

**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”**

**July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022**

**Fifth Sunday After Pentecost**

**...We Gather to Worship God...**

**Responsive Call to Worship:** Based on Psalm 30

**Come, exalt the Lord who lifted you out of the depths.**

**Come, exalt the Lord who listened when you called for help and healed you.**

**Come, sing praises to the Lord, you faithful people. For His anger lasts only a moment but his favour lasts a life. Weeping may stay for the night but rejoicing comes in the morning.**

**Let us worship God.**

**Announcements:** We are glad you are with us today and welcome your online voices joining with us.

**Birthday Train:** We have many birthdays this week! Emily Michaud's was on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, Eunice McEwen and Michael Edwards on July 5<sup>th</sup>, Shelby Deubel on July 6<sup>th</sup>, Warren Hull on July 7<sup>th</sup>, and Claude Daoust on July 8<sup>th</sup>. We pray that everyone will be blessed and have a special time on their birthday.

**Offerings and Tithes:** Our Session would like to encourage our members and friends to prayerfully consider your contributions to our ongoing ministry here at Westminster. Contributions may be made in person, by mail, or by e-transfer to [office@westminsterchurch.ca](mailto:office@westminsterchurch.ca). We thank you for your continued support and prayers.

**Hymn:** All Creatures of Our God and King - 433

**Opening Prayer**

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. We come convinced of many things but trusting very few.

Holy God of limitless surprises, meet us here in this place as we touch that which we cannot see that which we have not dared to hope.

For You have given us a world of beauty, and we have spoilt it.

You have given us a world to feed us, and so many go hungry. You have given us a world of riches, and we are unwilling to share.

You have given us a world to care for, and we think only of ourselves.

Forgive us, gracious God, every time your heart is saddened by our selfishness, every time we have no thought for others, no cares but ours.

Enable us to see this world as a gift from you that can be shared with everyone who lives in it.

We ask this that your name may be glorified, through the beauty of this world, and the service of our lives.

Hear us as we pray as your Son taught us to pray, saying: Our Father, ... (The Lord's Prayer)

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

### **Word of God:**

**Old Testament: 2 Kings 5: 1-14, Psalm 30**

**New Testament: Luke 10: 21-24**

### **Hymn: When morning gilds the skies - 438**

### **Message:**

This is the first of the summer services. We have already been away for a few days visiting relatives and family so it feels like summer is well started. When I think of summer, I think of graduations, weddings, birthdays, and social time. Much love shared and many gifts exchanged. Wonderful times being spent together and sharing gifts is part of that.

Gifts. This morning, we will be looking at the story of healing of Captain Naaman of the Syrian army and gifts. This is a fairly large story and many things are happening but I have decided that this morning I will be focusing on the gifts that were given in this passage of scripture.

I want you to think about the gifts that you have been given or received. Has there ever been a gift that was just too large, too generous, too overwhelming to accept? Did you ever accept a gift that you knew that you could never return in kind?

I want to start by telling you about a novel I read a year ago, again to be truthful, called Under Heaven, written by Guy Gavriel Kay who is a Toronto writer of fantasy fiction. In this particular novel, the story opens with a young man who is burying the dead at a battle site in honour of his

father. He is not able to sort who is his people and who are the others. He simply digs graves and buries the bones. He does this to keep himself active while he is mourning the death of his father. This work becomes seen as a gift - not to his own people but to the neighbouring people who were the others in the battle. In return for burying these people, this man was given a gift. A huge gift. So generous that he could not turn it down without offending the giver. So large that if he accepted it, he would be seen as vying for leadership and power in his own city state. This was not what he wanted or expected to happen. A really interesting tale about an oversized gift.

This got me wondering if the gift that Naaman brought to the king of Israel was of that size. It is a detail of the story that seems to be overlooked but keeps being mentioned as the story continues. Certainly, the king of Israel reacts quite dramatically when Naaman arrives with his entourage, gifts and letter from his king, the king of Aram. Naaman comes to request a healing from his leprosy and the king of Israel thinks that Naaman is trying to create tension and a fight. Naaman's gift is too large. Too big to accept. If the king of Israel accepts this large gift then he would need to honour Naaman with something as large in return. This is an honour culture. This was what was expected. You know - I invite you for dinner and then you invite me. It all works as long as someone's dinner does not become too expensive that it cannot be returned in kind. Right? The king of Israel knows that if he accepts the wonderful gift that is offered, there would have to be a miracle offered. It was that big. He felt that he had nothing of this size to give in return.

Fortunately for the king of Israel, Elisha comes to his rescue. Why the king of Israel did not think to ask for him is telling. Note that the king of Israel is not even named. He does not get much honour in this story. Even the slave girl who was taken from Israel and worked as a servant to Naaman's wife knew about Elisha the prophet and his miracles. This king is only sure of one thing. He is not God! Elisha also knows that the king is not God nor is he, God. He is however the man of God or the prophet of God and believes strongly that God will be able to give Naaman what he is wanting. Healing from his leprosy.

So the king of Israel informs Naaman that Naaman needs to go see the prophet of Israel. So he, his gifts and all of his entourage arrive at the doorstep of Elisha. That must have been quite a sight. It would be one thing to arrive at a king's palace with this entourage and quite another to go to the prophet's door. I am sure that Naaman and his horses and chariots hardly fit in the street to get to this door. I think we are to be amused at this picture that is being created of Naaman meeting Elisha. And can you image, after Naaman getting to Elisha's door in all of its awkwardness, Elisha only sends a message through a messenger. Then Naaman is offered a simple healing.

It takes Naaman a little to get his head around what has been offered. His servants have to encourage him to do this simple task of washing in the Jordan river. Once he does, he is healed. So back everyone goes to Elisha's house to offer this gift that keeps getting carried around.

It is interesting to note that Naaman is in awe of what has happened. He is praising the God of Israel as the one true God. He offers Elisha the gift but Elisha will not take it.

This is a large gift. This is an honourable gift. And Elisha will not accept it. Why?

If the gift was accepted, it would mean that Naaman and God were on some sort of equal footing. Like the king of Aram and the king of Israel. The gift of healing was given and the gifts of power by Naaman were offered.

I remember reading Miroslav Volf's book "Free of Charge: Giving and forgiving in a culture striped of grace". In this book, he writes about people's needs to make a bargain with God. We no longer come with gifts like Naaman. We try to strike a bargain. Volf examines this bargain making and finds it wanting. After all, a bargain is based on the one person needing or wanting something that I have and making an agreed price. Now I can stick to my end of the bargain, when I make one with God - I will attend church, I will give so much money to this charity, I will treat this person or people properly - but is this really a bargain? Do we believe that the miracle for which we asked was worth this much? Did God really need what we had for the bargain?

Elisha makes a statement about God by not accepting the gift. The miracle was not for sale or part of a gift exchange. The healing of Naaman's skin was simply that. A gracious gift from God. Naaman understands what Elisha is communicating by not accepting the gift he has brought. Naaman has nothing that could repay or equal the gift that has been given to him. So Naaman makes the only proper and possible response. He worships God and God only. God has given Naaman an incredible gift and Naaman worships the God of Israel for the rest of his life.

What other response can we have when we have been given a gift from God? I think sometimes we sort of expect God to do something. We are often told that if we pray properly or act properly or give properly then God will honour us with gifts and miracles. We expect it! As we expect many things in our culture.

You see, the wonderful thing about Naaman was that he came with a large gift and a little hope that God might look beyond His people to heal him, a captain of the Aramean army. After all, his servant girl said it was possible and his king encouraged him to try. What more endorsement could he want? I am not sure that Naaman, for all of his bravado, really expected to be healed. He would have understood if the God of Israel had said no to the captain of Aram who worshiped Rimmon. There is so much opportunity in this story for God or the king or the prophet to say "Go ask your own God for this miracle." I think that Naaman came to Israel with such a generous gift because he did not really believe that he would be using it. The gift was ready if necessary but if not necessary, he could take it home again.

Naaman encounters the wonderful generosity of God. He is healed. There are no conditions. There is no price. Naaman responds in the only way that he knows - with a life time of worship. I want this story to make us think about the gifts that God has given to us. Name those gifts. Dwell on those gifts for a little. Then praise God for all the wonderful gifts that He has given to you.

## **...We Respond in Service...**

### **Prayers of the People:**

Lord Jesus Christ, you tell us not to be afraid of what the future holds, not to worry about tomorrow, but you know how difficult we find it to heed your words. For we worry about so many things, our families, our friends, our circumstances, some worries big worries, most worries tiny niggles. We come before you this day with these big and tiny worries, and with confidence we know we can lay them all at your feet. For we know that when we have worries, we are unable to see your gifts.

We bring our big worries about health and happiness and security for ourselves and for our loved ones. We bring big worries about the world we live in and its future existence as we continue to fail to address so many ecological problems. We bring big worries about the way people in our world are treated as less than human, exploited, tortured, helpless and abused.

Father God, we know that you are concerned with every aspect of our lives, so we also bring the little things that concern us, the worries which keep us awake at night, the worries which only you know.

Living God, reach out to all those for whom the future brings fears and uncertainties. Assure them that you are with them, even when that future seems dark and circumstances feel like they are spiraling out of control. Remind them that you are able to transform even the bleakest of situations, bring healing and wholeness.

Lord we make our prayers in faith, for we know that your Spirit is at work in our world making all things new. Amen

**Hymn: Morning has broken - 814**

**Benediction**

## Prayers - Wednesday June 29, 2022

*Mark 11: 24 Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours.*

### **Praise Reports**

This was graduation week. Michael Ferlaino, Sam Serre, Wany (Reuben) Mawau Ruathdel - with honours, and Tuti Puol graduated with their Grade Twelve certificate. May this open doors for them for many new endeavors.

**Birthdays** - So many because we are a week behind. Sharon Selkirk was June 30<sup>th</sup>, Linda Buchan and Beth St.Onge on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Emily Michaud on July 2<sup>nd</sup>. Eunice McEwen and Michael Edwards on July 5<sup>th</sup>. Shelby Deubel on July 6<sup>th</sup>. Warren Hull on July 7<sup>th</sup>. Claude Daoust on July 8<sup>th</sup>..

### **Prayers**

Lord we are mindful of the ongoing tragedy and horror of the war in the Ukraine that just seems to continue on each day. Lord we pray for the people who have left the Ukraine and watch from a distance and wait to hear news of loved ones. We pray for those who have stayed and hear shelling every day. Lord be with them and protect those who simply want to live in peace and safety. Give these people hope and comfort, we pray. And please Lord, bring this war to an end.

We continue to pray for Josie who is still in the hospital from a series of issues. We are thankful that she is improving. Be with her, Lord, and may she heal and recuperate quickly. Be with her family who have been giving her support all through this time. Strengthen them, Lord, and give them and Josie's care team wisdom in what are the 'next steps'.

We lift up a person who is struggling with depression and feelings of negative self worth. We pray that he is able to hear the words of encouragement, of hope and of worthiness that come from others and from You. We also pray for others that we know who are struggling with mental health issues. We bring these names to you and pray that they would seek out help.

### **Lord, we pray for those who are dealing with cancer.**

We pray for Melinda's Uncle Ronny who is in Arch. We thank you that he is still with his family and Melinda was able to contact him after her vacation, share pictures with him and have a visit with him. We pray that each of these last days are special for Ron and for the family.

We pray for Charlotte who as diagnosed with multiple cancers last year and is now on a maintenance program. We pray for the family who are finding the trip to London each month to be somewhat difficult. Give them strength and courage. We pray for Your on going watchcare and encouragement for Charlotte and her family.

We pray for Grayson who will be finishing his cancer treatment this fall. We pray that he is able to keep on track with treatment this summer so that he is able to meet this goal in the fall.

We pray for Sharon's friend, Patsy, who is recovering from cancer surgery. Lord, we pray for excellent recuperation and ask for your complete healing for Patsy.

We continue to pray for Sharon's friend's husband who has cancer. His chemo begins tomorrow and there is reasonable belief that this treatment should be successful in giving him a number of more years to live. We pray that the treatment will be a positive experience for this man and that their fear and anxiety will be relieved as this treatment begins.

We continue to pray for Peter's sister-in-law who is still battling cancer. Be with her and be with Peter and his family as they try to support her.

**Lord, we pray for those who are facing a variety of medical issues.**

We pray for Beth's friend's son who was in a very bad accident. Lord, we thank you that he is alive and able to sit up in a wheelchair already. We pray for your continued healing of his multiple injuries and that he will be able to go fishing at some point this summer.

We pray for Emily Michaud's father who broke his hip and is now recovering in hospital. May he do well in physio and be able to get around again.

We pray for Joan Van Bentham who broke her leg a week ago. May she heal quickly and be able to enjoy the summer.

We pray for Carol Jean as she continues to recover from her broken arm. Bless her and give her a speedy recovery.

We pray for Jody Arthurs who broke her leg in a bike accident. Be with her as she waits for the break to heal and recovers from this injury.

We pray for Michael Ferlaino who broke his wrist. He has many things that he wants to do, Lord so we pray that you would grant him a speedy recovery as well. Also grant him patience so that the wrist will have time to heal.

We pray for Charity that you will heal the wound that she has from her back surgery. Lord, please put your healing hand on her and may she know that you are with her during this time of healing and restoration.

We pray for Mary Anne whose husband finally had his heart surgery in Sudbury. May he recuperate fully from this surgery and may they be blessed with a good summer.

We pray for Les Dool and that he would get relief from the shingles that he had in his neck. Do not let him get discouraged, Lord. Assure him that healing will come.

We pray for Jackie and his ongoing health issues. He is doing a little better and really appreciates these prayers for him.

### **Other prayers**

We pray for Carol and her son, Adam, that their relationship would improve so that they could enjoy each others company again.

We pray for Emily's friend who is looking for an apartment. We thank you that she has a safe place to stay at this time but we pray for something more permanent for her.

We pray for Gene and Leona as they look for an apartment. Help them to find something that will meet their needs and also delight them. Be with them in their search.

We pray for Nicole and her 9 year old daughter Hope who face the loss of Bryan who was their husband and father. Be with them, Lord.

Lastly, Lord, we pray for the churches of St. Paul's and Victoria as they face changes again. May they put their trust in you and experience your presence with them at this time. Amen