



Birchcliff Bluffs United Church

Ministers: All the People – wherever and however they gather

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June 14, 2020 – Second Sunday after Pentecost

WE GATHER AS GOD'S PEOPLE

Prelude

Call to Worship

In the midst of the world's chaos

come to this place and find peace.

When your mind is overwhelmed with what you see

come to this place and find hope.

If your heart is heavy, with fear, with worry, with sorrow,

come to this place and find strength.

As you long for community in a world that is torn apart,

come to this place and find grace.

Come people of God, and in this place, in this moment,

find peace, hope, strength and grace, as we worship and pray together.

Response

Just As I Am (v. 1 & 4)

VU 508

Words: Charlotte Elliott

Music: William Batchelder Bradbury

Just as I am, without one plea,
but that your blood was shed for me,
and that you bid me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Just as I am, your love unknown
has broken every barrier down;
now to be yours, yes, yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Life & Work of the Church

Welcome to online worship



Land Acknowledgement



As we prepare for worship, we take a moment to acknowledge the sacred land beside the water on which Birchcliff Bluffs United Church stands. It has been a site of human activity for many thousands of years. This land is the territory of the Huron-Wendat and Petun First Nations, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississauga's of the Credit and Scugog, part of the Williams Treaty. Today, the meeting place around Toronto is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island. We are grateful for the opportunity to live and work on this territory. We seek to be mindful of broken covenants and the need to strive to make right with all our relations.



Candle Lighting

Today we celebrate the 95th anniversary of the United Church of Canada. We light a candle for all those who have gone before and those who lead us now into the future. I pray that this candle shines the light of Christ onto injustice so that it may be seen, confronted, engaged, and eliminated. In honour of this day let's listen to the voices of children at Fraser Road United Church in Gander Newfoundland sharing the United Church of Canada Creed.

Opening Hymn

O Jesus, Joy of Loving Hearts (v. 1, 2, 4)

Words: 12th Century, translated by Ray Palmer.

VU 472

Music: Henry Percy Smith.

1 O Jesus, joy of loving hearts,
 the fount of life, the light of all
 from every bliss that earth imparts
 we turn, unfilled, to hear your call.

2 Your truth unchanged has ever stood;
 you plead with all to call on you,
 to those who seek you, you are good,
 to those who find you, life is new.

4 O Jesus, ever with us stay;
 make all our moments calm and bright;
 chase the bleak night of sin away;
 shed o'er the world your holy light.

Prayer for Grace

*Loving God,
in Jesus you offer life to the world
and love to all people.
When we see life only for ourselves,
forgive us.
Help us to hear your transforming love
speaking to us of respect, dignity and worth,
telling us that we are loved
and that we are to love one another.
In the knowledge of this love
work through us to bring your justice to the world,
in the power of the Holy Spirit.
Amen*

WE LISTEN FOR GOD'S WORD

And Now for Something Completely Different

A monologue by Sarah

One meal changed my life.
You know how all this ends, I didn't.

The promises God made that we would be the mother and father of a great nation were
getting old.
Really? A great nation?
That takes children and that was one thing we were short on!

We had goats and sheep and camels.
Enough to eat and drink.
Servants and maid servants.
But no children.

Every decade or so God would remind us:
You will be parents of a great nation.
More than you can count.

I tried to keep hope.
I tried to keep faith.
I tried to believe.
But I was running out of belief –
just like I was running out of my favorite nut cakes ...
Best make some for tomorrow's lunch.

I was sitting and pondering the state of my kitchen
and getting the ingredients ready for my nut cakes-
flour, oil, nuts, of course, maybe some cinnamon ...

When Abraham ran in-

"Quick ... make ready three measures of our best flour,
knead it, and make bread. We've got guests.
Three men showed up out of nowhere. I'll kill the fatted calf."

I reminded him of all the extra cheese and milk we had,
and suggested they might like a refreshing drink.

Abraham agreed. What could he do?

I'm the cook around here and usually what I say goes.
I can't believe he told ME how to make bread. (Big sigh.)

Well I made the bread,
he killed the calf and put it on the barbecue.

I made my famous nut cake
and Abraham brought it out to the men.

I watched from the tent.

Yup, the tallest one couldn't resist a second helping of the nut cake.
I knew it!

He settled back on the blanket and asked for me.
I think he saw me peeking through the tent flap.

Anyway, then he said something outrageous.

I would have a baby within the year.
(*Chuckle that turns into a full laugh*)

Well you know—he was right. I had a baby.

Those visitors changed my life.
Our baby brought back hope, and opened up the door to faith.
And I never doubted God again.

Hymn

To Abraham and Sarah

Words: © 1984 Judith A. Fetter

Music: Basil Harwood

VU 634

1 To Abraham and Sarah
 the call of God was clear,
'Go forth and I will show you
 a country rich and fair.
You need not fear the journey
 for I have pledged my word,
that you shall be my people
 and I will be your God.'

2 From Abraham and Sarah
 arose a pilgrim race,
dependent for their journey
 on God's abundant grace;
and in their heart was written
 by God this saving word:
'that you shall be my people
 and I will be your God.'

3 We of this generation
 on whom God's hand is laid,
can journey to the future
 secure and unafraid,
rejoicing in God's goodness
 and trusting in this word:
'that you shall be my people
 and I will be your God.'

Prayer of Illumination

*Help us O God, to come to you with open lives to receive your words.
May we give them new life as we listen to what you have to say.
Open our hearts as we embark on this journey with each other and with you. Amen*

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19 A paraphrase by Calvin Seerveld in *Voicing God's Psalms*.

I love God because God hears me when I cry and pray,
Yes, God bent God's ear down to me,
and I'll talk about it the rest of my life!

I was caught in a dead end.
The cramp of the grave had a hold on me;
pain and trouble kept hurting.
So I called out loud on God's name:
God, please! Get me out—save my life!

Full of mercy is the Lord God, just—yes—
but our God spills compassion over!

God takes loving care of those open to temptation—
when I was cut down to size, God took care of me—
so calm down people, God has given you what was good!

That's so.
You got me out of the dead end.

You have stopped my eyes from filling with tears!
You have kept me from walking into ruin—Yes!

What shall I give God?
So many lovely surprises God has given me.
I know, I shall toast God with the cup of victory—
Cheers for God!
I will do what I vowed to God I would too,
and I'll do it right among God's people.

Yes, I will really offer thanksgiving to you:
Cheers for God!
I mean it, I will do what I vowed to God,
and I'll do it among the faithful,
near the house of God,
right in the middle of Jerusalem—
Glory, Hallelujah!

Hymn

For the Beauty of the Earth

Words: Folliott Sandford Pierpoint

Music: Conrad Kocher

VU 226

- 1 For the beauty of the earth,
 for the glory of the skies,
 for the love which from our birth
 over and around us lies,
 God of all, to you we raise
 this our hymn of grateful praise.

- 2 For the beauty of each hour
 of the day and of the night,
 hill and vale, and tree and flower,
 sun and moon, and stars of light, R

- 3 For the joy of human love,
 brother, sister, parent, child,
 friends on earth, and friends above,
 for all gentle thoughts and mild, R

- 4 For each perfect gift sublime
 to our race so freely given,
 graces human and divine,
 flowers of earth and buds of heaven, R

Romans 5: 1-8**New Revised Standard Version**

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we^[c] boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.³ And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,⁵ and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die.⁸ But God proves God's love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

The word of God for the People of God

Thanks be to God

Sermon

I Hope

Last week I was angry. I was angry that the faith I hold dear was being used to accomplish a nefarious purpose. I am OK with how that all presented itself, but this week, I found myself picking up the wreckage of that experience.

Having voiced my anger, having voiced my understanding of Jesus message of love for neighbour self as, a message that calls me to give voice to the voiceless and stand against oppression, I stand here this week saying – now what. I said all those things. Did they make a difference? I thought I stood up and lived my faith in an authentic way and that somehow that would bring about – WHAT...

Change? Not so much.

Peace? Not so much.

Understanding? Not so much

All of these things still seem out of reach. What was I hoping for?

Have you ever felt this way? That something would happen because of something you did, or wished for, or hoped for?

The biblical stories we are engaging today speak about hope. In Genesis, Abraham and Sarah have the hope of birthing a new nation. In Romans we are called to boast of hope that is grounded in faith. We are called to hope because of God's action. What are we to do when that action seems remote, out of our grasp?

As is often my way, I have a story for you today.

Some of you know that I spent time as a student chaplain at St. Michael's Hospital downtown. One morning I met with someone who had attempted - but did not complete - ending their life the night before. I listened to their story and given their challenges and experiences I could completely understand how they got to be at the place where I met them.

They said to me – I have absolutely no hope.

There is no reason to hope, I tried that before, and look where I am now.

We talked some more and after some time and further sharing, I said, I understand that you have no hope, I hear you, I wonder what it might be like to have someone else hold onto hope for you. I can hold your hope for you right now and as we get to know each other, maybe there will be a time when I can pass that hope back over to you.

We did indeed meet again and as relationship developed between us one day they said this:

I was thinking about what you said and that you were going to hold onto hope for me. I still don't have any hope, but because of what you have done, I have hope that there is hope.

Remember at the outset of our conversation today I said: We are called to hope because of God's action. Hope is not about passivity: action is required.

I believe that a vision of hope does not lend itself to passivity. In a theological sense, hope invites us to take part in the activities of the world. This approach is consistent with the ethic and preaching of Martin Luther King Jr., as well as many voices in feminist, queer, Latin American and black theologies.

We often talk of hope as wishful thinking: "I hope it won't rain"; "I hope I win the lottery"; "I hope the Leafs win the Stanley Cup" but Paul's concept of hope in Romans is different.

A little earlier in the book of Romans, he introduces "hope" referencing Genesis and telling of Abraham and Sarah's faith, and then further develops the concept in today's reading.

For Paul, hope isn't wishful thinking, but absolute certainty about the future because it is grounded in God's faithfulness to keep God's promises. That is, what God will do is grounded on what God has done.

Two phrases in Paul's letter offer some insight into this: We have peace with God (verse 1) and we boast in our hope (verse 2). Later in Romans, Paul will call this: the believer's great hope.

Paul also wants us appreciate that the idea of hope - leading us to have peace - is grounded in another important understanding of God: grace

In the beginning of Romans Paul greets his readers as those who: “belong to Jesus Christ” and reminds them to be holy with “grace and peace”

Paul calls us to consider the things we boast about. He is not talking about the things we have done ourselves, our own actions, our own expressions of needs and wants. Paul is talking about God’s gracious act in Christ. That Jesus comes to the world with a message of inclusion, love, and yes, peace, hope, grace, that silences anyone who would boast of their own actions, status, or privilege.

That includes me. Me and my boasting of my own stuff, advancing my own agenda, living and acting within my own privilege and status. I do get a soapbox as a minister.

To live in God’s peace and grace requires a crucial redirection of my energies: an essential re-orienting my understanding of hope. This hope I am to boast about is not rooted in my own actions and desires, it is rooted in God’s grace and God’s peace. It is not of my own doing.

Grace is difficult to grasp sometimes. It seems that much of what I do remains caught in my own experience, my own bias, my own sense of the world. And when I confront that, when I admit that, I feel unworthy, guilty as charged, complicit in the exercise of oppressive power. How do we as individuals and as a society move beyond the guilt that comes from hurting ourselves and others to a place where we can feel good enough again and live into new relationships.

Where does God enter that conversation? By offering grace. God offers us unmerited and whole acceptance and inclusion just as we are: boasts and bias all.

This grace can stir us and sensitize us to move in a direction that builds wholeness, relationship and community.

But how do we live that out in the world and what does it mean individually and collectively? I believe it is living in God’s grace and offering that grace to others, living in God’s peace and offering that peace to others.

I believe that is the essence of hope. It is hope in God. So I hope.

Henri Nouwen said this:

*Hope means to keep living amid desperation,
and to keep humming in the darkness.
Hoping is knowing that there is love.
It is trust in tomorrow.
It is falling asleep and waking again when the sun rises.
In the midst of a gale at sea, it is to discover land.
In the eyes of another, it is to see that they understand you.
As long as there is still hope there will also be prayer
And God will be holding you in God’s hands.*

Don't get me wrong, this is challenging to grasp in difficult moments. Moments of grief, frustration, oppression. "Is God among us or not?" For me, this is not a question about the existence of God, but whether God's care and compassion extend to people in need.

It is a legitimate question, and it cannot be dismissed. However, in the continual asking over and over, our trust in God and hope in God begin to wear away. This spiritual erosion can lead any of us to despair, or to forgetfulness about God's care in the past, even the recent past.

It can lead us to ask, "What have you done for me lately?" I see this in my experience with many people challenged with difficult life circumstances. I see it in my own life. This is real and powerful. Events can sometimes overwhelm and we are not able at certain points to perceive God's action in our lives.

In these moments, we are called to simply walk alongside people, because how God is working and why God is working in certain ways often becomes clearer only with time and distance. Hope can assert itself only when we can see the power of the intervention of God, who remains Wholly Other at the same time as we see God manifest in Jesus.

In Jesus, hope became near to all of us, living and all-embracing. This is not a theological formula, but a response, a gift, Jesus simply walking alongside people a gift of grace, freely given. Knowing that hope can be absent when we take the journey of despair, philosopher Gabriel Marcel suggests that "Hope is the act by which this temptation is actively or victoriously overcome."

At St. Mike's having the conversation that I did with a person despairing, I found a way to hold hope for that person, to sit with the tension of their despair and offer them the possibility of hope.

We too, can hold hope for each other. We can also hold hope for ourselves. In those instances we might not feel hopeful, but we receive hope's gifts. While we usually state our hopes in the form "I hope that..." rather than "I hope," which is an absolute statement, might I suggest trying something different.

I believe that living in God's hope requires us to sit with the tension, sit with the uncertainty, with each other, caring for each other in the best ways that we can, and not attempting to direct the world, or change the world by trying to make it all better, by dismissing the reality of the grief and frustration, that just leads to further knocking our heads against a proverbial or literal wall.

I believe that there is good news in advancing a different approach. Do we bargain or rationalize? Do we hope that under certain conditions our situation could improve, or do we simply hope in God? Because God is the source from which unqualified hope springs. God offers irrepressible hope.

Things continued happening in the world this week, nefarious evil things. I continue to be angry.

And yet, I hope.

Hymn

It Is Well With My Soul

Words by Horatio Spafford / Music by Philip Bliss

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll
Whatever my lot, you have taught me to say
It is well, it is well, with my soul

It is well
With my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul

Though troubles should buffet, though trials should come,
Let blessed assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
It is well, it is well, with my soul

It is well
With my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul

O God, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
The trumpet shall sound and my God shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul

It is well
With my soul
It is well, it is well with my soul

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

Offering our Gifts to God

God has abundantly bestowed upon us the gift of life.
Our best response is to offer our whole lives
as agents for God's mission in the world.
Give as you are able to build the community of God
in our homes, our congregation and around the world.



Prayers of the People (based on Romans 5)

We thank you, O God, that you have given us an enduring hope—one which cannot disappoint us or mislead us. We thank you, that through our faith in you and in your child Jesus Christ, you enter into every heart and create new lives that have been torn asunder by the powers of this world – oppression – fear - hatred, **God hear our prayer.....**

We pray today O God that those who are asleep may awake and know that salvation is near. Help them, and us, to lay aside our own power and to put on the armour of light that you bestow upon us as we seek you day by day. Grant that our faith and our commitment to change may be fully alive, **God, hear our prayer.....**

We ask today, O God, for those who have lost hope and for those who have never had it. Grant to us and to those we lift before you in our hearts a new and abiding vision of what have you have done, what you are doing, and what you will do, through us for all people as we take up your message and indeed for creation itself. Grant, O God, that all might discover their purpose and the purpose of all that is and all that is yet to be, **God, hear our prayer.....**

We lift before you, O God, the people, the places, and the experiences which trouble us and cause us to call upon you. May your hand touch them, may your presence be known and embraced by all, **God, hear our prayer.....**

We ask all this, knowing that you are our hope and our salvation, a very present help in times of trouble, and the One who offers new and abundant life to us and our world:

understood through Jesus who taught us to share these words together in prayer...



Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH

Closing Hymn

One More Step Along the World I Go (v. 1, 2, 3, 4) VU 639

Words and Music: Sydney Carter

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- 1 One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go,
from the old things to the new,
keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

- 2 Round the corner of the world I turn,
more and more about the world I learn;
all the new things that I see
you'll be looking at along with me: R

- 3 As I travel through the bad and good,
keep me travelling the way I should;
where I see no way to go
you'll be telling me the way, I know: R

- 4 Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough,
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you: R

Benediction & Commissioning



Postlude

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Other Resources for Today

Additional Lectionary Readings

Genesis 18: 1-15 New Revised Standard Version

The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³ He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵ Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” ⁶ And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures^[c] of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.” ⁷ Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.” ¹⁰ Then one said, “I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴ Is anything too wonderful for the LORD? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁵ But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”

Matthew 9:35 – 10:8 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore ask God of the harvest to send out laborers into the harvest.”

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. ² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, ⁶ but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim the good news, ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near.’ ⁸ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.