



Camrose United Church
Sunday March 21, 2021
Community of Faith: God, me, we
Rev. Helen Reed, Diaconal Minister

Candle Lighting

We light the Christ Candle, aware of God around, among, & within us. In a moment of silence, we prepare ourselves to celebrate God's presence in our community.

Call of Faith

(from A Song of Faith, The United Church of Canada, 2006).

“We offer worship

as an outpouring of gratitude and awe
and a practice of opening ourselves
to God's still, small voice of comfort,
to God's rushing whirlwind of challenge.

Through word, music, art, and sacrament,
in community and in solitude,
God changes our lives,
our relationships, and our world.

We sing with trust.”

Leaning into Lent:

As we continue this Lenten journey, our Song of Faith reminds us that worship is an important part of our journey. In worship we find ourselves in a community and time that teaches us, supports us and accompanies us as we learn to give thanks for the gifts we have in our lives, as we learn to listen for God's voice of comfort and challenge. Our Song of Faith reminds us that God uses many ways to change us, transform us and love us.

☞Hymn: ♪ MV28 God of the Bible

Jeremiah 31:31-34 The Message (MSG)

31-32 “That’s right. The time is coming when I will make a brand-new covenant with Israel and Judah. It won’t be a repeat of the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant even though I did my part as their Master.”

33-34 “This is the brand-new covenant that I will make with Israel when the time comes. I will put my law within them — write it on their hearts! — and be their God. And they will be my people. They will no longer go around setting up schools to teach each other about God. They’ll know me firsthand, the dull and the bright, the smart and the slow. I’ll wipe the slate clean for each of them. I’ll forget they ever sinned!”

Focus on Faith...

Beginning again... it happens a lot with God.

I wonder if God has a patience limit...

and when it might run out?

I wonder why, when we hear that God resets, redirects and changes direction for the good of the whole, that we resist doing that?

I wonder how we are listening to the words God has written on our hearts?

♪ ***MV115 Behold, Behold, I make all things new***

Prayer for Grace:

(Based on words by Richard Bott, St. Andrew's (Haney) maple ridge, B.C. Gathering, Lent/Easter/Pentecost 2009 page 29. Used with permission)

Covenant. Promises made.

Covenant. Promises between people.

Promises between people and God.

Sometimes...

Covenant is broken.

Promises are forgotten.

Plans are changed. Life moves us into the unknown.

And we grieve. And God knows our sorrow.
Then something amazing happens...
even when we are fearful,
even when we forget our role
to protect, to hold, to love...
even when we are unbalanced by the unexpected,
God invites us back.

God invites us back.

God invites us into the covenant again.

So with God's love and guidance

Invitation and support

we gather...

To remember our connections

To remember our faith and God's faith

To renew our promises with each other and with God.

♪ **MV#65 When we are tested.**

Words of Assurance

In our faith stories we hear that

God renews covenant with us all the time.

God offers us guidance to help our choices.

God's love is all around us.

God has promised us to always be there for us.

Let us trust God's promise,

Let us open our hearts to feel the love of God

around us, within us, among us.

Amen.

John 12:20-26a The Message (MSG)

A Grain of Wheat Must Die

20-21 There were some Greeks in town who had come up to worship at the Feast. They approached Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee: "Sir, we want to see Jesus. Can you help us?"

22-23 Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip together told Jesus. Jesus answered, "Time's up. The time has come for the Chosen One to be glorified.

24-25 "Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal.

26 "If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment's notice.

Scripture Reading(s):

Scripture is our song for the journey, the living word passed on from generation to generation to guide and inspire.

God calls us to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

Message/Reflections

We are coming closer to our destination on our Lenten road. On this 5th week of Lent, when we have been challenged to ask ourselves and each other "How are we doing?" we may have simply learned that we really don't know.

Our life journey right now is filled with a lot of questions, a lot of wonderings, a lot of uncertainty. Many of us really don't know how to identify how we are doing, how we are feeling.

What we do know is that we continue to travel this journey together. Together, we are holding each other up, holding

on to each other, encouraging each other. Together, we are sharing our frustrations and our joys.

For many of us, the changes that we are living through are the most challenging we've experienced and we resist the lack of choices we have, the feeling of being contained.

There are also many who could remember and share, if we are willing to listen, other challenges of Wars, of Illnesses, of violence, of natural disasters that took away loved ones, choices, and freedom that, in retrospect, were far worse than we are living through now.

I think that one answer to How Are We Doing? might be that we are learning to appreciate more what we do have - no, *who* we do have in our lives. We express our yearning to be together with family and friends that, in our Before Times, we may have taken for granted.

Another answer might be that we are learning that there are a lot of things we had that we need to let go of if we are to live forward into a world that is safe for all.

In our Jesus story today, even knowing that he was about to take his biggest risk and face his hugest challenge, Jesus reminded the disciples that there are times when you must be ready to give up what you have for what could be.

Jesus said, that if you give up all you are for the good of someone else, you have that possibility to feed, to support so many and to reap the harvest of love. Then he says, to get it right we must follow his teachings.

Holding onto the present and the past holds back life. Trying to remain as the one grain of wheat we are, will not bring healing or hope to the world. But, if we are willing to take the risk, to rise to the challenge...oh... the

differences we can make. If, he says, we are willing to let go of ourselves, and give our life for others the reward is more than we might imagine.

Isn't that true for us today? Aren't we asked to give up the life we are used to so that others can have life? It's also true that being asked to make that decision is temporary – we know it is. So why is it so hard to do?

We live in a privileged part of the world and we often become blind to our privilege. We grumble about how hard our life is – and I agree, our challenges are many... but...

Have you been aware of the turmoil in Myanmar? Since the military coup at the beginning of February 2021, at least 193 peaceful protesters have been murdered as part of a terror campaign by the military to force the people of Myanmar to accept military rule. Once again Rohingya citizens find their lives in danger and are becoming Refugees looking for safety.

Have you been aware of a shooting in Atlanta that has taken the lives of 7 women and 1 man? And that the Asian communities are experiencing a great fear of persecution?

Have you been aware of an incident in a school in Leduc this week that resulted in the loss of the life of a young woman?

Have you heard that the Vatican has said that LGBTQ couples are unable to receive a church blessing because they are a 'sin'?

Have you heard the concern with choices around coal and oil that are negatively impacting the environment we share?

The world is not horrible place, really it's not, but it's not perfect either. It needs work and support to be it's best. How are we doing?

In the scriptures that Jesus would have known and heard, from the story of Prophet Jeremiah, we are reminded that we have some of the answers within ourselves. We see God's capacity to assess a situation, see what sacrifice and change is needed, and to change directions to fill the need.

We are reminded that God has placed within us the power of and the capacity for love.

We are told that we don't need to be told what to do – God has already placed the answers in our hearts. Love and be love in an imperfect world.

Listening with our hearts, following the many examples that Jesus gave us of risking, of taking up the challenges God puts before us to give up ourselves so that others may be protected, is what we gather to learn and live in our worship.

Our words, our prayer, our songs connect us with God – with that voice of love written on our hearts. We are reminded to be grateful for what we have. We are reminded to give all that we can because of the love God has given us.

Where is our capacity to change directions to fill the needs of God's people? We are taught by so many of our stories to give in to God, to give up for God, to give out love as God did – this is what we are meant to do. This is what Jesus asked us to do and showed us how to do.

How are we doing?

☞Hymn: ♪VU598 When Pain of the World

Responding to God's call...

There are many hurting people in the world,
God knows each one of them.

Even if our life is not what we planned,
we are blessed to live with choices,
with friends and neighbours.

God challenges us to be a friend to someone in need.
God challenges us offer healing hope to a hurting world.
May we never forget that every little bit we offer, has the
potential to offer hope, to change a life.
May all that we have, and all that we offer be pleasing in
God's sight. **Amen.**

☞Hymn: ♪ How Can I Keep From Singing

Pastoral Prayers of God's people for God's people

God of all creation,

You are always with us.

You never give up nurturing us, feeding us, loving us.

We become our best when we listen to your love.

As we find ourselves on a detour in our church's life,
We take a moment to express our gratitude for the gifts
and connections you bless us with.

We are grateful for good leaders in the world:
those who offer gifts of integrity, of selflessness,
of inclusiveness, of respect to those they serve.

**We pray that they will find in you the courage,
for continued persistence and dedication
in the role that they offer the earth.**

We pray for

those who are sick and weary,

those who are sad and lonely,

those who are frustrated and angry,

those who are hurt
those who do the hurting,
those who grieve the loss of life

May they feel your love enfold them, may they encounter
your strength and compassion on their journey.

May they know that they are not alone in the world.

We pray for ourselves,
that we will remember that you are constantly beside us
that we will see your voice and love in many places
that we will not be afraid to face the challenges that
come our way because you are with us in them.

**May we remember that
We are a church with purpose:
nurturing faith and comforting hearts
Sharing gifts for the good of all,
Resistant to the forces that exploit and marginalize
Fierce love in the face of violence,
Defenders of human dignity
Held and inspired by you.
Thanks be to you, O God.**

Blessing

This moment of worship is a time of
connecting through the spirit
with God and those who live and learn with us.

Let us remember our connections

We are one...

God's children, God's family.

The Holy Spirit of God

energizes each one of us

for God's work in the world

We are related and we have God's work to do

for as the body of Christ we are sent forth,

to love our neighbours as ourselves,

to work for healing and for wholeness,

in God's world.

Changing the Christ Candle:

The light of Christ, shining into all the corners of the earth, showing us where we are and where we are meant to be.

The Spirit of God. Breathe it in...and know that God is with us wherever we go.

***✠ Sending Song: VU#951 Holy, Holy, Holy
Holy, Holy, Holy, My Heart, my heart adores you!
My heart is glad to say the words: you are holy, God.***

Acknowledgements

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