

“A More Excellent Way”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

September 21, 2021 – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video – September 26, 2021

“Brother, Sister, Let me Serve you” #635 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 2

(Words adapted for consistency with the Book of Praise)

V. 1 Brother sister let me serve you

Let me be as Christ to you

Pray that I might have the grace to

Let you be my servant too

V. 2 We are pilgrims on a journey

And companions on the road

We are here to help each other

Walk the mile and bear the load

Richard Gillard

© Words: 1977 Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publishing (Admin. by Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, Inc.)

Music: 1977 Universal Music - Brentwood Benson Publishing (Admin. by Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, Inc.)

CCLI License # 1952948

“God Whose Giving Knows no Ending” #663 in the Book of Praise Vv. 1, 3

V. 1 God whose giving knows no ending

From Your rich and endless store

Nature's wonder Jesus' wisdom

Costly cross grave's shattered door

Gifted by You we turn to You

Offering up ourselves in praise

Thankful song shall rise forever

Gracious donor of our days

V. 3 Treasure too You have entrusted

Gain through powers Your grace conferred

Ours to use for home and kindred

And to spread the gospel word

Open wide our hands in sharing

As we heed Christ's ageless call

Healing teaching and reclaiming

Serving You by loving all

Robert Lansing Edwards

© 1961, Renewed 1989 The Hymn Society (Admin. by Hope Publishing Company)

CCLI License # 1952948

Closing Chorus: "The Lord Bless You-Aaronic blessing" #619 in the Book of Praise

The Lord bless you and keep you
The Lord make his face shine upon you
And be gracious unto you
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you
And give you his peace

Public Domain

Scripture Texts: Psalm 104:1-9, 23-35

¹ Bless the Lord, O my soul.

O Lord my God, you are very great.

You are clothed with honor and majesty,

² wrapped in light as with a garment.

You stretch out the heavens like a tent,

³ you set the beams of your chambers on the waters,

you make the clouds your chariot,

you ride on the wings of the wind,

⁴ you make the winds your messengers,

fire and flame your ministers.

⁵ You set the earth on its foundations,

so that it shall never be shaken.

⁶ You cover it with the deep as with a garment;

the waters stood above the mountains.

⁷ At your rebuke they flee;

at the sound of your thunder they take to flight.

⁸ They rose up to the mountains, ran down to the valleys

to the place that you appointed for them.

⁹ You set a boundary that they may not pass,

so that they might not again cover the earth.

²³ People go out to their work

and to their labor until the evening.

²⁴ O Lord, how manifold are your works!

In wisdom you have made them all;

the earth is full of your creatures.

²⁵ Yonder is the sea, great and wide,

creeping things innumerable are there,

living things both small and great.

²⁶ There go the ships,

and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it.

²⁷ These all look to you

to give them their food in due season;

²⁸ when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
²⁹ When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
when you take away their breath, they die
and return to their dust.
³⁰ When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the ground.
³¹ May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
may the Lord rejoice in his works—
³² who looks on the earth and it trembles,
who touches the mountains and they smoke.
³³ I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have being.
³⁴ May my meditation be pleasing to him,
for I rejoice in the Lord.
³⁵ Let sinners be consumed from the earth,
and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul.
Praise the Lord!

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

Meditation

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is a day set aside by the denomination to acknowledge and become more aware of the mission of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. It is Presbyterians Sharing Sunday, and we are worshipping with the help of the resources provided to us by the national church. While much of our time in congregations is spent thinking about how we are serving our own communities, caring for each other and doing what we can to meet budget needs, we must be just as aware of the needs of the greater church and the world. Our gifts to Presbyterians Sharing support so much more than the viability of the denomination. Our gifts go to support and help people throughout Canada and the world. We combine efforts with partners like Canada Food Grains to build food security, and Kairos as we strive for justice for all people. I'd like to share some of the

sermon that was prepared for today's service to remind us of the amazing mission in which our church is engaged in the name of Jesus.

Today's epistle reading comes from a letter Paul wrote to the congregation in Corinth, a few years after the resurrection of Jesus. He knew the congregation was experiencing challenges. People were preaching the gospel. Some were experiencing holy visions, others were healers, teachers, miracle workers. However, there was conflict. They began to judge each other, each believing that their own gifts were more important and more valuable to Christ's church.

So, Paul used the body as an illustration for the church. He reminded them that the body doesn't function if every part is the same, it functions because each one is different. Each part has its own unique role to play. So it is with the church: a body with many members, every member essential, all part of God's family. Paul reminded the congregation that all gifts and abilities come from God and should be used to further God's kingdom.

We are called into a church community so that we might both receive God's blessings and share God's blessings with others. As a church, we have been given a variety of gifts and each of us can play a valuable role. You might work with children and youth, preach, or lead worship. Maybe you make the coffee or clean up after an event. You might minister through music, welcome people at the door or offer listening ears in quiet times. You might excel at fundraising, or prepare minutes, agendas and newsletters. You might spend hours praying for ministries or writing encouraging notes. There are many gifts and abilities. While some gifts are more visible and attention-getting, the quieter, behind-the-scenes gifts are just as important. It won't always be easy, but with God's help, we can nurture and grow our gifts. We may play different roles, using different gifts at different times, but without ALL of the gifts that are offered, our churches cannot do what we are called to do: to care for one another, and to share God's transforming love in the world.

Today, we celebrate people from all walks of life who are using their gifts to participate in God's mission through their gifts to Presbyterians Sharing. As our church's mission and ministry fund, Presbyterians Sharing is one of the ways that Presbyterians across Canada work together to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, sharing God's love and hope in our communities, in Canada and around the world.

Because of our gifts:

- New congregations are planted and others experience growth and renewal
- Ministries with Indigenous people in Canada are serving people scarred by Residential Schools, racism, discrimination and the loss of culture and language.
- Theological students in Canada, Malawi, Nigeria, Ghana and Beirut prepare to shine Christ's light in their communities.
- Indigenous teams translate the Bible into their own languages in Taiwan.
- Young people attend and are inspired by Canada Youth events.
- Sex workers are treated with kindness and dignity through ARISE Ministry in Toronto.
- Refugees find friendship and support through Action Réfugiés Montréal.

...and so much more!

Working together isn't always easy, but as we share in ministry across Canada and around the world, God is working through all of us. Here are some stories of people and congregations who are sharing God's love and hope as they participate in God's mission with us.

Kate McGee is Executive Director and Chaplain of Boarding Homes Ministry, which provides comfort and companionship to people living in low-rent housing in the core of Toronto. Many live with a crushing combination of mental illness, addiction and poverty. Kate and the staff and volunteers are working to reduce the social isolation of people living with mental illness.

Cariboo Presbyterian Church in British Columbia and Two Rivers Church in Guelph, Ontario, are two congregations reaching out with the love of Christ to meet the needs of people in their own communities.

Cariboo Presbyterian Church has a house church ministry in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region of northern British Columbia—a breathtaking wilderness of grass-filled valleys and rocky ridges, scattered with forests and deep blue lakes. The small communities are accessible only by driving countless hours through winding back roads. The house church ministry connects people living in these communities, allowing them to worship and serve God together.

Halfway across the country is Two Rivers Church, a house church ministry in Guelph, Ontario. Guelph is rich in music, arts and culture and there are many places of worship, including four traditional Presbyterian churches. At Two Rivers Church, people who are not comfortable in these traditional settings gather in living rooms where they share meals and conversations that draw them deeper into friendship and spiritual growth.

Both of these ministries, meeting in very different settings for different reasons, share a common mission of serving their neighbours through small acts of service and hospitality: baking a pie, shoveling snow, driving someone to the doctor, or doing yard work for an elderly neighbour. The vision is simple but the impact is great. When we pay attention to the people around us and seek to understand their needs, we can form relationships and offer hospitality through simple acts of kindness.

Through Presbyterians Sharing, we participate in God's mission by helping start new faith communities across Canada. This allows ministers and lay leaders to try new things to bring people together, in and through Christ, and it helps our church grow and flourish.

We participate in God's mission with international partners, who share God's love and hope in their communities. We send grants and mission staff to encourage, equip and accompany these partners. Even when mission staff had to return home in 2020 due to COVID-19, they continued to support our partners from Canada.

One of the programs, supported by the Rev. Joel Sherbino in his role as the PCC's mission liaison to Malawi, is Blantyre Synod's prison ministry in Malawi. In this ministry, visits from "Friends of Prison" volunteers, Rammy, Lyca and Hastings, offer hope. Pre-COVID, these dedicated volunteers were regularly visiting 13 prisons, often travelling hours by foot, motorbike, bike, taxi or on crowded minibuses to stay connected and encourage the prisoners. From 2019–2020, when COVID-19 forced them to return home, Steve McInnis and Nora Martin

were part of the prison ministry team, teaching English, chemistry and math at Chichiri Prison's reformatory school, which offers both primary and secondary classes to the inmates.

We are disciples of Christ, empowered by the Spirit, glorifying God and rejoicing in service.

As our nation acknowledges Indigenous Peoples in the coming week, and continues to work for healing and reconciliation with residential school survivors and their families, the church repents and seeks forgiveness for its involvement in the schools. The Presbyterian Church in Canada has created a National Indigenous Ministries Council to support the ongoing process of healing and reconciliation. We support several ministries with First Nations Peoples through Presbyterians Sharing. To remind us of the and the tragic, lasting legacy of residential schools and the hope we have for reconciliation, we are going to watch a powerful video from a woman who attended one of our denomination's schools, and is working with the PCC for healing and the continued building of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in the church. [PLAY VIDEO]

We are members of a body bigger than our individual congregations, and together we are involved in God's mission and ministry in ways that are bigger than our individual efforts. You may have noticed Vivian saying her tears are a sign of her healing. Because of our gifts to Presbyterians Sharing, we are a part of the church working together for healing for so many people who are hurting, broken, looking for hope. Together, we are the Presbyterian Church in Canada, a vibrant denomination, putting our faith into action.

We can use our unique gifts to make a difference in the world God loves. We may not all have the ability to teach in a prison in Malawi, or the knowledge to translate the Bible. But when we give to Presbyterians Sharing, our financial gifts, our prayers and our encouraging words empower others to use their gifts to share God's love on our behalf, in Canada and around the world.

This is what Presbyterians Sharing is all about.

Each of us has received gifts from God.

And know this—when we put our gifts into God's hands,

God does remarkable things. Amen.