

Worship services are being cancelled until further notice because of Covid-19. However, we will have worship services through the Internet Zoom platform every Sunday at 10:30 AM. The Zoom link for this service will be sent to you by email. The phone number for Zoom always remains the same but the Meeting ID and password number changes every week. If you need more information, please contact Mr. Vautour. See the bottom of the bulletin the contact information.

If you have friends or acquaintances who want to join in the worship service, please do not hesitate to share with them the Zoom links to join with us in the worship our great God.

The National GCI services will be at 1:00 p.m. each Sunday. The Zoom link for this service will be sent to you by email. The phone number for Zoom and the meeting ID always remains the same for the National Worship Service.

For more information about special activities happening in GCI, please see the international website at www.gci.org. On the left-hand upper side of the screen, you will see 3 short lines. You simply need to click on it. A drop down menu will appear. Click on "**PARTICIPATE**".

Please note that audio sermons are available and a PDF copy of sermons are available at www.worshipim.ca and video sermons are now available on YouTube – GRACE COMMUNION INTERNATIONAL-MONCTON (see link below)

If you have a prayer requests, other events you would like to announce and/or praise to our great God you would like to share, **please try to contact Mr. Vautour by email, text or telephone no later than Saturday, in the morning.**

Certainly, we all need to realize, during this time of crisis, that even if situations appear bleak and evil appears strong, God is still the ruler yet. Jesus sustains all things we are clearly told in Colossians. We could not be in more loving hands! Although we may go through temporary troubles, we have to always keep in mind the hope we have in Jesus.

We need to pray for our civil leaders, those in high positions as well as Christian religious leaders to give appropriate leadership as we traverse difficult periods. God tells us to pray for all people and to do good to everyone especially those of the household of God. ("**1 ¶ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,**" (1Ti 2:1-3 ESV)

We all need to remember that this fallen world system will one day be replaced by the fullness of the kingdom of God. Only God knows when Jesus will return to the earth. "**3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.**" (Ga 1:3-5 ESV)

Because of the COVID -19, several churches may be in financial difficulties. Those who have building maintenance and staff to pay may not receive the same income because of their members' job loss, etc. Please pray as our society and churches face multiple challenges because of this pandemic.

For prayer requests, please see www.worshipim.ca under "**Members Only**". If you have forgotten password for this section only, please contact Mr. Vautour.

April/May Calendar

| Worship Services 10:30 a.m. Sunday | Bible Study Thursday 7:30 p.m. | Prayer Meeting Thursday 7:30 p.m. |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Communion – May 3 | April 30 | |
| May 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 | May 14, 28 | May 7, 21 |

Offerings: you can send your offering directly to the following address: **Grace Communion International- Canada, Suite 203A, 2121 Airport Dr., Saskatoon, SK 7S1 6W5.** If you prefer, you can also call **1-306-653-2705.** Thank you for your continued generous giving to God by giving to this part of God's church, his body.

From Mr. Bill Hall – GCI Canadian Director *"Our office here in Saskatoon will remain open during regular business hours. I'm self isolating for a couple of weeks, but Kathleen will be available. We will continue to process the donations we receive in Saskatoon. Members are urged to mail them directly to our office for the time-being. They can also donate via phone using a credit card, or via Canada Helps using the donate button on our website www.gcicanada.ca We are waving the provision that all donations given via Canada Helps go toward national expenses for the time being. We will credit all donations received via Canada Helps to a member's local congregation, if we can identify where they attend."*

HOPE (GCI Update April 29, 2020)



Gregg and Susan Williams



Dear GCI Family and Friends,
The "Hope Avenue" of ministry has been our guiding theme this year, and the crescendo was going to be the Denominational Celebration. (In the April 1st issue we shared the news that we will postpone this until the summer of 2021.) Another initiative that we have been promoting in 2020 is the GCI Worship Calendar. Through the combined efforts of the Superintendents, Regional Directors and Media Team, we were anticipating special gatherings around Holy Week and Easter,

and to our shock and dismay much of the world has been on an extended self-quarantine lockdown. So, what has the Lord been up to? Has he somehow forgotten our plans in GCI? Should I join the laments of the Old Testament Psalmist? *My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, 'Where is your God?' (Psalm 42:3)*

There are a few of our members and their church families who have experienced the loss of loved ones at the hands of COVID-19, so I want to be careful not to move past the reality of grief too quickly. Where there has been loss of life, grief is multiplied when friends and family are not able to gather for a funeral service and celebration of their loved one's life. Our hearts go out to you, and we lift prayers of comfort.

So where is our God? In the pattern of many Psalms, the grief, mourning and despair are turned to joy, hope and faith when the psalmist recalls what the Lord has done in the past, and how he is with them in the present circumstance. The same is true today. Let me express to you some of the tangible ways I have found hope.

I had the privilege of speaking with our six Superintendents around the globe and I was encouraged to hear their stories of how the pastors and churches in their areas are managing. I'm happy to share that each superintendent and their families are safe and healthy. I also found it interesting to discover how many of us have children who serve in the healthcare field. We seek your prayers for them and the other front-line workers. (Eugene Guzon estimates that in the Filipino members scattered around the world, there are some 170 doctors and nurses.) I am proud that our small denomination has such strong representation in the healthcare world.

The Superintendents expressed how many of their pastors and churches have shared online gatherings—inclusive of Sunday services, small group studies, game nights, youth meetings and the like. Not only do members have access to meetings online with their home congregation, many are accessing neighboring churches in their region, country and across the world. Staying home has spawned a new level of creativity and connectivity that we have not experienced before.

Having personally participated in online meetings for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday, I was more than pleased to see that the initiative to promote our GCI Worship Calendar is happening. It wasn't how I envisioned, nor could I have anticipated to what degree GCI would access Facebook, YouTube, Zoom, WhatsApp and other social media platforms, but here we are.

We are finding hope during the pandemic, and why should we be surprised? Hope has a name: Jesus. His name is being proclaimed online and it is incredibly hopeful to see how we are communicating with many people beyond our regular members. May we continue building and forming these relationships. Our Denominational Celebration is delayed, and yet it will go on. The prayerful planning and hard work that has been done to this point will serve us well as we rejoin the final preparations next year. Hope is still the theme, and I praise our Triune God for always supplying hope even through difficult times. Always looking to our Hope,
Greg Williams

A THEOLOGICAL ETHIC, part 5 (conclusion)

Posted: 30 Apr 2020 07:07 AM PDT

This is the fifth and concluding post in a series adapted from "What is a Theological Ethic?" a lecture by GCS President Dr. Gary Deddo. For other posts in the series, click or copy to your browser: <http://thesurprisinggodblog.qci.org/2020/04/theological-ethic-5.html>.

Last time we saw that our calling as followers of Jesus is first to worship God (and no other), then out of that relationship of worship (loving God), to love our neighbors (sharing in God's love for them). By worshiping only God, we avoid a form of idolatry that is common in our day -- the collapsing of the first Great Commandment (to love God) into the second (to love neighbor). Let's look further at how a theological ethic protects us from this idolatry. We begin with Jesus' example.

Jesus' example of sacrificial giving

Throughout his life on earth, Jesus showed perfect love by sacrificially giving of himself. He first gave himself in faithful, even joyful obedience to his Father. Then, as part of his worship of the Father, Jesus gave sacrificially of himself to us. It was out of total trust in and honor to his Father that Jesus loved and served us. Jesus serves us only in ways that take us to the Father.

It was because Jesus knew he was in right relationship to his Father and the Spirit, and because he knew where he had come from and was returning, that he served us in the ways he did. This truth is explicitly illustrated in John's presentation of Jesus' washing of his disciple's feet at the Last Supper -- an act by which he "**loved them to the end [telos]**" (**John 13:1**). In this act of love, Jesus was fulfilling both of the Great Commandments in the right order, priority and inter-relationship. Understanding sacrifice as an act of the worship due only to God, Jesus did not allow Peter to dictate how the foot washing should occur. Jesus veered neither to the right nor the left in fulfilling the Father's will. In doing so, Jesus resisted and offended Peter (and perhaps others).

Jesus' disciples had to receive what Jesus was actually giving them, not something else they might have preferred -- something that might not have offended their pride. Had Jesus yielded to their preferences, he would not have "loved them to the end" -- the telos -- to completion. Rather, he would have loved them less and perhaps not at all. It was only as an overflow of his sacrifice to God and to God's good will and glory that Jesus "sacrificed" himself for us, not to us -- not bending his will to our will and ways and ideas of what we might consider to be loving. Self-sacrifice is due to God, our Creator and Redeemer, and to no one or nothing else. That is what Jesus' example makes clear.

Self-giving to others in Christ's name, for God's glory

Jesus Christ, and no other, is our Creator and Redeemer. We were created to be and become images of him and of no one and nothing else. So, it is the same for us as it was for Jesus in his earthly ministry. Any self-giving for another human being must be motivated, guarded and controlled by our self-surrender to God first and alone, in worship. Love for neighbor certainly will involve self-giving and in that sense self-sacrifice. However, that sacrifice will never be to the neighbor, -- it will be for the neighbor as our worship of God, as his commands to us specify. Directed toward worship of God, our "sacrificial giving" will glorify God while also contributing to the true benefit of our neighbor. Any of our "sacrificing" must be done in the name of our Triune God, not in the name of our neighbor.

Sacrificial giving that does not come under the discerning and sanctifying light of the worship of God, following in his ways, results in faulty, even evil "sacrifice." There is nothing Christian about the idea or ideal of sacrifice itself. Pagan religions are full of it -- with the ultimate (most grotesque) expression being the sacrifice of children to the god Molek (**2 Kings 23:10**).

As in religion, so it is in relationships -- sacrificial giving can become a means to manipulate, entrap, ensnare and place in endless obligation the one for whom the sacrifice is made. Conversely, the demand for sacrificial giving as an ideal held up for others to live by, can be tyrannical and even demonic. Jesus himself had to resist exactly this kind of sacrificial heroism as a way of obtaining the earthly goods offered him by the devil. Jesus said No! every time. He refused any self-sacrifice to the devil.

When Jesus is offered as a mere generic example for us to imitate, his sacrifice is torn apart from his exclusive worship of God, and redirected to establish an abstract and autonomous human "ethical" ideal -- one that inevitably enslaves and even destroys the one who sacrifices in the name of the ideal and also the one for whom such a humanistic

ideal is rendered. Sacrificial giving can never be separated from a continuous worship relationship with God in which our first sacrifice is sharing in Christ's self-giving to the Father. Then and only then, as an overflow of that self-giving, may we participate in Christ's service of others done, in the name of the Father and the Son, for them, not to them. There is no ethic of autonomous self-sacrifice, no simple human ideal of self-giving to another to fulfill. No other human being nor their circumstances can set the terms of our self-giving. Our self-giving must be moved, conditioned and controlled by God. There is no human sacrifice for the sake of other humans or humanity itself, since no human is divine -- humanity is not God.

Perhaps it would be best if we removed the entire idea of sacrifice from Christian ethical thinking and restrict the notion of sacrifice to our exclusive relationship of worship with God. When speaking of our creaturely relations, it might be best to stick to the idea of self-giving for another. We would thus say that we sacrifice ourselves to God exclusively, but that sacrifice results in self-giving to others in Christ's name, for the glory of God. Another way to say this is that all our relations with other human beings must be mediated by the lordship of Christ.

The point here is that all ethical activity must be done in and through Jesus Christ. Our Lord must stand between us and all others. He mediates not only our relationship to the Father and the Spirit, but also our relationships with other humans, and even with the natural environment. The New Testament way of indicating this, is to say that everything we do, we do **"in the name of the Lord,"** or **"in the Lord,"** or **"as unto the Lord,"** or **"for the glory of God."** We can only truly love others with God's kind of love when it is defined, determined, moved and lived out with Christ regulating what we give to others and also what we are to receive from others.

The only way to come close to others in a way that brings God's kind of life, is to have Christ be a real, actual insulator between us and all others. That is why Jesus is and remains the Head of the Body of Christ, Lord over each and every member. No other member becomes that to us, even if others assist and help us remain in Christ, under his Lordship. All our relationships are to be mediated by Jesus Christ.

Beware a humanistic ideal of altruism

This critique of self-sacrifice (sacrificial giving) calls into question the ideal of altruism -- doing good for another simply for the sake of doing good, with no thought for the self. This is sometimes called a disinterested love. But this humanistic ideal is no substitute for God's agape love and our sharing in it through Jesus. Unfortunately, the two are often equated, especially by ethicists. But doing so is an error. The two must be carefully distinguished, which is done by seeing Christian love, service and self-giving, only as it is judged (sorted out) and directed by Jesus Christ.

Jesus' love was not simply "un-selfish" as altruists often claim. Such a claim is worldly. While Jesus' love was not self-centered, it was not disinterested, expecting no benefit from it at all. No, Jesus' love and self-giving was for the benefit of his Father, to point all to God and God's glory and to bring about reconciliation to God so that his heavenly Father would be rightly worshiped by his creatures -- those created through him (Christ), for him, and to him. It was for **"the joy set before him [that] Jesus endured the Cross" (Heb. 12:2).** Jesus' love was interested in the glory and worship of the Father -- it was not altruistic in that it intended a particular outcome, namely, the benefit of those for whom he died that they might join him in worship of the Father in spirit and truth! A love that seeks the right and appropriate benefit is not a lesser love contrary to what altruists assert.

As a human-centered (humanistic) ideal, self-sacrifice can become a horrific substitute for the kind of agape-sacrifice directed by God through Christ that leads to life now and forever. Promoted as the "highest" moral ideal, (e.g. the only way that true love for God can be shown) needed to achieve a humanistic end (a utilitarian human-centered end such as human survival, or the victory of a social/political ideology, a medical or technological advance, the advance of a religion, etc.) self-sacrifice can also be used to undermine a Christian theological ethic. It can be used to get us to depart from what the apostle Paul calls **"the obedience of faith."** It can be used to pry people loose from living out of a worship relationship with the Triune God who alone is worthy of our self-sacrifice, worthy of our complete surrender to him and his ways.

The way of a theological ethic is never self-centered. It is always theo-centric (Christo-centric). The obedience called for by this ethic results in sacrifice that is expressive of loyalty to the triune God, not loyalty (in the ultimate sense) to any created thing (including humans). Furthermore, a theological ethic always contributes to a theo-centric or Christo-centric witness that resists equating the two Great Commandments, then collapsing the first into the second, making the second, by default, the only commandment.

A truly Christian theological ethic both preserves and draws from the two Great Commands as taught and lived out by Jesus Christ, Son of the Father, Savior and Lord over all humanity.

GCI principle website and Moncton Websites—a) www.gci.org , b) www.worshiphim.ca , c)

www.facebook.com/GCIMoncton ; d) <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgKazyWhmKmDZy69vJcFfPg>

For a wealth of helpful articles about God, grace and his plan for salvation, who we are, etc., please see the GCI.org website.

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