

Worship

September 10, 2023

9:30 a.m. St. Andrew's, Mooretown

11:00 a.m., Knox-Moore

**Indicates to please stand as you are able.*

God calls us to worship:

Call to worship:

We respond in praise and confession:

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

Prayer of praise and supplication:

God of grace and glory,
Your creative power is beyond imagining.
Your love is wider than the whole universe;
your mercy reached beyond the highest heavens;
your wisdom lies deeper than the fathoms of the sea.
Maker of all things,
you became one of us in Jesus Christ,
walking the roads we take each day.
Through your Spirit,
you are present with us in every time and place,
to comfort and challenge us.
We worship you, Creator, Christ, and Spirit,
and will live to bring you glory, now and always, Amen.

Prayer of confession (*unison*):

**God of mercy:
you have called us to be thankful
for your good gifts to us,
but too often we have taken them for granted
as if we deserved them.**

**You have called us to be hopeful
through the gospel of Jesus Christ,
but too often despair has come upon us,
and the cares of the world
have weighed us down.**

**You have called us to be joyful
in the wonder of your presence among us,
but too often we become mired in the mundane
and lose the gift of reverence.**

**By your saving power, O God,
enable us to celebrate your love for us
with joy and thanksgiving.
Amen.**

God speaks to us:

We hear the gospel of God's grace: Romans 8:1; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21
(The response to: "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good" is, "**His love endures forever**")

*Hymn: #65 "All people that on earth do dwell"

Scripture: Romans 13:8-14; 14:1-23
(The response to: "This is the word of the Lord" is, "**Thanks be to God**")

Keeping the main thing, the main thing

Over the next year or two you will be working with your interim moderator to try and discern God's will for the Moore Presbyterian Charge. You will probably talk about what type of ministry you'll pursue. Should you call another full-time minister or part-time? Should you amalgamate to become a single-point charge or join with another congregation to become a three-point charge? Should you dissolve both congregations and start a wholly new congregation with a new identity and renewed sense of purpose? You will probably talk about how, in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit, you can most faithfully respond to the many pressing issues of our age: the housing crisis, the climate crisis, the refugee crisis, the opioid crisis, safe-injection sites, decriminalizing drugs, LGBTQ concerns, gender and schools, Physician Assisted Suicide, abortion, reconciliation with Indigenous communities.

In all of these conversations there will be differences of opinions. Maybe even arguments.

None of these discussions are simple matters. Embedded in each are personal or communal traditions, experiences, theologies, emotions, loyalties, faith, spirituality, family dynamics, fear, vulnerability, and more.

This scenario is not entirely dissimilar to the situation the apostle Paul addressed within the Christian congregation in Rome.

Between the Jewish and Gentile sides of the church, there were differences of opinion based in tradition, experience, spirituality, faith, and theology. And, in spite of their praiseworthy faith, Paul was concerned that these disagreements would split the church which would undermine the credibility of their witness to Christ's kingdom and thus demonstrate a falsehood concerning the glory of God.

Paul categorized his readership in terms of "strong" and "weak" faith. Those whose faith was "strong" were those who understood, through the gospel of Jesus

Christ that they were freed from the restrictions of the law such as following the religious schedule of holy days and limiting what they could eat.

Now, I need to mention that the reference to vegetarianism is somewhat obscure. Although eating meat was a concession God made to humanity after the Fall – in the early parts of the Creation stories we learn that humanity was originally instructed to eat only of the trees and plants – eating meat was not wholly prohibited.

As far as I'm aware, there are two possible explanations for this reference.

One is that in some of the pagan rituals of the day, meat was offered to the idols – not always cooked “well done” – and subsequently gorged upon by the worshippers. Sometimes this feast was in the context of other ritualized celebrations which could be categorized as excessive and even lewd. Some Jews therefore might have hesitated eating any meat in case it had been part of these idolatrous practices and thus was considered to be ritually unclean.

The other possibility is that, by the 1st century within the Jewish community, extra restrictions had been added as a kind of legal fence around the covenantal boundaries passed on by God through Moses. The thinking went like this: In the covenants God established certain dietary rules. For example, because blood is the source of life, no meat could be eaten that still had blood in it or else this would be equivalent to eating/taking a life (i.e. murder.) Over time stricter regulations were enacted that were not from God but were created by the human faithful as legal fences. As long as *they* were kept, one could be sure that the real covenantal laws would be kept as well. Those who ate only vegetables may have been individuals who chose to avoid any risk of mistakenly eating forbidden meat by not eating any meat at all!

In any event, those who had a “strong” faith were those who understood that one's justification (one's right standing before God) is based solely on our faith in Jesus Christ – his atoning sacrifice, current Lordship, and return as triumphant King to right all wrongs and resurrect Creation. This faith frees us from the restrictions of various regulations about what to eat and which days are holy. Those things do not affect one's salvation.

Those who had a “weak” faith also believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, they also believe in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, of his current lordship, and of his return. However, they weren't quite ready to give up the things in which they

had taken comfort for so many generations. Perhaps they believed the Law needed to be added to one's faith in order to properly secure justification – just as the legal fence ensured no one mistakenly broke the covenantal laws, if one kept the Law *in addition to* believing in Jesus, one was doubly assured of salvation! Or, maybe they simply felt they'd be betraying their ancestors and traditions if they were to step outside of the boundaries that had served their community for so long.

To them Paul wrote that if that is the case, then keep the Law for it is a greater wrong to violate one's conscience. But remember that faith in Jesus is what assures us of our justification and adoption into God's Holy and Righteous Presence.

These differences of opinion/practice were threatening the harmony of the congregation. This mattered because it threatened the community's witness to God.

If the people who represent the Living God are known only by their in-fighting and divisions, what does that tell the world about the character of God?

For the sake of the glory of God, Paul urged the congregation, as much as they were able, to work together for harmony. We began to see this last week: Because of the gospel “we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another” (Romans 12:5)

Because it severs Christ's earthly, Spirit-bound body, the greater sin than observing – or not observing – religious traditions is that by our insistence on what we think is right, we drive someone else out of the church.

We've been seeing this happening right now in the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Those of us on the conservative side of the theological spectrum in terms of marriage and human sexuality might be tempted to condemn the more liberal or revisionist side for disregarding the Word of God and simply doing whatever feels good. Conversely, those on the more liberal side might be tempted to condemn the traditionalists as ungracious, legalistic, and even hateful. When neither side is willing to concede any ground, they force each other out of communion and the result is schism and Christ's earthly body is broken. This Paul called “ruin.”

Sometimes this becomes necessary.

But, “If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

(12:18)

To the “strong”, Paul urged that if they truly love one another in Christ, they should not eat meat that the other group considers unclean when they are in the company of the other group.

Likewise, to the “weak”, Paul urged them to not condemn, lecture, and give dirty looks when they see a brother or sister-in-faith eating meat.

*Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died.
(Romans 14:15)*

Christ died for everyone.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Everyone is precious to God.

It is also true that not everything everyone thinks, says, and does is acceptable to God. Through Paul, the Lord was not giving us a licence to do anything we want.

*...let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and
drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in
quarrelling and jealousy ... (Romans 13:13)*

The task is to discern which behaviours are important to our individual sanctification – our growth in the knowledge of, love of, and trust in Jesus Christ – as well as the collective witness of the church, and which are not. To figure out in a given situation, relying on the Word of God for the foundation and framework of our conclusion, what is the Main Thing. And then to keep it the main thing.

When you begin to discern together what God might want of the Moore-Mooretown charge in the years ahead, keep in mind that the church’s primary purpose is to reveal the glory, grace, mercy, and healing power of the Triune God known through Jesus Christ to the world in which we live. The church is the beacon of God’s presence and power in St. Clair Township.

The question for discernment therefore becomes:

*According to the Word of God, does **my**
behaviour/attitude/thought process honour the Lord and express
my gratitude to Him?*

As Jesus said, before we worry about the dust in our neighbour's eye, deal with the log in our own.

For the sake of our communal testimony, the salvation of society, and the glory of God.

Amen.

We respond in faith, offering, and prayer:

*Affirmation of Faith (Knox): The Apostles' Creed

*Offering:

(Offering plates are presented at the Communion Table while singing:)

**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

Public profession of faith and reception of new members (St. Andrew's):

(Elders join minister at the front, facing congregation. Norm and Anna stand facing minister and elders)

The Presentation

Renunciation and Affirmation

Questions to the Candidates

*Questions to the Congregation:

Do you believe in God the Father?

**I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.**

Amen.

Thanksgiving and Intercession

Blessing

*Charge

(Elders extend the right hand of fellowship)

Prayer of Thanksgiving, Intercession, and the Lord's Prayer:

God of love,

Creator of heaven and earth,

we are filled with gratitude for the blessings of this life.

For making us in your image to love and care for one another,

we give you thanks.

For the gift of Christ, who redeems and guides us,
and who gives us a pattern for everyday living,
we praise you.

For the work of the Spirit, who works in us, through us and beyond us,
We praise you.

Hear us now as we pray for situations where your love and grace are sorely
needed:.

We pray for the church in this place and around the world,
facing so many new challenges to respond to so many enduring needs...

Silence

We pray for this beautiful planet, the fragile home we share with all living
things...

Silence

For children and youth who worry about the future of the planet and their
place in that future...

Silence

For those who govern in this city/town/area and the nations of the world,
that they may find the wisdom and courage to do justice for all in the decisions
they make...

Silence

For the homeless and the hungry, for the unemployed and the uncertain,
and for all who struggle with daily decisions for their families and their
future...

Silence

For those who mourn, for those who face illness or isolation,
and for all whose situations we carry on our hearts this day...

A longer time of silence

God with us, we thank you for your all-embracing love that touches all life and
each life, and keeps us in communion with those dear to us who now live with
you. So we join our voices to theirs in gratitude, praying the words Jesus
taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

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

*Hymn: #717 "We cannot own the sunlit sky"

Benediction

Congregational Amen