

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL TO WORSHIP:

*It is good to praise the LORD,
and make music to the name of the Most High;
to proclaim his love in the morning
and his faithfulness at night!
For he makes me glad by his deeds;
I sing for joy at the works of his hands!*
Let us worship God.

(Psalm 92.1-2, 4)

HYMN: When morning gilds the skies ...

PRAYER OF APPROACH AND CONFESSION:

Almighty, holy, and righteous God:

On this first day of the week, we come into your presence together to worship you — to praise you for your power and love, to listen to what you have to say to us through the scriptures, and to bring to you our thanksgivings, petitions, and intercessions. As we do so, help us to see reality from your point of view, and to let your point of view influence our choices and our actions.

We confess, however, that we so often see things only from our own limited points of view, and that we act accordingly. We are therefore often rude to those who are different from us, callous toward those who are in need, preoccupied with our own immediate concerns, and indifferent to the long-term consequences of our actions.

Forgive us, we pray, for we acknowledge that we have sinned.

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, enable us to see the world from your point of view more and more clearly, and thereby to live in your ways more and more readily.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Savior; and we pray together, now, as he taught us:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

(Matthew 6.9-13, KJV)

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS:

Hear this good news from the scriptures:

*Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation —
the old has gone; the new has come!
All this is from God,
who reconciled us to himself through Christ,
not counting our sins against us.*

(2 Corinthians 5.17-19)

So, if we have confessed our sin to God sincerely,
let us be assured that God will forgive us.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION [*sung*]: Come, Holy Spirit, for, in you ...

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

- Old Testament Reading: 1 Samuel 15.34 - 16.13 - Samuel anoints David

In this reading, God has just rejected Saul as king of Israel, and now he instructs the prophet Samuel to anoint someone else to be king. That “someone else” turns out to be one of the sons of a man named Jesse — and it’s not until the very *end* of the story that we find out his name: David.

- Psalm: Psalm 20 - “May the LORD answer you when you are in distress”.

Psalm 20 is a royal psalm.

It appears to have been written for use in some kind of ceremony that would’ve been held before a king of Israel and his army headed into battle.

Notice how the first five verses contain a series of *blessings* addressed to the king. Next comes a statement of confidence in God’s help. The final verse is a brief prayer for victory.

- Letter Reading: 2 Corinthians 5.11-17 - “Christ’s love compels us”

This reading is part of a much larger passage in which Paul defends himself against the criticisms of rival apostles.

- Gospel Reading: Mark 4.26-34 - Two parables about seeds

This reading is from a chapter in which Mark records a number of Jesus’ parables.

The reading consists of two of those parables, both about the kingdom of God, and both having to do with seeds that sprout and grow. They are followed by an editorial comment by Mark on Jesus’ use of parables.

SERMON: “From God’s Point of View”

The Christian faith isn’t just about believing particular things, or about learning to live and act in particular ways; it’s also about learning to see life and the world around us from God’s point of view.

This is a theme that comes up in at least two of the scripture readings for today. In today’s Old Testament reading, the prophet Samuel is instructed by God to anoint someone to be the next king of Israel. In last week’s Old Testament reading, the people of Israel clamored to have a king, just like the nations all around them; and, at God’s direction, Samuel agreed to their request, even though Samuel himself didn’t feel that instituting a monarchy in Israel was a wise

thing to do.

The first king of Israel, then, turned out to be a young man named Saul, a man chosen by God for the task, and presented to the Israelites as such by Samuel. The lectionary skips over a good portion of Saul's reign, however; so in today's reading, many years have passed. By this time in his reign, unfortunately, Saul has fallen out of favor with God, and God has decided to choose someone else to serve as Israel's king.

And so, God sends Samuel to Bethlehem to find and anoint this future king. Samuel isn't told ahead of time whom God has chosen, other than that he's one of the sons of a man named Jesse. Samuel has to do this act of anointing in secrecy, of course, because Saul would be justifiably upset to find out that Samuel was looking for someone to replace him. Saul's expectation would've been that he would remain king for the rest of his life, and that, when he died, one of his sons would succeed him. However, there is a higher authority in Israel than Saul: God; and it is at God's direction that Samuel goes to Bethlehem.

When Samuel then meets Jesse's firstborn son, Eliab, he figures that *he's* the one whom God has chosen. But God says to Samuel, *Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things that people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart* (1 Samuel 16.7).

This is a classic expression of the difference between God's point of view and a human being's point of view. I take it from this brief description that Eliab was a tall, robust young man, who, physically, at least, looked like an ideal candidate for king — someone whom people could literally “look up to”. But that didn't matter to God; what God wanted was someone with the right kind of “heart” — the right psychology and character traits, as we today would put it. In spite of his impressive appearance, then, Eliab apparently didn't have what God was looking for in that respect. So Samuel was told to keep on looking.

Finally, of course, Jesse's youngest son, who isn't even present at first, is sent for. He has been out in the fields, doing the menial task of tending his father's sheep. He turns out to be the one who meets God's requirements. So God tells Samuel, *Rise and anoint him; this is the one* (1 Samuel 16.12). Apparently, he wasn't the big strapping fellow that Eliab was, but it turns out that he wasn't bad-looking, either. The narrator says, *He was glowing with health, had beautiful eyes, and was handsome* (1 Samuel 16.12). His name? It's not until the final verse of today's reading that we're told his name — David.

Today's reading doesn't tell us what specific character traits God was looking for in a king of Israel, but David's character is revealed in the stories that follow in the First and Second Books of Samuel. For the most part, he's portrayed as being honorable and obedient to God, as well as being a capable soldier and military commander. That doesn't mean that he was without fault, of course; but on balance, he proved to be a better king of Israel than most of his descendants, according to the writers of First and Second Samuel and First and Second Kings. Centuries later, the people of Israel would look back on his reign as Israel's “Golden Age”. Not bad for little “Davy”, the baby of the family, the teenaged shepherd boy from Bethlehem — God's unex-

pected choice to be Israel's second king.

I should point out that this doesn't mean that David became king right away. Saul remained on Israel's throne for a number of years after that, despite having been rejected by God — as we'll see in our Old Testament readings in the next couple of weeks.

Again, the key point in today's reading is that God's point of view isn't always the same as that of human beings. God often sees things differently than we human beings do; and therefore the challenge for us as people of God is to learn to see things from God's point of view.

This theme comes up in today's reading from the Letters as well — in two places, in fact.

First, in defending himself against the criticisms of rival apostles, Paul writes, *We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than what is in the heart* (2 Corinthians 5.12). “What is seen” — that is, the outward appearance — versus “what is in the heart”: it's just about the same language that *God* uses in commenting on Eliab in today's Old Testament reading.

Apparently, there were rival apostles who were more charismatic and polished than Paul, who tried to convince the Corinthian congregation that Paul was a second-rate apostle, at best. This idea comes through later on in 2nd Corinthians. For example, in Chapter 11 of the same letter, Paul writes, *I do not think I am in the least inferior to those “super apostles”. I may not be a trained speaker, but I do have knowledge* (2 Corinthians 11.5-6). In today's reading, then, Paul emphasizes that what is important is “what is in [an apostle's] heart”, not the way an apostle comes across outwardly.

Paul's second reference to seeing things from God's point of view is found four verses later, where he writes, *From now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer* (2 Corinthians 5.16). Although Paul doesn't actually say that he now regards Jesus from God's point of view, that's clearly what he means.

What's the difference, then? To regard Jesus “from a worldly point of view” surely means to regard him as a religious troublemaker, who deserved what he got when he was put to death on the cross — which is probably how Paul saw him before his conversion experience on the road to Damascus. To regard Jesus from God's point of view, on the other hand, is to see his crucifixion as the event that inaugurates a whole new age — an age in which God offers human beings a whole new remedy for their sin: no longer endless sacrifices of animals, but instead the once-and-for-all sacrificial death of Jesus. To see Jesus from God's point of view is to believe that he truly was raised from death, and to trust that his resurrection holds out the promise that everyone who believes in him also will be raised from death — to eternal life. So, then, those who believe in Jesus — those who belong to him — become part of God's new creation, the new order that God is in the process of bringing into being.

The challenge for us as people of God, then, is to learn to see things from God's point of view, rather than from a typically human point of view — and then to act accordingly. As we reflect on this today, perhaps our focus should be on how we regard our fellow human beings, especially those who are different from us in some way — and on how the way in which we see them leads us to treat them.

The senseless and horrifying murder of four members of a Muslim family in London, Ont., last weekend has brought to light once again the xenophobic and racist attitudes that many people in our society continue to harbor and express. As one person commented in the media this past week, Canada is not the multi-cultural utopia that a lot of people like to think it is. The fact is that people of various racial, ethnic, and religious minorities continue to be persecuted by those who belong to the majority ethnic and cultural group, simply for being different — for having a different skin color, for speaking with a different accent, for dressing differently, and so on.

As Christians, we would do well to remember what God said to Samuel regarding Eliab: *The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart* (1 Samuel 16.7). In other words, what counts is not what people look like on the outside, but rather their character, their values, and the way they act. I'm reminded of Martin Luther King's famous "I have a dream" speech, in which he said that he had a dream that his children would one day live in a country in which they would be judged not "by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character".

Why is it that people in our country continue to make negative judgements about people who speak French, or who have dark skin, or who wear particular head coverings, or who are Indigenous? And why is it that they feel that such differences give them the right to treat such people rudely, unfairly, or harshly? It isn't right. To see people who are outwardly different from ourselves as inferior, or as unwelcome intruders, is not to see them from God's point of view. And to treat them badly is not the way God would want us to treat them. On the contrary, it's the worst kind of tribalism.

By all accounts, the people who were run down in London last Sunday were people of good character. On the other hand, the man who has been charged with murder and attempted murder in that incident reportedly has serious psychological problems.

Just a week ago, we were once again having to come to terms with the way Indigenous people in our country have been mistreated by white people. The announcement that the buried remains of some two hundred and fifteen children had been discovered on the grounds of a former Residential School in Kamloops sent shock waves across the country, reminding us again of a shameful chapter in our country's history. A decade or two after Confederation in 1867, our federal government came up with a strategy to forcibly assimilate Indigenous people into the majority culture by taking Indigenous children away from their families and communities, and putting them into residential schools. Ostensibly, they were given an education that would help them integrate into the majority culture. But in reality, they were subjected to all kinds of

abuse and deprivation because they were considered to be racially and culturally inferior. And to make matters worse, Christian churches — including our own Presbyterian Church in Canada — enthusiastically participated in this undertaking. In this case, too, it was a matter of looking at people from a human point of view, rather than from God’s point of view.

It’s an important truth that the way in which we see people determines the way we treat them. As people of God, it’s not just important but imperative that we see people from God’s point of view, and that we treat them accordingly — with courtesy, respect, fairness, kindness, and compassion.

HYMN: Come, let us sing of a wonderful love

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:

God of love and compassion:

As we worship you today, we acknowledge that your knowledge of the world, of human beings, and of each one of us is much greater than our own. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, then, enable us more and more to see the world, situations, and people from your point of view, so that we may also *act* in ways in which you would want us to act more readily. Enable us to care about the things that matter to you, rather than to simply share and reflect the attitudes of people around us. Enable us always to treat people with kindness, fairness, and compassion, no matter what they look like or where they come from. Enable us to understand situations thoroughly before making our judgements, rather than jumping to conclusions and making hasty judgements.

We pray for your church, that it may embody your values and principles more and more thoroughly, and that it may be content to have a servant role within society, rather than seeking to be dominant. We give thanks for the work of Presbyterian World Service and Development, and we pray that you would bless its efforts to help meet the needs of vulnerable people in Lebanon following last summer’s disastrous explosion in Beirut. May the assistance from PWS&D and other aid agencies make a positive difference in the lives of those who have lost their homes or workplaces.

We pray for members of our two congregations, our families, and our circles of friends who are dealing with difficulties of various kinds today, especially those whom we now name before you in silence: _____ . Gracious and compassionate God: You are the source of all strength, comfort, healing, and guidance, and we pray for your blessing on each one.

We give you thanks for the rain we have received in the past week, and we pray that we may have favorable weather throughout the rest of this growing season, so that crops may be abundant at harvest time, providing sufficient food for human beings and animals alike.

Hear our prayers also for the wider world. We pray in particular today for the relatives and friends of the Muslim family in London who were killed in that senseless and hateful hit-and-run attack last weekend, and especially for the nine-year-old boy who survived the attack. Grant him your strength and healing, that he may recover from both his physical injuries and the emotional trauma of losing his parents, sister, and grandmother in such a violent way. We give thanks for the outpouring of sympathy and support for the family and the entire Muslim community that has taken place, and we pray that it may help to counter the xenophobia that so many Muslims here in Canada experience. We pray that the irrational fear and hatred of Muslims may be further discredited, and that people who hold such attitudes may change their minds, and may come to accept the increasing diversity of our society. We pray also for the young man who has been charged with this terrible crime, that he may come to realize the seriousness of what he has done, and may be led to make amends in some way.

We pray about the ongoing conflict in Israel and Palestine. Now that outright fighting has stopped, we pray that there may be serious attempts to resolve the outstanding issues in constructive and non-violent ways.

And we continue to pray about the ongoing pandemic. Today we pray in particular for the well-being of COVID patients who have had to be moved to ICUs in Ontario and Saskatchewan. We pray that you would sustain them and their families while they are separated from each other; and we pray that the patients may soon be restored to health, and be able to return home. We give you thanks again for the availability and effectiveness of COVID vaccines, and pray that people may continue to get the shots they need. We pray also that you would bless the effort to make greater quantities of vaccine available to the citizens of the world's poorer countries, so that they also may benefit from the protection the vaccines provide. And we give you thanks for the financial assistance that our federal and provincial governments have been providing to individuals, businesses, charities, churches, and other organizations, in order to alleviate the financial hardships that the pandemic has been causing.

We thank you that you hear our prayers, gracious God, and we offer them up to you in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

OFFERING

DOXOLOGY: To the great One-in-Three ...

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:

Faithful and generous God:

We are grateful for the wisdom you impart to us through the scriptures and the work of the Holy Spirit. We are grateful that you call us to follow your ways rather than our own self-centered instincts. We are grateful for Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, which allows us to

be reconciled to you and adopted into your family. We are grateful for all the ways in which you provide for our needs and sustain us in times of difficulty.

In gratitude, then, we present our offerings to you as part of our service for you. Help us also to serve you by speaking the truth in love, and by treating our fellow human beings with fairness, kindness, and compassion.

We pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

HYMN: Lord, speak to me

COMMISSIONING AND BLESSING:

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

Go into the week ahead, now,

in peace,

and in the strength of the Holy Spirit,

to strive to look at the world from God's point of view,

and to act accordingly.

And may God bless you:

May he continue to guide and strengthen you in serving him,

and may he free you from worry and anxiety;

in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

CHORAL AMEN