

**New St. James Presbyterian Church
Reformation Sunday
October 25, 2020
Rev. Mark McLennan**

“Are we there yet?”

Scriptures:

Deuteronomy 34:1–12

Psalm 90:1–6, 13–17

I Thessalonians 2:1–8

Matthew 22:34–46

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“Are we there yet?”

These words are familiar to anyone who has been a child, or been on a long road trip with a child.

It doesn't matter where *there* is, it's always better than sitting in perpetual seatbelt limbo.

Our passage from Deuteronomy comes at the end of a long journey.

God promised Moses and the Israelites that they would be brought to the promised land—a land of milk and honey.

One that was the exact opposite of the decades they had spent in the oppressive slavery of Egypt.

And yet, the journey was a long one. Moses and the Israelites spent 40 years wandering in the desert.

How many times can you stand “Are we there yet?” in a four-hour air-conditioned car ride,

Imagine then - 40 years of sweltering desert heat!

It's clear to me that if Moses had anything, he had **patience**.

I've heard the phrase “*the patience of Job*” before, but I think Moses deserves a phrase like that too.

He had incredible endurance.

Yes, Moses had something like superhuman patience.

The kind that could have endured anything to the bitter end.

But the problem is that Moses never makes it to the promised land.

He arrives at the border.

God takes him to the mountaintop and gives him a survey of the vastness of this new and beautiful country.

But he never crosses over.

Instead, he's buried on the edge of the wilderness.

I imagine Moses dying with the words "*Are we there yet?*" on his lips.

Even Moses, one of the most faithful people, never actually arrived at his destination.

It seems unfair.

Maybe that's the point, though.

No matter how gifted we might be, no matter how spiritually mature or intelligent we are.

No matter how good we are, or how mystically connected to God we are, arrival at our human destination is always out of our grasp.

'There' - is a constant temptation for us.

As individuals and churches, we can see ourselves as having spiritually "*arrived*"—all grown up, having all the knowledge—while others simply need to catch up with us or pay attention to our wisdom.

We have read all the right books; we are the most faithful or the most progressive.

It's always others who are the problem.

Self-criticism is not an option once you have reached enlightenment.

This is not only self-deceptive, it is arrogant and spiritually destructive.

When we have "*arrived*," there's this sense that we can settle where we are.

We are no longer moving forward, there's no room for growth.

When we have "*arrived*," our only posture can be defence.

- And defensiveness.

As the people of Jesus, however, we understand human life and progress differently.

Rev. Ryan Slifka

It took a rabbi to teach me this.

He told me that he believed that in the synagogue liturgy, many Jewish people read only the Pentateuch (the first five books) through cyclically,

- with this passage at the end, because there is always this sense that the promised land is still before them.

The end of history is always just out of our grasp.

And yet, it is the beauty of the promise, this vision of a world brought to completed harmony that makes life worth living.

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We always live in the between time, either in our personal spiritualities or in the state of the world.

While we can experience the presence of God's kingdom here and now, there is always a "not yet."

As God's people we are always yet to arrive.

Which means we are never fully settled.

There is always more ground to cover, always more forgiveness to seek, always more growth.

God is still speaking afresh, and there is yet more light to shine forth from God's Holy Word.

It is a very Protestant way to be.

There is a final destination, for sure—the beautiful coming of Christ, and the coming together of heaven and earth.

But it hasn't happened yet; it has yet to arrive, as do we.

Until then, though, we believe with our Reformed forebears, that the church is reformed and always being reformed by the Word of God.

We are not fated to play defence.

Nor are we fated to spiritual complacency and self-righteousness.

Rather, with the end always in sight, we are freed to live faithfully and authentically,

- to keep striving for the kingdom,
- and to have our lives constantly renewed and remade by God's Spirit.

“Are we there yet?”

Not quite yet.

But we will get there some day.

In the meantime, we are always being drawn further out of the wilderness by Christ and deeper into the heart of God.

And that's good news.

IN THE NAME OF THE CREATOR, CHRIST, AND HOLY SPIRIT...Amen.

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 90)

God is our dwelling place from year to year, age to age.

And yet, we become complacent, forgetting who we are.

God reforms us **and makes prosperous the work of our hands!**

God's life surges forth through creation, like grass that renews every morning.

And yet we prefer to be dust, swept away in the wind of every new idea and new fad.

God reforms us **and makes prosperous the work of our hands!**

God turns to us, and has compassion on us, so the great work of our lives manifests

Christ's glorious love to the world.

God reforms us **and makes prosperous the work of our hands!**

Prayer of the Day

Wondrous God: Billions of years ago your creative spark called creation into being.

Two thousand years ago you lit a spark of new creation in Christ.

503 years ago, your grace reignited the hearts of believers with names like Martin

Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, John Knox, and others

Just when we think all is settled, everything is finished, closed, your power and presence explodes on to the scene yet again, bringing newness, bringing life.

Fill us with your power and presence, O God, so we may, like our grandparents in faith carry your truth, your beauty, and your justice to the world you so love—a world in such need.

Living God, You are the One who is always on the move, always creating and re-creating, always doing a new thing.

And yet, we confess, O Lord, that our lives can become static, routinely paralyzed by doubt and fear.

We remain ossified in patterns of greed, covetousness, and self-interest.

We doubt your promises of abundant, everlasting life and so we live in dread of our neighbours, our friends, and our enemies.

Our souls remain still. We do not love as you love.

Nor do we live as you would have us live, with courage, generosity, or the boldness of the gospel.

Forgive us, O God. Renew us by your Spirit, and reform us with your compassion, remaking us more fully in to the image of Christ, and as dedicated servants of your reign. **Amen.**

Assurance of Grace

Friends, the good news of the gospel is that God's love in Christ stretches so deep and so wide that it infiltrates every broken place in our hearts and in our world.

Our hatred is met with love, our cruelty is met with compassion, our sins and our trespasses are met with forgiveness.

It is greater than anything you have ever done, or could do.

Open your hearts to let the love of God in, because in Christ you are forgiven, freed, made new.

Believe in this great good news. **Amen.**

Prayers of the People

God of Grace and God of Glory,

On this Reformation Sunday, we give you thanks for the saints who have gone before us.

For those who faced trouble and trial, and even death, for the sake of the message of your mercy and in the spirit of Pentecost, the right to hear and read the scriptures in their own languages.

We pray especially for those who now face trouble, trial, even death, for those members of the body of Christ who face persecution.

For your beloved children everywhere—regardless of tradition—who live under the threat of religious persecution.

For people, especially those of us who are Indigenous, who face the extinction of our own languages through neglect, oppression, or cultural pressure.

We pray that all may hear the good news of the Prince of Peace in ways that resonate, and cause us to drop our weapons and defences for the sake of the kingdom.

We pray that you may help us not only walk in the shoes of our forebears, but fill them.

May all of us gathered here today be as captivated by the life you have given us in Christ that we are freed to reach our friends, neighbours, and enemies with your unconditional love.

- *PRAYER LIST: Roy Harrower, Marg and their family, Laura Summers, Ruth Evans, Bob Baron and Karen, Anne Milling*

Lord, we pray for the world you love in hope, and in trust, that we and your church might carry the light that has been passed down through the centuries, so we might be a beacon of your love to the world.

Now with gratitude for your love poured into the world through Christ Jesus, we pray together as he taught us,

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed be your name, Your kingdom come,
Your will be done, On earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.*

Forgive us our sins As we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial And deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, Now and forever. Amen.

STEWARDSHIP THOUGHT

Suze Orman - author, financial advisor, motivational speaker, and television host

True generosity is an offering; given freely and out of pure love.

No strings attached. No expectations.

ANNOUNCEMENT - via Lyn Hill

Dear Lyn:

It was brought to my attention that St. James Presbyterian Church gave a large donation towards our campaign with Staples stores in Ontario for the Back to School for needy children project.

Thank You so very much.

We chose four deserving schools as recipients.

- St. Mary's Elementary School, West Lorne,
- West Elgin Secondary School, West Lorne,
- Quad County Youth in Transition Services and
- Rick Hansen elementary school in London.

The presentations have been made with gift cards to each school.

This will go far in buying tablets and chrome books for the children who are having classes from home and for any supplies they just can't afford. The Guidance counsellors and teachers will assess the students in need and privately assist them with the gift cards.

I just wanted to express my appreciation to you from Kiwanis and all the children this will be helping during these uncertain times.

Heartfelt Thanks. In Kiwanis Service and Health

Louise Macphee Lieutenant Governor, Division 4 "Colonel Talbot"
Eastern Canada & Caribbean District, Kiwanis International

Lyn Hill:

I stopped by the church Monday and picked up a bundle of mail.

This included:

--a hand-written note from Theresa McDonald-Lee thanking the Committee for its support of Camp Kintail,

--a "thank you" letter from *The May Court Club of London*,

Commissioning —*words attributed to John Wesley*

Go out into the world, living in the light of Christ!
By the power of the Spirit do all the good you can
by all the means you can in all the ways you can
in all the places you can at all the times you can
to all the people you can as long as ever you can.

Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God,
and the power of the Holy Spirit
be yours this day, and always.
Amen.