

# Alexandra Presbyterian Church

March 21, 2021

## Fifth Sunday of Lent

**Minister: Rev. Stan Cox**

Stephanie Burgoyne, music director

Kaitlin Vandertuin, soprano

### GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER

**PRELUDE**

"Jesus Name of Wondrous Love"

L. Peeters

### WE ARE CALLED TO WORSHIP

God has called us to be members of the Body of Christ.

**Lord, help us to be devoted to one another.**

God has called us to be citizens together in His kingdom.

**Lord, help us to learn to be kind and compassionate toward each other,  
help us to encourage one another.**

For such a time as this, God has called us brothers and sisters that we might come together in worship and service for our King of kings and Lord of lords. Welcome to his throne of grace, where we may shine like stars for His glory.

**HYMN 366**

Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts

#### \* PRAYERS OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

God of grace, you have promised that where two or three of us are gathered in the name of Jesus, he would be among us, and our prayer would be heard. Some come into your presence with a light step and a song of victory. Others are here with broken hearts and aching questions. In sadness and in joy, may your name be praised, from the rising of the sun to its setting, for we offer ourselves to you in worship in the name of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, who taught us, when we pray:

#### \* 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

### LENT LITURGY

We are closer to the events in Jerusalem every day.

**We are pilgrims on a journey.**

**We are travelers on the road.**

When your people were slaves, you led the faithful through the waters and set them free. But we struggle with the freedom you give us.

**We are pilgrims on a journey.**

**We are travelers on the road.**

Always you reach out to us. Yet so often we have ignored your open arms and fled from your grace and freedom—and our responsibility.

**P: We are pilgrims on a journey.**

**We are travelers on the road.**

Let us pray.

**Loving God, you have loved us beyond all measure,  
but we continue to look for life outside of your embrace.**

**On this journey, remind us that true freedom comes  
in obedience to you and following where you lead.**

**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

Philippians 4:4-11

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

Galatians 2:19, 20

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.

Luke 23:26-46

As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"

For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." [c] And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is God's Messiah, the Chosen One." The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar and said, "If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself." There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the Jews

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong."

Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.

## SERMON

### "Were You There?"

The last time I went to a hockey game with the kids, we all mostly stood up for "O Canada," - sort of. I belted out the first two words. But It was obvious that nobody else was singing. The kids looked embarrassed and pretended that they weren't with me. So I shut up. How many of people actually sing the National Anthem when you go to sports events? Where else besides in church any more do we sing in a group?

COVID protocols keep us from singing out loud here. But still, we're blessed to have Kaitlin sing the words as we follow them on the screen. But, is it possible that sometimes, these songs become just words that we've grown accustomed to? Or maybe they are words and tunes that are very strange to us. When we're thinking of the cross of Jesus Christ, these Sundays - that song "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?" comes to mind. It's a haunting treasure given to us by the black community. So today let this melody take us back in history to a crude cross of rough timbers, where a man named Jesus died.

The crucifixion is just not a moment of history that marks the landscape of mankind. It's that, but it's much more.

It is just not a statement of theology, the atonement, the redemption, the covering of the shame of our sins. It's that, but it's much more.

It's just not symbolic of mercy, grace, justice, and love. It's that, but it's much more. The Cross of Jesus is all that and much more.

Paul keeps reaffirming this. He says, "For me to live is \_\_\_\_ ." How would you fill in that blank? Would you say; for me to live is to graduate this June? For me to live is to get married in August? For me to live is to get that job? For me to live is to be able to drive? For me to live is finally to get out of that marriage that is killing me? For me to live is to get out from under this fog of COVID? For me to live is to get rid of this chronic disease that is wrecking my life?

For me to live is... how would you fill that in? If you're crucified with Christ, then you have no other option than to say what Paul said: "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

But aren't there times when we get that formula mixed up? Don't we often say, "For me to live is gain. For me to live is to fulfil my dreams, to fulfil my desires, to fulfil my plans. And to die? Oh yeah, that's when the curtain comes down. Maybe then I'll be with Christ."

No. The life that has been to the cross has the joy of only one answer: "For me to live is Christ." In Philippians 3 he goes through the list of all of his credentials. What a resume that would be for a job seeker! Do you remember that list? Here's a portfolio that anybody would hire. After going through all of his credentials, all of that "I," that "me" stuff, he says, "I count it all but ... farmers would immediately recognize this word ... . The translators kind of clean up his language, and use the English word "rubbish." " ... I consider all just so much - *er, uh - the real word means dung*, or more exactly a street-slang four-letter version of that word. By comparison to the life of pursuing Christ, all the glitz, the academic and career ambitions, the accomplishments that make people ooh and aah, the pride of nationalism, and racial pride -- it's all - well - "BS." What takes its place? "And to know Him and the fellowship of His sufferings and the power of His resurrection, That somehow I might attain to the prize..." That's what takes its place. And it was the cross that did that for him. He could say, "From now on, all this stuff that preoccupies me and drives me to selfishness, - it's crucified with Christ."

How does all this work out in our lives? All of it works out by this: "Christ lives in me, and the life that I now live is a brand-new thing. The life that I now live," the text says, "I live by faith in the Lord, who loved me and gave Himself for me." I know that this is a hard truth to get our hearts around, so let's do a little unwrapping.

One Sunday at Paris, I had a nagging bronchitis that reached out and grabbed me by the throat every time I tried to talk. I'm sure some were pulling for the bronchitis, so maybe we could get out early and go home. Others were pulling for me. One woman graciously got out of her pew and handed me a pack of "Fisherman's Friend." I'm glad the package was not childproof. But I finally had to get that lozenge out of the wrapper and into my mouth to make it effective in my life.

It's the same way in this text. So if you are dead and Christ lives in you, then how does that finally work itself out? Paul tells us. It's by faith in the Christ who lives in you. You see, it is trust in the reliability of what God has done, trust that triggers the actuality of Him being alive in me. What is faith? To have faith is to trust. To have faith is the willingness to surrender control to God. Scary, isn't it? Faith is to throw ourselves completely on someone else. Faith is submission. Faith is dependency. In Scripture, faith is trust.

I come to a crossroads of life and someone has deeply offended me, said that thing about me, or betrayed me. At that crossroads I have to stop, look at Christ, and say, "What does a dead person do in a moment like this? What does a life do that's full of You?" And He says, "Forgive." I say, "I can't. I'm too vulnerable. I could never protect myself. They might do it again. And I'll look like a sucker." But He says, "Forgive." And by faith, even though I don't understand it all, and even though I'm scared to death to do it, by faith, because I trust Him, because I depend on Him, because I will submit to Him, I forgive. And this Christ that is in me becomes expressed through me.

Somebody says, "My husband betrayed me! He lied to me! He cheated! I can't trust anybody anymore!" We may not be able always to trust each other. But I want to tell you this right now: you can always trust Christ. The life that He works to produce through your life is an echo of what He said when He said, "I have come to give you life, and to give it to you more abundantly." You say, "How do I know I can trust Christ?" Read what Paul says. It is by faith in this One who loved me all the way to the cross, then died for me. You can always trust somebody who really cares for you. And Jesus really cares for you.

Dead things don't need to rise in your life. You've been crucified with Him, and now He lives. When He calls the shots, my life is transformed. And now I have a life that I live, because I was crucified with Him.

We're going to sing this question: "Were you there?" The question is not only *were* we there, but *are* we there every day? In every situation, every decision of our lives, we are there. Because as we've learned from Galatians 2:20, we are continually crucified with Christ, so that the only thing that lives in me and through me is the reality of the character, activity, and attitudes of Jesus Christ. If the cross is to make a difference in our lives, then by the Holy Spirit's gracious power, we manage our lives in such a way that the only thing people ever see and experience from us is the reality of the living Christ in us and through us.

**HYMN 233**

Were You There? (vs 1-3)

## **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.

### **PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

Do you have doubts? God invites you to bring them to him in prayer.  
Have you been wounded? Bring your hurts here.  
Are you flying high with the joy of success? Bring your triumph with you.  
Have you failed miserably? Bring that failure with you, and come into his presence.  
The awesome presence of Christ right here with us as we are.  
Come, receive again all that we need in our Lord Jesus Christ, Crucified for us; buried in our grave;  
Risen alive and strong; among us as people who have come together; and coming again to make a new heaven and a new earth.

**HYMN 233**

Were You There? (vs 4-6)

**\* BENEDICTION**

**\* CHORAL AMEN**

**POSTLUDE**



**In Our Prayers:**

Edith Cowper  
Bruce Wheatley