

Sunnybrook United Church

Our Vision:

Being - Belonging - Becoming

Living our lives with compassion, commitment, purpose, and meaning. Creating a warm and welcoming intergenerational community of faith, while challenging one another to learn and grow

Our Mission:

We are a community seeking to follow Jesus the Christ. We gather in large and small groups to worship, celebrate, encourage and comfort one another. Living our faith, we walk humbly with God, caring for all with love and compassion, and pursuing justice.



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April 19, 2020 – Second Sunday of Easter

Opening our Arms

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CENTERING AND CANDLELIGHTING

A POEM: “Easter 2020,” Malcolm Guite

And where is Jesus, this strange Easter day?
Not lost in our locked churches, anymore
Than he was sealed in that dark sepulchre.

The locks are loosed; the stone is rolled away,
And he is up and risen, long before,
Alive, at large, and making his strong way
Into the world he gave his life to save,
No need to seek him in his empty grave.

He might have been a wafer in the hands
Of priests this day, or music from the lips
Of red-robed choristers, instead he slips
Away from church, shakes off our linen bands
To don his apron with a nurse: he grips
And lifts a stretcher, soothes with gentle hands
The frail flesh of the dying, gives them hope,
Breathes with the breathless, lends them strength to cope.

On Thursday we applauded, for he came
And served us in a thousand names and faces
Mopping our sickroom floors and catching traces
Of that virus which was death to him:
Good Friday happened in a thousand places
Where Jesus held the helpless, died with them
That they might share his Easter in their need,
Now they are risen with him, risen indeed.

♪**OPENING SONG:** "Sing a Happy Hallelujah"

VU 224

An Introduction to Holy Humour Sunday:

The season of Easter is the celebration of God's triumph over death, tragedy and violence. It is a time to rejoice in the joyful faith that in his resurrection, Jesus has dethroned death. Early church theologians (like Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and John Chrysostom) taught that God played a practical joke on the devil by raising Jesus from the dead. "*Risuspaschalis* - the Easter laugh," the early theologians called it.

There is an old Easter custom begun by the Greeks in the early centuries of Christianity. Early Orthodox churches gathered on the Monday after Easter to tell stories, jokes and anecdotes. To this day in Slavic regions Christians gather the day after Easter for folk dancing and feasting in the churchyard. "Bright Sunday" (the Sunday after Easter), was observed by the faithful as "days of joy and laughter" with parties and picnics to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. Churchgoers and pastors played practical jokes on each other, drenched each other with water, told jokes, sang, and danced.

In 1988 a group called the Fellowship of Merry Christians began encouraging churches and prayer groups to resurrect Bright Sunday celebrations and call it "Holy Humor Sunday," with the theme: "Jesus is the LIFE of the party."

Whenever "Laughter Sunday" it is celebrated, and by whatever name, it is characterized by laughter, joking, singing, and merry-making. And it reminds us that God is a God of laughter as well as of sorrow - much as God is Lord of the valleys as well as the mountain tops.

OPENING PRAYER & PRAYER OF JESUS

Hallelujah, thanks and praise, ever-living God,
worker of wonders, maker of miracles,
author of all life and giver of life eternal!
Out of chaos and fear you bring beauty and hope.
Out of despair and death you create courage and new life.

Loving God, we rejoice in the gift of your grace.
Grant that in this brief time of worship,
joy and laughter might displace anxiety and worry,
so that we may face the week to come with hope and faith.
For we pray this in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray, saying,

Our Father...

Opening our Minds

SCRIPTURE READINGS:

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

(The death and resurrection of Jesus
reverse human wisdom and foolishness.)

The Message that points to Christ on the Cross
seems like sheer silliness to those hellbent on destruction,
but for those on the way of salvation it makes perfect sense.
This is the way God works, and most powerfully as it turns out.

It's written,
I'll turn conventional wisdom on its head,
I'll expose so-called experts as crackpots.

So where can you find someone truly wise,
truly educated, truly intelligent in this day and age?
Hasn't God exposed it all as pretentious nonsense?
Since the world in all its fancy wisdom
never had a clue when it came to knowing God,
God in his wisdom took delight
in using what the world considered dumb
—*preaching*, of all things!
—to bring those who trust him into the way of salvation.

While Jews clamor for miraculous demonstrations
and Greeks go in for philosophical wisdom,
we go right on proclaiming Christ, the Crucified.
Jews treat this like an *anti*-miracle
—and Greeks pass it off as absurd.
But to us who are personally called by God himself
—both Jews and Greeks
—Christ is God’s ultimate miracle and wisdom
all wrapped up in one.
Human wisdom is so tiny, so impotent,
next to the seeming absurdity of God.
Human strength can’t begin to compete with God’s “weakness.”

Philippians 1:4-9

(The apostle Paul speaks of the joy, peace and blessings that come with the Good News of Jesus.
And yes, I know that we read this passage quite recently. I just think that we need its message right now.)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.
Let your gentleness be known to everyone.
The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything,
but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.
And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing,
whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
Keep on doing the things that you have learned
and received and heard and seen in me,
and the God of peace will be with you.

MINISTER’S MESSAGE:

One of the things that I have noticed about Sunnybrook is that there are a lot of P.K.s who are part of this congregation. Those of you who are P.K.s know that that means, but I bet there are a lot of people who do not, so let me explain:

P.K. is short for Preacher’s Kid, Priest’s Kid or Pastor’s Kid. It is one of those rare labels that works across denominations. PKs are those unfortunate enough to be born into homes which are also occupied by someone looking for sermon illustrations. As a result, PKs grow up with the weekly embarrassment of having their mood swings, their successes and failures, even their toilet training habits pondered and meditated on, explored for their spiritual significance, dissected in minute detail, not just by their parents, but by a whole community, on a weekly basis. They are, above all children, most to be pitied!

And even if their pastoral parent doesn't talk about them directly, eventually they will become teenagers, and those of you who have teenagers know that all teenagers find their parents utterly humiliating. But teenaged PKs suffer a double curse. You see most parents in those teenage years can play it safe by heeding the very wise advice that "it is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt." But preachers, pastors and priests don't have that option. We have to speak. We are required to do so. And so PKs suffer the vicarious humiliation of having their pastoral parent removing all doubt on a weekly basis. The only possibility more humiliating than being a PK on a Sunday morning is to be a PS (Preacher's Spouse). But you don't need me to tell you more about that. Just ask Therese after the service!

I explain that just so that you can enjoy a joke about one particular P.K., a preacher's kid, (not one of mine lest I get into trouble again) who was being reprimanded (again) for failing to wash his hands before eating. His mother patiently explained to him (again) about germs and the need to avoid getting them on his food and then into his mouth. The PK was having none of it. "Germs and Jesus!" he exclaimed. "Germs and Jesus! That's all I ever hear about around here and I've never seen either one!"

Well in this season of Easter we celebrate that although we don't see Jesus, the joy of his resurrection is very real. Although we don't see him directly, the resurrection community carries on his ministry of healing and justice-making and joy-spreading wherever it lives out of his story, wherever it shares a meal in his name, wherever it ponders the meaning of his life for the way we live together, whenever we turn over our worries to him in prayer, whenever we keep in the front of our minds what is true, what is honourable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent and worthy of praise.

It is pretty easy to get caught up in negative thinking, in complaining, in focusing on the problems in our lives rather than the blessings. But in calling us to rejoice, the apostle Paul calls us to focus our minds on what is good, giving thanks and praise.

Pope Francis entitled his first major message to the Catholic Church *The Joy of the Gospel*. In that work, Pope Francis lamented that too many Christians seem "like Lent without Easter": In a consumer culture, he writes, we are constantly tempted to covet, and a covetous heart in constant pursuit of frivolous pleasures leads not to joy, but desolation and anguish.

Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.

One of the ways we cultivate joy is to approach suffering and trouble with a joyful heart. We rejoice not because there is no difficulty in life, but in the very face of those difficulties. We celebrate this Holy Humour Sunday, remember, in the aftermath of the horror of Christ's crucifixion. We celebrate Holy Humour Sunday because Easter is the good news that tragedy and horror do not have the last word. Easter is the punch line to the joke that God plays on the

powers of evil. And so, in the face of death, we reaffirm life. In the face of tragedy, we reaffirm joy. In the face of events that challenge our sense of life's meaning and purpose, we reaffirm that faith, joy and laughter are the very things that make life worth living.

W. O. Mitchell suggested something about this power of humour in a short story he wrote about a big city university professor who came to a small prairie town during the Second World War to do some field research on what the locals called "tall tales." The professor, however, made himself immediately unpopular by referring to their tall tales as "lies." He would go about town asking people to tell him their lies, and they would look at him befuddled. "Lies?! Folks around here are honest," they would say. "We don't tell lies." But every time someone told a tall tale, the professor would pull out his little notebook and start scribbling madly. Relations with the townsfolk generally deteriorated from there.

But right at the end of the story, the professor redeemed himself. He came up with a tall tale of his own, and not just an average tall tale, but a real whopper, about an enormous grasshopper. This grasshopper that was so big that when it landed near an airfield, the men pumped a hundred gallons of fuel into it before realizing it wasn't a plane. It was so big that it squashed a man to death when it landed in one town. It was so big that it spit tobacco juice and smeared an entire newly painted schoolhouse. It was so big that it laid an egg as big as a chicken coop. It was so big that bullets and buckshot bounced off its chitinous hide, and it only left when it developed some amorous feelings for a passing Lancaster bomber. It turns out that the reason the professor has been so interested in tall tales is that he sees them expressions of hope in difficult times, ways of making fun of the very things that most threaten farmers' livelihoods. "Grasshoppers? You think these grasshoppers are bad? You should have seen the one that landed over by Jackson's barn in twenty-nine. Now that was a grasshopper!"

"This is a hard country," the professor said. There are grasshoppers that devour precious crops. "There are – drouth [sic], blizzards, loneliness. A man is a pretty small thing out on all this prairie. He is at the mercy of the elements. He's a lot like – like a - ... Fly on a platter.... These men lie about the things that hurt them most. Their yarns are about the winters and how cold they are... the summers and how dry they are. In this country you get the deepest snow, the worst dust storms, the biggest hailstones... Rust and dust and hail and sawfly and cutworm and drouth [sic] are terrible things, but not half as frightening if they are made ridiculous. If a man can laugh at them he's won half the battle. When he exaggerates things he isn't lying really; it's a defense, the defense of exaggeration. He can either do that or squeal.... [and] People in this country aren't squealers."¹

So rejoice! Rejoice always! Rejoice in all circumstances! Again I will say it, rejoice! For Jesus is risen! Even if you can't see him, he is as real as germs. Amen!

♪HYMN: "Give to Us Laughter"

VU 624

Opening our Hearts

INVITATION TO SHARE

¹ W. O. Mitchell, *Jake and the Kid*, pp. 100-1

OFFERING

Whether you are able to offer a little or a lot, your offering is a spiritual practice which helps you to focus your life on what you have rather than what you don't.

A NEW CREED

We are not alone, we live in God's World.

We believe in God:
who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.
We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us;
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.

CELEBRATIONS AND CONCERNS

- This Wednesday is Earth Day, an annual day to remember how much we depend on the environment, and to recommit ourselves to learning how to live sustainably. This Earth Day is a special one, the fiftieth anniversary of the very first Earth Day, which was held in 1970. I find myself wondering if this Earth Day is special for another reason, and whether one of the silver linings in the cloud of this pandemic will be that we will learn the danger of ignoring what scientists are telling us about the likely consequences of a course of action will be. And it may also be teaching us that if we really decide that something is important, things that we thought could never happen, can be made to happen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Lord, we thank you for the gift of joy -- the gift that comes from knowing you and knowing that nothing in all creation can separate us from your love, the joy that comes from knowing that our lives have purpose and meaning in your world.

We thank you gracious God, that in your wisdom you have appointed a time in our lives for laughter -- and that laughter and a merry heart are means by which you bring healing and wholeness to that which would be otherwise dried up and without beauty or vitality . Indeed,

gracious God, we praise you for giving Abraham and Sarah laughter in their old age and for revealing your wisdom through the foolishness of the cross.

Thank you for granting to us a sense of the ridiculous and the ability to appreciate it when it comes to pass. Grant us the grace to be able to laugh at ourselves, and so forgive ourselves and experience grace and healing.

Bring joy and hope, laughter and wholeness, rejoicing and healing, today, O Lord, to the many people and situations who need your life-giving love this day, for those struggling with illness, poverty, hunger and violence.

Remember especially, O God, those who mourn at this time of separation and isolation. Grant special comfort to those who are unable to be with a dying relative, or those who are dying and feel very alone. At a time of separation, may they yet know the joy of the time they shared, and the joy of the good news that we are not alone because we live in your world.

And this coming week, as we commemorate Earth Day, help us recommit ourselves to living sustainably, reducing pollution, protecting endangered species, habitats, and the climate system. These things we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

♪**HYMN:** “Joyful, Joyful We Adore You”

VU 232

BLESSING:

May we open our hearts to mysteries along the way
Greet fellow pilgrims with welcome and grace
Move lightly and simply through the day
May we give thanks for the Earth, our fragile home
For all our relations who have gone before
And for all who will follow ...
We are not alone
May the spirit and blessing of the One who is love –
Holy One among us, all around us, and within us –
Be with us this week,
and surround us with love