



South Cayuga Community Church

of The United Church of Canada

Pastor Dawn Ballantyne, DLM

VAMs: Joan Willis, Rev. Bryan Melick

Pianist: Joan Houser

Music Leader: Donna Mulder

Sunday, Nov 19, 2023

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Welcome

Welcome! Welcome to those who are in-person, those who are watching us online [and to those of you who are reading this] – welcome.

Whoever you are, wherever you are at, we are so glad you've chosen to join us on your journey. May you feel at home with South Cayuga Community Church.

Territory Acknowledgement

Our building sits on fertile ground close to Lake Erie and the Grand River – land long stewarded by the Haudenosaunee people, long before settlers arrived.

May we continue to learn about the history of this land we are so grateful to inhabit, and may we seek reconciliation and friendship while honouring the Indigenous ancestors who also cherished this land. With grateful hearts, we begin our worship service this morning with a familiar song. Let us sing together,

Gathering Song

Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty

VU 315

Lighting of the Christ candle

If you are worshipping with us from home, you are invited to light a candle, turn on a lamp, or breathe deeply, imagining yourself to be surrounded by light.

May the affirming light of this Christ candle guide us all.

May the gifts of this community and the love of God be a blessing and may the flame's warm glow be a beacon of welcome for all people.

Jessica Knoyle, Ottawa, Ont.
The Gathering, Pentecost 2 2023, p.30.
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Call to Worship & Opening Prayer

Come to this place where we belong, a place of welcome and of witness.

We come to rejoice in the One who celebrates each of us and all of us.

We come with eyes lifted – in reverent awe of God's great works.

Great is God our Creator, and worthy of our praise!!

We come with eyes open – to the needs of the world around us.

God is our comfort in times of trouble and our strength in times of strife.

God is worthy of our praise!

And we trust that in this sacred space we will find comfort, grace and love.

We come as those sent out into the world to reflect the light of Jesus and transform the world with love.

We come to recharge, to renew, and to re-engage with the Spirit's power.

As we come, let us pray as one:

Loving and Gracious God we come before you today, just as we are. We come to listen and to learn. Help us to let go of everything that is holding us back. Help us to stand in your awesome presence. Break us open and fill us with your Holy Spirit. Shake us up with the good news of Jesus and show us the way, your way. Amen.

Opening Hymn

Praise, My Soul, the God of Heaven

VU 240

Theme Time

“Something big from something small”

¼ cup of popcorn kernels = 4 cups popped popcorn, 1 cob = ~800 kernels

Can you think of another example of something small, into something bigger?

Your generosity/ donations to the SS = field trip, shopping for Salvation Army

Children’s Hymn

Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus

Scripture

Matthew 25:14-30 (NIV)

¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,^[a] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²² “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²⁴ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

²⁸ "'So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Judges 4:1-7

¹⁻³ The People of Israel kept right on doing evil in GOD's sight. With Ehud dead, GOD sold them off to Jabin king of Canaan who ruled from Hazor. Sisera, who lived in Harosheth Haggoyim, was the commander of his army. The People of Israel cried out to GOD because he had cruelly oppressed them with his nine hundred iron chariots for twenty years.

⁴⁻⁵ Deborah was a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth. She was judge over Israel at that time. She held court under Deborah's Palm between Ramah and Bethel in the hills of Ephraim. The People of Israel went to her in matters of justice.

⁶⁻⁷ She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "It has become clear that GOD, the God of Israel, commands you: Go to Mount Tabor and prepare for battle. Take ten companies of soldiers from Naphtali and Zebulun. I'll take care of getting Sisera, the leader of Jabin's army, to the Kishon River with all his chariots and troops. And I'll make sure you win the battle."

Reflection

"Deborah, Bees, & Standing True"



Okay, so those are some tough scriptures this morning. First we hear about the man throwing worthless servants out into the street for protecting his money but not making more of it and then we hear about people doing evil in God's sight and thus being sold off to slavery. Not exactly the feel good stories you were looking for on this dull, cold, grey November morning?

Well, perhaps that's how the authors of those particular passages were feeling when they wrote them. Maybe it was November. The leaves had fallen off the trees, the fields were too wet to be working in, the breeze had turned to a bitter, bone-chilling wind, and they were feeling discouraged. All around them people were ungrateful, unhelpful, unkind. Haven't you ever felt like that? Like karma was biting you in the butt for not doing enough or being enough and for a wrong you'd committed? I'm not saying it's right – I'm saying it's relatable. I'm not saying it's God – but is it life? Sometimes we feel worthless, sometimes we feel tossed aside, sometimes we feel like slaves.

Instead of focusing on that feeling - what I'd really like to focus on this morning is Deborah – we don't necessarily know how she was feeling but we hear about what she did. And it's not too often that our story focuses on a woman as the lead, or the heroine – so I couldn't *not* concentrate on her this morning.

Deborah is one of only five women who were described as prophets in the Old Testament. She is also the only woman named of twelve judges mentioned in the Bible. Her resume includes judge, warrior, poet, singer and songwriter... and though she is named as the wife of Lappidoth in some biblical versions – the word for wife and woman was the same – so we don't know historically, for sure about that part.

Deborah served as a judge during a time when the Israelites were oppressed by the Canaanites. Judges in ancient Israel were leaders raised up by God to deliver the people from oppression and to administer justice. Deborah was known for her wisdom, and the Israelites would come to her to settle disputes and seek guidance.

Deborah established a safe place for people to share their stories: their concerns, cares, dreams and fears; trusting that she was listening. She was in touch with the needs of her people and the conditions in which they lived. And she genuinely wanted to make their lives better. She had no trouble settling the small disputes and anxieties the people brought before her but what concerned her most was the bigger conflict – that the land there were living on, was occupied by military forces and the Israelites were not free. The people were living in a war zone. They were avoiding the main streets in order to avoid the opposing troops and were travelling only on back roads which brought its own risks and dangers. Because the main thoroughfares were blocked or occupied, that meant trade was slowing down or had stopped completely, so the people did not have what they needed and couldn't trade or sell their own wares. People were in utter despair. So when God called Deborah forth as a leader with a plan – she answered God's call and she prepared to execute God's plan.

Deborah partnered with Barak to take down Sisera... Barak wasn't totally on board with the plan – but he said he'd do it if Deborah went to battle with him. So Deborah bravely went with him – even though her plan seemed inefficient and doomed.

But do you know what the name Deborah means? Deborah means “bee” – like the little insect? “The long-time symbols for accomplishing the impossible. For many years, it was believed that the body of the bee was too large for its wings. It has only been in more recent times that science has determined that bees move their wings at such a high rate of speed that it makes flight possible.” But they still remain as a symbol of accomplishing quests that appeared to be impossible.(2)

Deborah's quest to free the Israelites seemed impossible but she stood strong and she did it! I wonder... What are the impossibilities in your life today? What seems impossible for you? Your children's cell phone or technology addiction? Your parents' dementia diagnosis? Your loved ones' mental health or financial situation? The cost of groceries or mortgage rates, the housing market? Deborah and bees remind us that there is a way – there is a solution.

Deborah illustrates for us that it is possible to find a new way, to find a different way – she was able to show the Israelites, God's way. So what is God's way through our impossibilities right now? If we relate Deborah to today's Gospel lesson, the parable of the talents... Deborah had some, she had a little bit – she had some leadership skills, she had some wisdom, she had some support and she did incredible things with that, she overcame Sisera's army and she freed the people. She did much with a little. But she had to take a risk; she had to stand true to her convictions, to God's calling and she had to at least try. – And that's what the parable reminds us – you just have to try – it doesn't have to be extravagant, it doesn't have to be huge; you don't have to ride into battle and save the oppressed people – you just have to try a little.

Bees are also remembered for what they produce. They make honey – delicious, sweet goodness. May they be a reminder to each of us, to extract the honey of life and that no matter how great the dream is, no matter how big the obstacle, no matter how scary or dire or overwhelming the problem, there is the promise of fulfillment if we pursue it; if we try, just a little.

The promise of fulfillment – the promise of God – the promise that we are never alone – that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, that we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit – that we when we try, when we stand true, God is there with us, showing us the way. Amen.

(1) Porter, Jeanne. Leading Ladies: Transformative Biblical Images for Women's Leadership. Philadelphia, PA: Innisfree Press, 2000. P.95-105
(2) Andrews, Ted. Animal-Speak: The Spiritual & Magical Powers of Creatures Great & Small. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2001. P.337-338.

Hymn

Standing on the Promises of God

Prayers of the People

Faithful God, it is easy to cry “Where is God in the world?” as disease disrupts lives and illness induces grief and pain. It’s so frustrating God that Covid continues to rear its ugly head and that more and more of our neighbours seem to be diagnosed with cancer.

Help us to encounter you, O God, in the dedication of nurses and doctors, in the wonder of science and research. Help us to serve you by comforting those who suffer and accompanying those in distress. We pray particularly today for those undergoing treatments; we pray for those living in retirement and long term care and those transitioning into new spaces and places. We trust Holy God that you are wrapping our neighbours in your loving embrace.

As war and violence spread fear and entrench hostility around the world, we wonder God – where are you? As war continues between Israel and Hamas and Ukraine and Russia... as bloodshed and brutality continue around the world in 32 separate conflicts, help us to notice you, O God, in unexpected bonds of peace and in the provision of refuge, food, and shelter. Help us to serve you by confronting aggression and the abuse of power and by protecting those displaced by conflict.

When racism diminishes our society and prejudice fuels distrust help us to experience you, O God, in the friendships that bridge cultural divides and through the allies that advocate for those who are exploited. Help us to serve you by adding our voices to calls for justice and by replacing suspicion with a desire for understanding. We give thanks for the organizers of the LGBTQ2S+ support group who meet at Grace United Church each month; and for those who have worked hard to bring the Jaacob family to Canada and who continue to work towards the arrival of a second family; and for our friends who call us out when we’re being judgemental or say something racist or prejudiced; or that comes from our place of privilege.

Holy God, when our hopes are dashed and dreams delayed it’s easy to lash out at you or to simply wander away from you. Help us to hold fast, to stand strong and to discover you, O God, in the small moments of each day that remind us of your persistent love for us. Help us to serve you with welcoming hearts and acts of compassion, sharing your love in the world around us.

All this we pray in Jesus’ name, who lived and loved as one of us. God in the word, we praise you, now and forever, as we say together,

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kindom 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,
forever and ever. Amen.

Announcements

Closing Hymn

How Firm a Foundation

VU 660

Sending Forth

Mother Teresa said, "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love."

So go forth into this world, trusting that God goes with you

– confident that Jesus loves you just as you are

– and that the Holy Spirit strengthens you as you each go out and do small things with great love,
even when it feels impossible.

Go Now in Peace

Go now in PEACE, never be afraid

God will go with you each hour of ev'ry day,

Go now in FAITH, steadfast, strong and true,

Know God will guide you in all you do.

Go now in LOVE, and show you believe,

Rach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there, watching from above.

Go now in PEACE, in FAITH, and in LOVE

Amen Amen Amen

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