adoration, to ground ourselves in the hope we have when we and creation are released from the lingering effects of sin in the Resurrection to come. This is not something to be undertaken lightly. It's no wonder Christians struggle with prayer, there's a lot wrapped up in it!

But, if we can hold this image in our mind: that we are not doing it alone, but we have a helper, a friend, the very Spirit of God who dwells within us is helping to carry the load, that takes a lot of pressure off what we say or do when we pray. Whether by ourselves or with someone for whom we care.

How that works out theologically, is that the Spirit takes whatever we have to say and translates it before the Father. He need not speak for the Father knows the mind of the Spirit who knows the mind of the Son. He intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

If you've ever tried to have a conversation with someone who's just learning to speak, you'll understand. They might talk non-stop for 10-minutes and you might catch two words. Then, you turn to the parents who then translate for you what was said.

This is a sense of what the Holy Spirit is doing. We pray in our weakness, however we can in the moment, and the Holy Spirit picks up the burden and turns to the Father through the Son and says: "This is what they meant..."

*the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.*

Amen.

\*Affirmation of faith (The Apostle's Creed)

\*Receive and bless the offerings

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow,  
praise Him all creatures here below,  
praise Him above, ye heavenly hosts;  
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.**

\*Prayer of dedication

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession with the Lord's Prayer:

O God, we give you thanks for your goodness  
in the changing times of our lives.  
For every occasion you have surprised us with a blessing,  
we give you thanks  
in the pressures of this present moment,  
we are grateful for the strength and courage we find,  
knowing you are right beside us.  
Give us wisdom and patience  
to face a future filled with many questions and challenges.  
Help us trust in your goodness  
even when we wrestle with what comes next.

Aware of our own needs and the great need around us,  
we remember Christ's compassion  
and offer our prayers for the world, seeking your guidance  
so that we may do our part to share comfort, healing, and hope.

We pray for those who are hungry or homeless in these challenging times,  
and all those feeling the stress of rising prices.  
Give those with more resources the confidence to share generously.  
We pray for those who have lost everything in wild fire or flooding this year,  
and for growers facing drought, shortage of workers and uncertain markets.  
Guide the leaders in our communities and our nation  
as they face these complicated problems.  
Give them wisdom and courage to work together  
to make decisions for the wellbeing of the most vulnerable.  
*(Keep silence for at least 15 seconds)*

We pray for all who are sick or in pain, those waiting for diagnosis or  
treatment,  
and all who face chronic health challenges.  
Equip those who offer health care to manage the demands they face  
to provide care in timely ways.  
Bring healing in body, mind, and spirit to all who struggle.  
*(Keep silence for at least 15 seconds)*

We pray for those who offer hospitality to others this summer  
in their homes and workplaces, in their churches and communities.  
Keep us alert to the needs of visitors and strangers  
and open our hearts so that your goodness will touch those we meet.  
*(Keep silence for at least 15 seconds)*

Lord Jesus Christ, you walk with us through all the days of challenge and celebration.

Draw near to all who face unexpected sorrow this summer and join with those who celebrate happy occasions, too.

Be our Bread for the journey to sustain us and encourage us, whatever the days ahead holds for us.

And so we pray together the words you taught us, saying:

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

**\*Hymn: #398 "When the spirit of the Lord moves in my soul"**

Benediction