

AUGUST 16th – Eleventh Sunday After Pentecost

DIGITAL PRINT SERVICE: FIRST SACKVILLE PRESBYTERIAN

Call to Worship

Leader: Sing praises to the Lord, O you, God's faithful ones!

People: We will give thanks to God's holy name, for God's anger lasts but a moment, God's favour is for a lifetime.

Leader: Sing praises to the Lord and remember: our weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the dawn.

People: Because God promises to turn our mourning into dancing, because God vows to wrap us in joy, because God's faithfulness is so great, we cannot remain silent, our souls must sing God's praises today and forever.

Prayer of Adoration

Holy God, we come to worship and praise you today. In this time of worship together we seek your transforming power. We seek your power so we can become your new creation, centered in Christ, and with all your people, renewed for the ministry to which you have called each one of us. Amen.

Hymn 313 *Oh worship the King*

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God, for all that we could have offered and chose not to: loving God, we ask forgiveness. For all we might have risked and were afraid to: loving God, we ask forgiveness. For all we might have loved and held back from: loving God, we ask forgiveness. For all we might have nurtured and withdrew from: loving God, we ask forgiveness, in Christ's name. Amen.

Mission Capsule – 40 years of partnership in Mauritius

In September of 2019, the Presbyterian Church of Mauritius (PCM) celebrated a milestone: the 40th anniversary of their autonomy from the Church of Scotland. The Presbyterian Church in Canada's partnership with PCM began in 1981 with the appointment of Rev. Brian Crosby and continued through the years with 11 Canadian Presbyterians serving as ministers and music consultants. Today, our partnership continues through annual grants sent to Formation Biblique et Theologique a Maurice (FBTM), a theological training program for over 1,700 Christians. FBTM's director, the Rev. Maurice Davantin, gratefully acknowledges that, " Due to the

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generosity of the PCC, FBTM has been able to continue its ministry in spreading the study of God's Words among Christians in Mauritius." **Presbyterians Sharing works with mission partners around the world**

Hymn 705 *God, who made the earth*

READINGS for August 16 – God speaks through the Scriptures

READING	VERSE	Minister's Message of Reflection
<i>Old Testament</i>	Genesis 45: 1-15	Joseph is reunited with his brothers
<i>Psalms</i>	37: 1-11	A call for patience and trust
<i>Epistle</i>	2 Corinthians 4: 7-12	Treasure in clay jars
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 6: 27-38	Love for enemies

Hymn 590 *We have this ministry*

SERMON: It's About God!

The theologian, Karl Barth, one of the leading theologians of the 20th century, whose main work, "Church Dogmatics," covered thousands of pages, once said:

"The world is first the sphere of God's Providence. It is also a sphere of human confusion, where we contort God's goodness to our own selfish ends."

God, created and saw that the creation was good. The problem was that humans frayed and distorted that goodness, as Barth says, 'to our own selfish ends.'

Human beings have become so obsessed with their abilities, powers, and control that God becomes at best a secondary consideration. Thus, to speak of 'the sphere of God's providence,' sounds totally out of touch with people today.

The word, providence, (pro –video), suggests that God sees beforehand; that God knows well ahead of us. This means that the power of God sets something in motion in and through us that goes against our best intentions. There are many places in the Bible where the providence of God stands out. The story of Rebekah's betrothal; Ruth, the Moabitess, setting out to see her widowed

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mother-in-law on her way home to Bethlehem, decides to go with her; if she had not, Boaz would have lacked a wife, and King David a great-grandmother.

How God overrules, for his purposes, the apparent chances of life, is utterly inexplicable; even the fact of his doing so is seldom evident at the time, but only afterwards.

Today, we have one of those stories that center on God's providence. In this story we find that Joseph is so resented by his brothers that he has been sold into slavery. The brothers of course did not tell their father, Jacob, what they did. They brought the robe made by Jacob for Joseph as evidence that Joseph had been killed by an animal.

In time a famine comes upon the land where Jacob and his sons live, but in Egypt where Joseph lives now things are different. Joseph has become a significant player in the government of Egypt. He has made it possible for Egypt to have plenty of food in a time of famine.

Jacob sends his sons to Egypt to purchase food. Eventually the brothers meet Joseph, who is in charge of food distribution. When the brothers meet Joseph they are struck with fear. They are no doubt expecting payback from their younger brother for what they did to him years ago.

If Joseph's only purpose was getting even with his brothers who wronged him, we would understand. Yet this is not what happens.

Joseph does not act out of his own personal experience of being sold into slavery by his brothers. He acts from a larger purpose, a purpose that was set in motion by God, a purpose greater than any anger or hatred that Joseph may have had.

Joseph speaks to his brothers, "I am Joseph," and he motions them to come closer to him, and after reciting the wrong that they did to him, he tells them he is not going to harm them. In short, he will not continue the cycle of fear and violence because, as he says,

"God sent me before you to preserve life."

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In case his brothers somehow didn't get the point, Joseph continues,
"God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth." And then, finally, he says,
"It was not you who sent me here but God."

Then Joseph embraces his brothers, feeds them, and sends them back to Canaan with food. He asks them to bring back the younger brother, Benjamin. Then Jacob brings the whole family to Egypt to be with Joseph.

Joseph's action has not been directed by hatred or revenge but by a larger purpose, a purpose that arises out of the providence of God.

In our gospel story today Jesus may well have been thinking of Joseph's story when he said to the disciples:

"Love your enemies." "Do good to those who hate you." "Bless those who curse you." "Pray for those who abuse you."

In other words, do what Joseph did!

In this time of a worldwide pandemic, everybody is at a new place. Is it not a time to have a new vision for neighborliness? Jesus is indicating, is he not, that when life is reduced to loving only those who love you, doing good only to those who do good to you, lending to those from whom you hope to receive, that this is not credit to you.

Our faith asks us to embrace God's generosity, to accept it as a gift and to share it with others. Thus, like Joseph to his brothers, we break away from payback, resentment and fear. Jesus calls his disciples, you and me, to a larger purpose, God's purpose. We are asked to be less obsessed with ourselves and more attuned to God. Then, following a resurrected Christ, we look to the future more than the past.

We see good things happening among people in this pandemic, but we also see a great deal of mean spiritedness. A great deal of we versus them, the good versus the bad, those who can afford food and those who can't.

What we have heard from the Bible today cuts through fearful habits to state that God's hidden generosity requires us to have another look and hopefully see the largeness of God's hidden way, which is generous and merciful.

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In living through fear and hate, people become small and defensive, lacking that generosity that God offers and which the world so desperately needs. The story of Joseph is about God's providential care. The terms of life are other than our own, for they are the terms of the generous, merciful, giving, forgiving God. Amen.

Prayers:

Beloved God, we are reassured to know that you will not leave us or forsake us. If our wrongs make us untouchable, you will touch us. You, O God of providence, are bigger than the world and your life is more powerful than death.

O God, you lay hands on the diseased and distressed, and we are under the bondage of so many demons it is difficult to number them. For some of us the demon is poverty, while others are bound by wealth. Some are invaded by pride, and others by their humility. Some are confined by illness, and others by their strength. The demons possess us, they fill our thoughts and guide our actions, they own us; we become their slaves. Free us! Set us free to serve you in generosity and mercy.

O God, safeguard the life of the weak and the vulnerable by the protection of honest and caring servants who stand against violence. Comfort and relieve those who are sick and sorrowful, especially those who desire our prayers. Grant them patience as they wait upon you, and an early and happy emergence from their hard times to better days.

You, O Lord, will keep our going out and coming in from this time on and forevermore. Keep us in the way that leads to new life, that we may rejoice with those pilgrims who have walked with us on our journey with Christ and already have been received into your presence.

Now, O God, bless us with your presence, guide us with your spirit, and strengthen us with your power, so we might not only find strength for our need but need for our strength. We offer these prayers in and through Jesus, who taught us to say together....the Lord's Prayer...

Hymn 762 *When the poor ones*

BENEDICTION / COMMISSIONING

We came here on the strength of God's promise of mercy. We have found a great mercy among the people of God. We leave on the strength of God's promise of presence. We will carry God's presence wherever we go. Amen.

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