

WESTMINSTER CHURCH
THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN CANADA
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6A 3B5
“Trusting God, nurturing disciples for Christ,
being empowered by the Holy Spirit”

April 25th, 2021
Fourth Sunday of Easter

...We Gather to Worship God...

Call to Worship (based on Zechariah 9:9-12):

Come and celebrate, people of God!

Sing and shout your praise!

For our God comes to us: triumphant and victorious, yet gentle and humble of heart.

He comes bringing peace, offering hope and freedom to all who despair.

Let's worship God together!

Hymn: The King of love my Shepherd is

Prayer

Gentle...yet powerful. Lowly...yet almighty. Shepherd...yet King.

In Your gentleness, guide us.

In Your power, strengthen us.

In Your lowliness, strip from us our selfish pride which only destroys us.

In Your greatness, lift us up that we might aspire to greater things.

As a shepherd, call us to be Your servants.

As a King, call us to be Your royal priesthood.

O God, who is our shepherd and our King;

O Christ, who was crucified and is now risen from the dead;

O Spirit, who comforts and empowers;

O great One in Three, Holy Trinity, this hour, set us free to worship. Amen.

...We Listen to God's Word...

Word of God:

Old Testament: Psalm 23

New Testament: John 10: 11-18, Acts 4: 5-22

Hymn: There is a Redeemer - 358

Message: An Act of Kindness

There was a video on Fb this week showing a three year old girl leading a blind veteran of WW I, I think, around the grounds of an institution/hospital of some sort. Her dad was the owner of the facility, I believe and this was her home. Being three, she talked to everyone and the apparently all the vets talked to her as well. Many of them hated to admit that they were lost but they could say that to a three year old and she would lead them to where they wanted to be. It was a very cute and it was on Fb to highlight her kindness to these men. Apparently, she received many toys and dolls as gifts for her kindness and is still remembered for this.

This morning we are going to be looking at kindness because I keep hearing that it is in short supply these days and because the word showed up in a reading where I did not expect it. Because I was surprised at its placement, I decided to focus on this word this morning. I also think that it fits with the after Easter themes of trust, forgiveness and reconciliation. Kindness is there as well.

So this morning, the lectionary included two readings about God being our Good Shepherd and this event in Acts with Peter and John speaking in front of the religious leaders of their day. It is not difficult to find kindness in the first two readings.

Who among you does not like the twenty third psalm? The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want. I wonder sometimes if I like it simply because I grew up with green pastures. I sometimes wonder if it will fall out of favour when most of our people dwell in towns and cities. I hope not. It is a lovely psalm whether I know much about sheep or not. What stands out in this psalm is the shepherd's care and kindness. The needs of the sheep are simple and all the sheep's needs are provided by the shepherd.

We move into the gospel reading from the book of John where Jesus speaks about being the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd knows his sheep. Because he knows his sheep, he will look after all of their needs with care and kindness which might not happen with hired help. There are many other topics brought up in this passage but this morning I simply want you to see the extent of the care of the Good Shepherd. He will even lay down his life for the sheep. But this will not be the end. The Good Shepherd is also able to take up his life and continue on after death. 1 John continues on this theme saying that we know how much the triune God loves us because Jesus laid down his life for us. This love is intimately connected to great concern, care and

kindness.

Now you might be wondering why I am emphasizing care and kindness when there appears to be bigger topics and theological themes in these passages. I am emphasizing this theme because I have been challenged recently to look at the beginning stories of the Book of Acts and see how the kindness of the Christians was a large part of their witness to the community. Though these disciples are sheep, they try to model themselves after the Good Shepherd in the way that they love God and love their neighbour.

So this takes us to the fourth chapter of Acts where Peter and John have been detained and brought before the scribes, elders and high priest because they are using Jesus' name as if He were alive. I have often been told that Peter is so bold in Acts. The Holy Spirit gave him courage to speak boldly and say what needed to be said. Peter says exactly what needs to be said.

When this passage is described in that way, I want to be able to speak that way. With the right words at the right time. Usually I blunder through and later think about what I could have said. I think of the words that I think I should have used. I know that if I had used them it would have been a mic drop moment! The tic toc event! I can see the video going viral. We are told that we live for those moments, right? I want that kind of power from the Holy Spirit!

However, when I looked at this passage again and at this particular speech, I see someone who is bold in a respectful and polite way. The bold words are not about himself but point to the act of kindness and the source of this power.

Here are the words that stand out for me. "Rulers and elders of the people. If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: it is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed ... Healing is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to humanity by which we can be healed." Maybe this is not a mic drop ending but simply a statement of fact. Everyone knows that God heals. There have been many descriptions of demons and demonic possession and none of those stories included healing and order, only chaos and violence. The religious leaders could not argue that the healing came from any other source other than God. They also could not argue with the fact that it was an act of kindness.

The leaders may not have been swayed by these words but many people came to believe that Jesus was still alive because of the kind act of healing the man. We like to think that the Holy Spirit provides us with boldness and courage. These have power and strength. Kindness. What kind of strength does kindness have?

I have always remembered Brian Stewart's convocation speech delivered to Knox College graduates in about 2007. He spoke about Christian kindness and how that was what the Holy Spirit used to lure him into being a Christian. You might remember that Brian Stewart was a CBC journalist who moved all over the world to cover war zones, disasters and atrocities. He was very good at his job. He and his camera man would get to where ever they needed to be very quickly and efficiently. They also noticed that no matter where they went and what disaster that there was, Christians were always already there working at making order out of the chaos that was, helping to alleviate suffering. The task would look absolutely impossible and there they would be starting to clean things up. It was to the point that his camera man said to him "is there anywhere where the Christians will not be there first?!?" There never was. Brian said that the Christian aid workers had a self-confidence that was striking because it came from a spiritual place. They had resilience that many journalists did not possess as they walked into the disaster and started caring for the people and organizing the chaos.

The aid workers were active in so many thankless areas with no notice of media, or publicity and they continued on being kind in bringing healing to the situation. Brian noted that he and his camera man never reported on this either. They did not know what to do with view of a disaster. However, he said as he acknowledged these Christians more in his life, he began to see disasters differently. Though he would still see the worst that there was to see, something would point him to see the best of humanity. This was not overtaken by the disaster and chaos.

For Brian there was great strength in this compassion and kindness and he eventually decided that he wanted to be part of it. This witness brought him to Christ.

This has made me rethink some of the sermons and situations of my career. I remember one funeral where I was asked to speak on specific passages which were very different from the ones I usually used. I remember not being sure of what I should say but I put something together. I remember the passage was 'the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed'. Now I know that I could have decided to use what I was used to using but as a kindness to the family I chose to use the passage that they

gave to me. I mostly remember this event because after the funeral and the committal, a gentleman came up to me and said to me ‘you actually believe the words that you said’. I told him that I did. We did not have the opportunity to pursue this conversation but I realized that the Holy Spirit had taken my words in which I was not particularly confident about and had them speak to someone very specifically. I wish I could say that it was one of those powerful, confident sermons that had garnered such a response but it was not. It was not. It was words created out of a kindness to a family

We are living in a time when kindness is not valued very much. Our youngest son said that our oldest son would like us to travel out to British Columbia and see him in the summer if that is possible. I noted that the borders might not be open. John noted that people are scratching the paint on the cars with Ontario plates in the west. I can see in comments through facebook that there is still a great deal of anger being expressed. I am not sure that the topic particularly matters. I know that this happens whether the group is about comedy or is about Christianity.

I was looking through some articles for this sermon and I was on a page put together by Paethos. It is a digital Christian journal that I am directed to for information once in a while. This time as I was reading this article about Peter and John in Acts, my eye caught the ads for other articles in their digital space. “Son of Shaking Head Prophetess admits mom only does that in front of crowds” “Jesus and Violent Nationalism” “Abuse in the church. Why leaders fail.” These titles were clearly click bait. These titles were created so that those who found themselves on one page of Paethos might go to other articles. I am not sure that any of these titles are for the edification of the Christian believer. The titles are certainly not worded in any kind way.

Peter and John find themselves addressing the rulers, elders, scribes and high priest because they have done this act of kindness, this healing of a lame person. Preaching and teaching was getting them noticed but it was this healing act - this kindness - that gains the attention. Many people who witnessed the event or heard about it believed that Jesus was still alive and was now among them. They were drawn into this beautiful event. We live in times that we are being challenged to be kind. As Christians, may we remember that we have a source of kindness that is beyond our own and has a power that is stronger than anything we could do or imagine. May you find the Holy Spirit with you as you attempt to live in kindness this week.

...We Respond in Service...

Collection & Dedication

Let us present to God our tithes and offerings.

(At this time Session would like to encourage the congregation to consider several ways to continue your contributions to Westminster Church. If you are already on PAR (Pre-Authorized Remittance) we thank you for your continued support. You may use the regular mail. You may use the Brock Street mail slot and drop it off if you are passing by (cheques only please). You may use e-transfer to office@westminsterchurch.ca. You may prayerfully consider joining PAR. We thank you for your continued prayerful and monetary support of our mission at Westminster.)

Prayers of the People:

O Lord, our Shepherding God, come close to us now
Come near us in our time of need.

Shepherding God,

We need you in our time of anxiety.

We need you in our time of economic uncertainty.

We need you in a time of a globe-trotting disease.

We need you to bind our wounds, and pour your healing ointment on our heads.

We need the briars, and brambles, and burrs pulled out of our fleece and skin.

Shepherding God, you guide us with your voice, help us to listen and follow no matter where your voice leads. Help us to trust you.

Shepherding God, protect us from the hired hands that do not really care for us and have neglected or abused us in the past.

Shepherding God, thank you for your son who lay down his life for those who follow him

and for those who are not in the fold yet..

Lord we pray for those who don't know the shepherd, whose life circumstances kept them from knowing the good shepherd. We pray that by our actions, our behaviour, and our reaching out into the community, they may come to know you.

Shepherding God, renew us, guide us with your love and renew us with your peace.

Amen

Hymn: Love Divine, All Loves excelling - 371

Benediction

Benediction St. Columba

My dearest Lord.

Be Thou a bright flame before me.

Be Thou a guiding star above me.

Be Thou a smooth path beneath me.

Be Thou a kindly shepherd behind me.

Today and evermore.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Some of you may have seen the call from Attawapiskat for children's clothes from ages 0-6 years. Since the Bargain Box has an abundance of clothes in these sizes, Westminster will be shipping two 11lb boxes to Attawapiskat.

The King of Love my shepherd is

1 The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never.
I nothing lack if I am his,
and he is mine forever.

2 Where streams of living water flow,
my ransomed soul he leadeth;
and where the verdant pastures grow,
with food celestial feedeth.

3 Perverse and foolish, oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me;
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home, rejoicing, brought me.

4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill,
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

5 Thou spreadst a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and oh, what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

6 And so through all the length of days,
thy goodness faileth never;
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house forever.
United Methodist Hymnal, 1989

There is a Redeemer

There is a redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Holy One

Jesus my redeemer
Name above all names
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Oh, for sinners slain

Thank you, oh my father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done

When I stand in Glory
I will see His face
And there I'll serve my King forever
In that Holy Place

Thank you, oh my father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done

Love divine, all loves excelling

1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav'n, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art.
Visit us with thy salvation;
enter ev'ry trembling heart.

2 Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into ev'ry troubled breast.
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be.
End of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

3 Come, Almighty, to deliver,
let us all thy life receive.
Suddenly return, and never,
nevermore they temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

4 Finish, then, thy new creation;
true and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.