

Alexandra Presbyterian Church

March 14, 2021

Fourth Sunday of Lent

Holy Communion

Minister: Rev. Stan Cox

Stephanie Burgoyne, music director

Kaitlin Vandertuin, soprano

GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER

PRELUDE

WE ARE CALLED TO WORSHIP

PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Our Father, we thank you that you are strength in our weakness. We praise you that though we cannot see you, you are present by your Holy Spirit to give us understanding, that we might know you in our hearts. We thank you that in a confusing and mixed-up world, your truth stands firm and clear.

As we worship you, please come among us by your Holy Spirit, that your truth will be as the fire of the sun, stirring life within our hardened lives, today, and every day. Amen

LORD'S PRAYER

*Our father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*

*For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.*

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

Jesus Christ is the righteous one. He speaks well of us before the Father. He covers our sins, and the sins of the whole world. Be assured that because of his shed blood, we are clean.

LENT LITURGY

The journey to Jerusalem is long.

This is a wilderness journey and we are not always comfortable. But we trust and we persevere.

We are pilgrims on a journey.

We are travelers on the road.

God's people are familiar with wilderness.

After Egypt, they wandered in hunger and thirst— confused and tired—waiting for the Promised Land.

Our destination is different.

We aim for Jerusalem—where it all ends— and where there will be new beginnings.

We are pilgrims on a journey.

We are travelers on the road.

Let us pray.

God of the wilderness, give us strength when we wander.

When we stray and grieve, hunger and thirst,

you have promised to make water spring up in the desert.

Quench our thirst. Feed us with manna.

Strengthen us when we are tired or lack trust.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Adapted from the original written by the Rev. Mary Whitson
"May the Lord bless the reading of His word to our hearts."

WE HEAR GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURES

Isaiah 64:1 – 8

Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down,
that the mountains would tremble before you!

As when fire sets twigs ablaze
and causes water to boil,

come down to make your name known to your enemies
and cause the nations to quake before you!

For when you did awesome things that we did not expect,
you came down, and the mountains trembled before you.

Since ancient times no one has heard,
no ear has perceived,

no eye has seen any God besides you,
who acts on behalf of those who wait for him.

You come to the help of those who gladly do right,
who remember your ways.

But when we continued to sin against them,
you were angry.

How then can we be saved?

All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;

we all shrivel up like a leaf,
and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

No one calls on your name
or strives to lay hold of you;

for you have hidden your face from us

and have given us over to our sins.
Yet you, Lord, are our Father.
We are the clay, you are the potter;
we are all the work of your hand.

Galatians 2:15 – 21

We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners; doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

SERMON

"The Walking Dead"

Have you seen any of the Mr. Bean videos? I laugh out loud at them, even though I've seen them often. In one sketch, he is sitting in the very front row at church, losing a battle with sleep. His head sags and his jaw drops. Then his head snaps back, only to droop again. In the background is the sound of the minister who drones on and on with unintelligible gibberish.

How many of us have been there and done that? Do you ever struggle with the fact that our Christianity can be flat, boring, and routine, that not a whole lot of stuff has changed in our lives and we can't seem to get a grip on it? Is it possible that one problem is that we're ignoring the central role that the cross of Jesus claims in each one of our lives?

In his personal testimony to the personally transforming power of God, Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

What are the results of a commitment to be crucified with Christ? Result number one seems like a statement of the obvious. Namely, one result of being crucified with Christ is that I no longer live. Say what?

No, it's not masochism.

It's a graphic metaphor that says, "The toxic things that used to drive my life are dead. The push for prestige is dead. The love of juicy gossip is dead. The breathless pursuit of money is dead." That controlling desire for the approval of others has shrivelled.

You see, people who lived in Paul's day understood the dynamics of crucifixion. We don't. We see it as an architectural feature, a tattoo, or a stylish accessory. We sing about it in our hymns.

But, outside of Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, how many of us have witnessed firsthand a crucifixion? I sure haven't. But Paul did. It was a common practice in that day. Criminals didn't die in capital punishment like they do today in some Western democracies. Today, it's done behind locked doors, monitored by official witnesses. Where capital punishment is carried out today, it's done discreetly, usually by the injection of lethal chemicals. Then, it was a gory, bloody

business, done in open, public places. Crowds would gather and jeer to watch these criminals writhe in their abject nakedness.

It was not unlike what happened in France where criminals were guillotined. Was it Madame Defarge in the Tale of Two Cities, who would sit at the base of the guillotine and knit, while she watched the severed heads tumble to the ground? It was like hangings in our own country in the early days, when people would come and crowd around the gallows. When the trap was sprung, the rope went taut, and the feet would dangle, slowly twisting. Then the festive howls would rise from the crowd who were glad to be entertained.

It was like that in Paul's day. He knew that crucifixions were brutal, bloody and final. Paul says that when he identified with the crucified Jesus, it was the determining reality in his life. His self-centred dreams and self-centred desires were pronounced DOA at the foot of the cross. And when we today identify with Jesus, the delicious satisfaction that we get when somebody is slandered, - dead. Not only the struggle with that stuff, but some other stuff is dead that we bid good riddance to. Shame is dead. Guilt is dead. My insecurities are dead. All the stuff I struggle with in this "me" is dead, done, finished. And that's the first result of a life that has shared in the crucifixion of Christ.

The second result means that we're not just big zeroes and just zombies, losers lying around the kingdom. There's been a transaction that's happened here. I have died, but that's not the end of it. I live. Christ lives in me. So instead of expressing the upsides and the down sides of it, he says, "Christ lives in me." Now filling my existence is not only the person of Christ, but all that He brings. When Christ lives in me, what drives me is love for people, a commitment to mercy and grace. What increasingly controls us is confidence in God and courage in His power. We grow into love for tolerance, compassion, righteousness, openness to those who are different. Our hearts warm to welcome strangers. Desire grows to serve, be generous and to love of justice. All that Christ is, - that now shapes me. So to be crucified with Christ means that all of me is dead. And now, secondly, all of me is alive. The risen Lord, by His Holy Spirit, inhabits the totality of my being.

Then Paul goes on to say, "Do you want to know something about that life that I'm living now?" This is a pivotal moment in the text. "The life that I *now* live." The assumption is that I'm living a different life than I used to live. It's kind of like if you trade in cars, you say "the car that I *now* drive." It's not "the car that I used to drive."

Sure, it's true that there will be times when will come right up to the edge of gossip or slander or saying some things we shouldn't say. But then, the light comes on: "Oh, that's dead-people talk." It's dead-people talk. We think thoughts and let them linger in our heads, and it's dead people's thinking. We still want to harbour hate and bitterness, but they're dead people's attitudes. We pump up old racial stereotypes about Middle Eastern or Pakistani or Native people or the much-reviled Americans, - that's cadaver stuff. We go on and on with that kind of a list. You can make your own list. But Paul says, "The life that I now live." This is new. This is fresh. This is different.

What is the way forward? The way forward first of all is to turn our view to the cross. We see Christ on the cross. God came to our world and was crucified, as though He had done terrible criminal acts. He was the perfect God. He was innocent, the perfect Christ.

Christ did die as a criminal, but when he did, He bore the deadly acts of my life.

The Good News is that the cross is the place where those acts were dealt with. Before God even my best stuff is like filthy rags, as Isaiah said. So I agree with God about that assessment.

What fills the void? Christ begins to live through me. So I'm driving down the 403, and some bozo cuts me off. But the energy for road rage is dead. My old response is dead. Now Christ - His patience, His mercy, His grace, His sense of understanding and tolerance - begins to flow out through my life. It's a process. It may not always prevail. But I'll grow so that the life of Christ gets more and more of

the air time in my life. So today, how would it be if all of us would let the wounded, sour, full-of-regret-and-remorse past be dead on the cross?

How would it be if only the life of Jesus Christ were to resonate through our beings on Monday morning at work, on Thursday evening at the dinner table, on Saturday afternoon in our time of relaxation?

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

DOXOLOGY

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.

HYMN

The Old Rugged Cross

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

In silence take some time to express to God what you think of God's character. Though you may have questions and even doubts, tell God in the quiet of your heart your appreciation for his reliability, his holiness, his mercy, his truthfulness, his faithful presence.

Now, in silence and in honesty, tell God about the sins that you know have stained your life this week: the impatience, the envy, the greed, the hardness of heart, and other sins that you know that God knows.

If there are events, people and circumstances in your life that seem unfair and troubling, take these moments to lament them before God. If you are angry and disappointed with God, say it in his presence. He will not be startled or offended.

Now in these quiet moments, say thanks to God for his mercy, his provision, his forgiveness. Thank God for sustaining you in times of great loss. Thank him, too, for his provision of at least glimpses of victory and joy.

Now, express to God the longings of your heart for your family, for your job, for your health, for others whom you love. Call out to God in your silent thoughts for wisdom and clarity of vision for the leaders of our world who courageously stare down tyrants. Pray for the victims of tyranny and cruelty the world over. Ask God that our own hearts would be peaceable and courageous with those who are close to us.

Finally, breathe in God's presence the secret prayers of our hearts. All these expressions of adoration, confession, lament, thanksgiving and requests, we bring to our loving and holy God in the name of the crucified and risen Saviour, Jesus Christ.

HYMN 231

When I survey the wondrous Cross

*** BENEDICTION**

For surely I know the plans I have for you,
plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.
May the peace of god be yours.

*** CHORAL AMEN**

POSTLUDE



In Our Prayers:

Edith Cowper
Bruce Wheatley