

Worship on September 27, 2020

Order of worship

We Gather

- Welcome and Announcements
- Call to worship
- Prayer for worship + Lord's Prayer
- Words of Assurance

We Listen

- Prayer for illumination (or song)
- Scripture: Matthew 21:28-32
- Sermon: Presbyterians Sharing Sunday (The Rev. Amanda Currie)

We Respond

- Prayer for the people
- Offering –

We Serve

- Benediction
- Postlude

Ponder Upon Questions

Announcements:

. Grace and peace to you all who are worshipping God with us through this video. This worship is for Sunday, September 27, 2020. Today, it is Presbyterians Sharing Sunday, so the Moderator, the Rev. Amanda Currie will share the message with us today.

. To meet and talk to me for the pastoral care or any prayer requests, please email me or phone me.

. Thank you for your offerings. If we look back this time of difficulty after 5 or 10 years later, what would we remember? I hope and pray that we will be able to say that God was with us. Our God is the God who is with us. Let us experience his presence in our lives.

As I mentioned, today is the Presbyterians Sharing Sunday, so I prepared today's worshiping with the guideline from our denomination.

Welcome to Presbyterians Sharing Sunday.

Today we remember and celebrate the fact that our congregation is not alone. We are part of a body. We belong to The Presbyterian Church in Canada, a denomination of Presbyterians across the country that is connected by a common faith, governance, mission, history and a shared ministry and mission.

2020 has been a difficult year for us. The impact of the global pandemic on congregations and other ministries has been significant. Denominational meetings and conferences have been cancelled, postponed or moved online. Camps and other children's ministries were cancelled or significantly adjusted. Pastoral needs have increased while financial resources have been stretched, and leaders across the country have had to adapt to doing ministry in strange and new ways to keep everyone safe.

Still, the ministry that we do together through Presbyterians Sharing has continued and is continuing, adapting to changing needs and priorities for the churches. Together we are carrying out Christ's ministry in our communities and around the world by serving, leading, and connecting..

As we come into the presence of God, let us calm down our hearts and minds and focus on our Lord.

Call To Worship

One: We are here because God's Spirit calls us to worship.

All: **We are here to offer our praise and thanksgiving for God's presence in our lives.**

One: We are here to acknowledge God's love all around us.

All: **We are here to claim the promise that wherever we are, God is with us.**

One: God is among us as we praise, pray, love and serve

All: **God is here! Let us worship God!**

Prayer For Adoration and Confession

God of desert days and wilderness nights, we rest in the comfort of your presence and trust in the sustaining power of your love. We come to you today, seeking the help and hope that comes only from you. We long to be fed and nourished by your Word. We want to be filled with your Spirit of peace and joy. We ask only that you will provide us with all that we need to live abundantly and to serve with abandon.

O God, we stand at the brink of what has been and what is yet to be. We long to receive the gift of your liberation and to taste the sweetness of your promises. But the way forward is unknown, and so we hesitate: discouraged, frightened, insecure, complaining. Still, we know we must move ahead on our journey.

Make us mindful of your sustaining presence and, like a bird in full flight, may this assurance soar within our faith so we can rise above the challenges of this moment and follow you together in faith and obedience.

This time, we come to you in prayer that you taught us how to pray: (Lord's Prayer)

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

Words of Assurance

God rains down manna in the wilderness and squeezes water from a rock. With fire and cloud God leads us out of the bondage of our past into a future of freedom and safety. God has been with us in the past, is with us in this present moment, and will be with us forever and ever.

Thanks be to God.

Before we read today's scripture, let us pray for the illumination of the Lord.

Prayer for Illumination:

O God, fill us with your Spirit and humble our hearts so that we can hear your Word. Amen

Scripture: Matthew 21:28-32

28 "What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' 29 He answered, 'I will not'; but later he changed his mind and went. 30 The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, 'I go, sir'; but he did not go. 31 Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

This is the Word of the Lord / Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S STORY

Jesus told a story about a father who had two sons. He went to the first son and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today."

Do you know what a vineyard is? It's a farm especially for growing grapes. It has rows and rows of vines with red grapes or white grapes for making wine and grape juice.

Well, when the father asked his first son to work in the vineyard, the son answered, "I will not."

I don't know why he said no. Maybe he was busy. Maybe he was tired. Maybe he didn't think he was much good at working in the vineyard. But later, he changed his mind, and he went.

Then the father went to the second son and said the same thing: "Son, go and work in the vineyard." The second son replied, "I will go, sir. Right away, sir." But he did not go.

I wonder why the second son didn't go, even though he said that he would. Maybe he got busy. Maybe he got tired. Maybe he didn't think he was much good at working in the vineyard either. He knew he should go, but he didn't go.

After telling this story, Jesus asked those who were listening, "Which of the two sons did what the father wanted?" (If you have the ability to interact with the children, either online or in person, give them a chance to respond. They'll probably say that it was the first son who did what his father asked of him.)

I think Jesus told the story to teach us that what we actually do is more important than what we say we will do. He wants us to "walk the walk" and not just "talk the talk."

But it makes me wonder about the kind of work that the sons would have been doing in the vineyard. What do you think? (Let the children share any ideas they have, if possible. May include tilling the soil, planting, watering, tending vines, picking the grapes, crushing the grapes, making the wine, bottling the wine, etc.)

Even today, working in a vineyard is hard work. I found a description where a young woman explained that picking the grapes involves long hours of hard, tiring physical work – which can be dirty and sticky. She said sweeping, mopping and cleaning is very important and making and bottling the wine requires a lot of attention to detail.

It makes me wonder about the son who didn't go to work in the vineyard. I wonder if he was worried that he couldn't handle it. I wonder if he thought he didn't have the strength and energy needed to get the job done.

As Christians, Jesus has work for us to do to. He asks us to tell others about God's love. He asks us to show love for one another. And he asks us to pay special attention and give extra care to people who are poor or sick or struggling.

Presbyterians Sharing is a special fund of The Presbyterian Church in Canada that makes it easy for us to do some of these things. When we give to Presbyterians Sharing our gifts help congregations share God's love with people in their communities, and with people around the world. When we give money to Presbyterians Sharing it's one of the ways that we say "Yes" to God who is asking us to do God's work.

We can also say "Yes" by praying for the church and its ministries, by participating in the ministries supported by Presbyterians Sharing, or by inviting others to come along and work with us to share God's love in the world.

Let's not hesitate like the first son or change our minds like the second son. If we work together, sharing our money, our time, our talents, and our prayers for each other, I think we'll end up with some pretty nice wine or

grape juice - enough to share with everyone!

SERMON

Called to the Vineyard

The parable of the vineyard is about two sons. Both were called to work in the vineyard. The first son says won't go, but then shows up. The second son says he'll go, but the never arrives to work.

After telling this story, Jesus asked those who were listening, "Which of the two sons did what the father wanted?"

I am sure that everyone would reply the son who showed up. The parable reminds us that faith must be more than just words. The son who promises to work in the vineyard and then fails to do so is no help to his father. In contrast, the one who hesitates to work, but then decides to take up the task, likely pleases his father with his unexpected generosity.

I think about this scripture today, as we reflect on the call to participate in our denomination's shared ministry and mission. We are connected through faith, governance, and sharing in ministry and mission. Through our gifts to Presbyterians Sharing, we participate in God's mission.

Together, we equip congregations, ministries and presbyteries with skills and tools for evangelism and discipleship, stewardship and Christian education. Together we create and support new faith communities and participate in national and international mission. We engage in healing and reconciliation and support Indigenous ministries. We prepare and support leaders and live out God's call to justice. We empower, encourage and support youth. And we do so much more to participate in God's mission.

Each year, congregations are invited to contribute to Presbyterians Sharing. General Assembly has agreed to encourage congregations to give a tithe – 10% of what they raise for regular congregational ministry – to our common ministry. Knowing how much funding is expected helps the General Assembly to plan and budget appropriately. It's like a father with a vineyard knowing how much help he'll have in planting, tending, and harvesting in the upcoming season.

Showing up to work in the vineyard is not always easy. 2020 has been a difficult year. The COVID-19 pandemic swept through the world and through our communities – disrupting our plans, testing our capacity to adapt, and challenging us to be the church outside our buildings and without our usual gatherings for worship and fellowship.

Thinking about how much things changed during the pandemic makes me realize we don't know what was going on with the two sons in the parable.

When the second son said he would go to work in the vineyard, he might have had every intention of doing so. Maybe he became ill or injured or had to give priority to a more urgent task at that moment. And the other son who decided he could help... Was that because he saw that his brother was suddenly unavailable?

Was that because he realized that he had more time and energy than he expected? Or was it because he loved his father deeply, and he suddenly saw how desperately his dad needed his help?

Although we don't know why the second son didn't show up, we do know that showing up is important, and we can imagine how delighted the father was when the first son was able to be there. But, while Jesus's parable calls us to follow through on the promises and commitments we make, there is room for grace. We are called to give according to our ability, and while some congregations might not reach their goal, others are surprised when the generosity of their members allows them to surpass it.

There are a variety of ways that we are invited to share our gifts of money, time, and talents for the work of God's reign on earth, and in difficult times we can pull together to support those who are struggling more. The important thing is that we all participate in the mission that God is calling us to do.

Together on the Journey

Today we've also read about the Israelites journeying through the wilderness in the hope of finding their way to the Promised Land. It reminds us of the importance of being on the journey together.

In those days, the struggles included the enormous challenge of finding food and water for all the people on the way. And their journey through that difficult time lasted not months or years, but generations of wandering.

The author of Exodus tells us that the whole congregation journeyed together – and they did so by stages. Sure, they quarreled and complained about the hardships as they went along, but they looked after each other and didn't abandon the weakest ones along the way.

In the midst of severe hardships, some of them began to wonder if God was still with them, guiding their journey. They complained against their leaders and questioned the whole plan of leaving Egypt in the first place. But when Moses asked for God's help, he received it. The people needed water, and God showed him where to find it. God was still among the Israelites, and we know that God eventually guided them all the way through that difficult time to a new normal in a new land.

The story may lead us to gratitude for the fresh, clean water that is available for most of us right from our taps, and it may spur us to action for those communities around the world that do not benefit from such basic amenities - including many Indigenous communities in Canada. It also reminds us that God is with us as we continue to make our way through the COVID-19 pandemic.

We've endured months of restrictions, economic impacts and social isolation, and at times we have become frustrated and impatient, just wanting everything to go back to normal. Like Moses, we don't know how long the journey will take, how many challenges we will face, or how many needs will arise that we will be called to respond to. We may feel scared and ill-equipped to deal with all the issues. But God is still with us.

When the pandemic began earlier this year, the Presbyterian Church in Canada at every level pivoted and adapted to changing circumstances and needs. Congregations moved online for worship, Bible study, meetings, prayer groups and fellowship. Large church gatherings like General Assembly and Canada Youth were cancelled or postponed. Planned meetings and events were moved online or put off until some uncertain date in the future.

Even as staff at our church offices in Toronto began to work from home, they quickly moved to produce resources and supports for congregations during the crisis. Guidance and support for worshipping online became a priority. Resources for pastoral care, stewardship, and Christian education at home were produced to support the new realities of physical distancing and sheltering at home. Information about government grants and loans was shared broadly and the church made its own emergency funding available for ministries severely impacted by the pandemic. Staff phoned clerks and ministers across the country to check in, offer support and encouragement, identify needs and resources. As the possibility of some churches reopening emerged, a resource was produced to help Sessions with step-by-step guidance and considerations for how to do so safely and responsibly.

Communication has been vital in keeping Presbyterians across Canada journeying together through the challenges of 2020. Our gifts to Presbyterians Sharing support the staff and resources required to communicate across the church through the website, PCConnect e-news, social media, and the Presbyterian Connection newspaper. Even as we are spread across this huge country, we do not need to feel isolated or alone because we can connect with each other and share the journey together.

We continue to support health, theological and Christian education, evangelism, leadership development, Bible

translation and other ministry initiatives of our international partners. Although international mission staff were called back to Canada, they are staying in touch with partners and providing support from Canada. Extra funds were sent to support the Near-East School of Theology when the devaluation of the Lebanese currency, political unrest and COVID restrictions, put the seminary in a precarious situation.

We've provided essential grants which train Indigenous women for ministry in Guatemala, offer spiritual and physical care for prisoners in Malawi and provide a safe space for people with mental health issues – a highly marginalized population - in rural Nepal – to name just a few. Our partners ask us that we keep their work in our prayers during these challenging times.

Mission and ministry in Canada continue because of our gifts to Presbyterians Sharing. Grants continue to support new and renewing congregations and specialized ministries which support vulnerable populations such as refugees and people living in poverty. When physical distancing guidelines temporarily suspended in-person programs run by Indigenous ministries within the PCC, a special grant helped them shift to drop-off food programs to ensure that some of the most vulnerable community members could access healthy meals and personal supplies. New innovation grants equip qualifying ministries to develop discipleship, faith sharing and community outreach programs.

Due to the pandemic and cancellation of the General Assembly, the Rev. Amanda Currie was asked to continue to serve as Moderator for a second year. She invited Presbyterians to join her every day of the summer to walk and pray for the church and its ministries. More than 100 people joined the pilgrimage of prayer, lifting up congregations and ministries from the West coast to the East, with additional prayers for our ecumenical partners.

It was a ministry of encouragement, solidarity, and love for one another, combined with a celebration of the beauty of creation and the gift of life, breath, and movement. Presbyterians Sharing funds the General Assembly Office and provides a small grant for the Moderator's congregation so that she is free to devote significant time and attention to that role without jeopardizing her local ministry.

Walking and praying across the country and considering our diverse ministries brings to light the reality that some communities have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and are struggling more. In the last few months, we've all become more aware of the inequalities that persist in our country and the devastating effects of systemic racism. We tend to assume that Canadians value multiculturalism and diversity, but we are learning that people - particularly Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour - still endure discrimination, hatred, and even violent racism in our communities.

Seeking justice is an important part of our shared ministry that is funded by Presbyterians Sharing. National staff, the International Affairs Committee, the National Indigenous Ministries Council, the ecumenical social justice agency KAIROS, and other partners are just a few who provide leadership and resources for our work towards the justice and peace that God desires for the world. In 2020, statements and resources to help congregations sow seeds of hope and respond to the justice imperatives of the gospel include a study guide on racism and hate in Canada, as well as resources for understanding and responding to the final report on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

The community that first sang Psalm 78 proclaimed their commitment to "tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that God has done." Remembering their ancestors' perilous journey through the wilderness, they sang about how they experienced the presence and help of God as they made the difficult journey together. "God split rocks open in the wilderness," they told their children, "and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep."

I wonder... When we tell the story of the COVID-19 pandemic some years from now, or when our grandchildren tell their children about it even later, what will we say? Will we talk about the people who died, the economies that crashed, the hardships that people endured, the complaining and quarrelling that surfaced? Or will we share stories of God's presence among us during this time? Will we tell the coming generation about

how we stayed together, how we looked out for each other's needs, how we gave generously as we were able to the continuing ministry and mission of the church, and how God enabled us to do that?

In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul describes his hope for a church that is united in the love of Christ. He encourages the Christian community to be "like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind." He invites each one of them not to look to their own interests, but to the interests of others, humbling themselves as Jesus did when he gave up his life for the life of the world.

Supporting Presbyterians Sharing is an important way for Presbyterians across Canada to give of ourselves for the needs of others, to share together in making God's presence seen and felt in the midst of difficult times, and to be faithful to God's call to work in the vineyard for the sake of the coming reign of God. Thank you for your gifts to Presbyterians Sharing.

Let us pray for the people of God.

Prayer for the people

This is a difficult time for us, God, a difficult year that is marked by disappointment, loss, loneliness, and fear. We long for things to go back to normal, or at least to know how long this pandemic will last, but you ask us to be patient and to hold on.

We remember that we're not alone in our struggle. We remember that we belong to a congregation, to a presbytery, to a denomination, and to the One Church throughout the world that is enduring all these things together.

Indeed, we share the struggle of the whole world in these days, and we remember that many others are suffering disproportionately more than we are.

We pray for people who are homeless, for refugees and for those who are struggling to meet their basic needs and care for their families.

We pray for people whose homes are not safe places to shelter, either because they are poorly equipped or because of domestic abuse or violence.

We pray for Indigenous peoples and others whose circumstances have made this pandemic particularly difficult.

We pray for people in long-term care facilities who are so isolated and at greater risk of illness and death.

We pray for those among us and beyond our community who have lost income, whose businesses are struggling, whose meagre savings are in jeopardy.

We pray for those who are sick and for the loved ones of those who have tragically died.

Give us faith, O God, not only to endure through difficult times, but to respond to your call to work in your vineyard even now, sharing from our resources of time, talent, and treasure as we participate in Christ's mission in the world. May your Spirit give us everything we need so that together we can be people of love, care, generosity, and hospitality for those who so desperately need to experience your presence and catch a glimpse of your hope in their lives.

We pray for The Presbyterian Church in Canada, for each congregation, ministry and mission. Give each one a sense of purpose and bless them with creativity, wisdom, love, and all the resources they need to reach out in Jesus' name.

Bless us together, as a denomination, and make us one in faith, hope, and love. Teach us to respect our differences and to pray for one another as siblings in Christ. Bind us together in our shared faith and grow our friendship and unity with one another and with other churches.

We pray for the mission and ministries that we do together through Presbyterians Sharing.

We pray for regional and national staff, committees and volunteers who work carefully to support congregations, presbyteries and synods in these difficult days. Give them wisdom and energy to do the tasks set before them.

We pray for international mission staff and partners around the world who are sharing the good news of God's kingdom of love and justice.

We remember the Indigenous ministries of our church across Canada, and pray for their leaders and members, especially in light of the severe impact of the pandemic on many communities.

We pray that the healing and reconciliation work of our church will help build good relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Bless those who are speaking out for the voiceless and seeking justice. We pray for wisdom in their words and that their messages will be heard with open ears.

We pray for the students, faculty and staff of Knox College, Presbyterian College, St. Andrew's Hall and Vancouver School of Theology. We pray that you will work through the colleges and teachers to help equip the church in an ever-changing world.

Gracious God, pour out your blessing on our congregation too, that we may be encouraged and equipped to be the church today and in the days ahead.

Give us faith to embody Christ's loving presence in our families, neighbourhoods, workplaces, and everywhere that your children are suffering or in need.

We pray in trust that God loves us, in faith that the Spirit hears us and knows our needs, and in hope of the coming kingdom that Jesus promised. Amen.

Invitation to the offering: In obedience to God's call to work in the vineyard, let us present our gifts of time, talent, and treasure for God's good purposes in the church and the world.

Offering – song and prayer – In Christ Alone

Offering prayer: Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation. Through your goodness, we have these gifts to share. We are grateful that you have been with us through challenging days and difficult journeys, for the ways that we have seen your presence and provision, and for the community that has shared the journey and cared for one another along the way. Bless and use our offerings for the work of this congregation and for our ministry together through Presbyterians Sharing. May our offerings be a sign of our desire to do your will, a gift of love for others who are struggling, and an expression of the unity and love we share in Christ. Amen.

Now, it is the time for us to go back to our daily lives. Beloved, let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus. Love the Lord and serve others for the glory of God.

Benediction

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, And the Love of God, And the intimate fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with us all, now and always. Amen.

Ponder Upon Questions:

1. What is my talent, so that I can share it with the people around me?
2. What kind of impact do I want to make through my life?
3. What do I want to say if I look back this difficult time in five or ten years later?