



South Cayuga Community Church

of The United Church of Canada

Pastor Dawn Ballantyne, DLM

VAMs: Joan Willis, Rev. Bryan Melick

Pianist: Joan Melick

Music Leader: Wendy Willis

Sunday Feb 18, 2024

“Again & Again”



Welcome

Gathering Song

God of the Bible (chorus only, 2X)

MV 28

Territory Acknowledgement

Call to Worship

God meets us in the night –

Before the sun rises,

Before the wounds heals,

Before there are answers,

Before there is closure.

God meets us in the light –

Where joy is effervescent,

Where laughter is contagious,

Where flowers bloom from cracks in the sidewalk,

And where people gather around the table.

God meets us at the threshold –

At the edge of the water,

At the beginning of the wilderness,

At the start of something new,

On the edge of faith.

And if God meet us in all those places,

Then surely God meet us in between –

Staying with us through the wilderness.

We are not alone. God is all around.

Let us worship the God of the here and now.

Call to Confession

Again and again, God meets us where we are.

God's love knows no bounds, which is hard for us to understand and easy for us to forget.

Therefore, in confession we remember together that we are not alone.
And in a unified voice, we once again ask for God's grace in that holy reminder.
Family of faith, please pray with me.

Prayer of Confession

God who meets us where we are-
There is nowhere we can go that you are not.

**You were with Jesus at his baptism.
You were with him in the wilderness,
And even in between, you were there,
Saying aloud, "This is my beloved."**

We know that you are with us too –
In the good, the bad, and everything in between –
But so often we act like we are alone.

**Instead of coming to you with our hurt,
We hold it in or cast it onto others.
Instead of coming to you with our joy,
We credit ourselves and offer you nothing.**

How can we long for a deeper relationship with you
While living like you are nowhere to be found?

**Forgive our self-centered ways.
Remind us that in every breath, in every step, you are there.**

You are the God who meets us where we are.

Before and behind, above and below, within and around. Amen.

Words of Forgiveness

Family of faith, if you hear nothing else today, hear this:
God is here. God sees you. God knows you. God meets you at the edge of every new beginning,
And God calls you beloved.

**We are washed by the water.
We are called beloved.
Thanks be to God for a love like that.**

Song of Assurance

Like a Rock

MV 92

Theme Time

"God's holy AND"

Who's been to a concert? And when the concert comes to an end... what happens? And usually, folks don't want the concert to end so what do they do to let the musicians know? Sure, they give them a standing ovation, they hoot and holler and might start chanting, "one more song!"

Who watched the Superbowl on Sunday? What happened at the end of the game? The score was tied: 19-19. And then what happened? It went into overtime. That happens quite often in sports – if the game ends in a tie, the teams don't want to leave it like that – they want to keep going and figure out who the winner is so they go into overtime.

Sometimes that happens for people at work, too. Their shift at their job might be from 8 to 4 or 9 to 5 or sometimes even 6am to 6pm but if the work isn't completed, sometimes folks stay for overtime and keep working.

Can anyone think of another time when something just keeps going? When something doesn't end when you think it's going to?

Sometimes it happens when you're reading a letter – after the end of a letter, after someone has already signed off, they might add P.S. What does P.S. stand for? Post script. After the original script – PS – and they add a little bit more. Sometimes it happens in a book. You come to the end of the story, "The End," but then there's an Epilogue. A little bit more of the characters' story.

Today and over the next several weeks we're talking about God's holy "AND". A little bit more to God's story. Because God's story is never-ending. It doesn't end even after the encore or the overtime or the PS – God's story goes on and on, infinity. Like the song that never ends. Do you know that one?

"This is the song that doesn't end.

Yes, it goes on and on my friend.

Some people started singing it not knowing what it was...

and they'll continue singing it forever,

just because..." (repeat forever)

(ukulele chords C, G, D7)

God's love is like that – it repeats forever. God's story is like that – it goes on, again & again & again. And so for this season of Lent – which has come along again and we're again hearing of Jesus' baptism at the beginning of his ministry before going into the wilderness again... We're reminded that God's story doesn't come to an end – it continues on again and again with God's holy "and."

So our symbol throughout this journey of Lent, throughout God's story and Jesus' trek to the cross we're using this symbol of "and." Does anyone know what this symbol is called? We know it means "and" but what is this called? An ampersand. This is the symbol of God's holy and. Reminding us again & again that there's more to the story, the story doesn't end at the cross or even at the resurrection – God's story begins again & again with a holy "and."

And God's calls us to pray, again & again. So throughout this season – all of you are invited to write your prayers and weave them into God's holy "and", this ampersand.

Special thanks to Kim and Rob Dickie who constructed this prayer wall for us – for its symbolism that we all get to see this visual reminder each week through this season of God's holy "and" and we also have the opportunity weave our individual prayers in with the prayers of this community to create a beautiful prayer wall. When we become weary from the motion blur chaos of our lives, God promises that there is always more to the story – death does not have the last word. When we feel helpless or hopeless, God's holy "and" encourages us to lift our weary eyes to search for more. This Lent, let us practice the power of 'and' as we sink into the repetition and ritual of prayer.

So to get us started on our prayer wall I'm going to write each of your names on a strip and weave it into the wall – okay? I'll do that after church – but right now – let's pray before we sing a fun song.

Hymn

Jesus Loves Me

(way more fun version)

Scripture

Mark 1:9-15

At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."

¹² At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness, ¹³ and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted^a by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

¹⁴ After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵ "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"



Mini Reflection

God meets us where we are at, again & again. God meets Jesus at the water before he is tempted in the wilderness. First and foremost, God claims us. God meets us in the liminal space, at the water's edge, at the threshold of something new, and names us Beloved. God's covenant with all of creation reminds us that God meets us where we are – in the midst of our reluctance, doubt, eagerness, or weariness – and proclaims we are good.

In those seven verses we just heard, we learn of three significant events in the life of Jesus as he began his ministry. The first is his baptism, where God claims him as God's own beloved son. The second is his experience in the wilderness, where God sends angels to attend to him as he faces the Accuser. Lastly, after John the Baptist's arrest, Jesus begins proclaiming God's proximity and reign while calling for repentance.

The common thread in each account is God's closeness. In pivotal moments, God is extraordinarily present with Jesus and those around him, and for good reason. God's proximity informs our trajectory. God approaches us to claim, equip, and send us to do God's will.

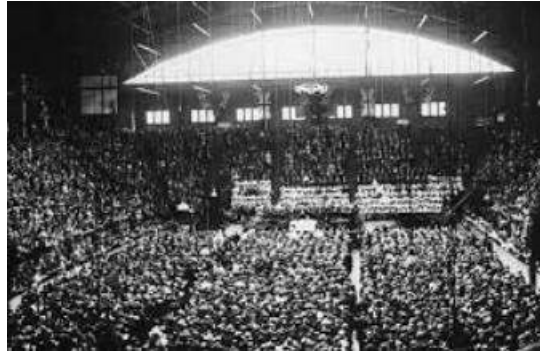
Again and again, God's meets us where we are, but doesn't leave us there. We shift from sinking sand to solid ground, navel-gazing to community, personal pietism to justice for all, and away from behaviours, both personal and systemic, that frustrate God's vision for the world.

Information Session

Remit

Today we have an opportunity to learn a little bit of history and to be a part of history. I invite you to pay close attention because at the end I am going to ask you to vote.

We're going to start at the beginning – not way back in Genesis at the beginning of creation – but rather, the beginning of The United Church of Canada in 1925.



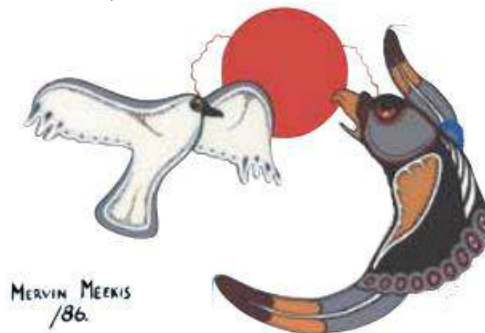
Slide – 1925

The United Church of Canada was created by the joining of the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians and Methodists in 1925. About half of the Presbyterians joined the United Church and the other half stayed Presbyterian – that's why we still have Presbyterian churches here in Canada. When these three denominations came together to become one – they were a little suspicious of one another – they wanted to ensure that one of the partners weren't going to take over or have more power than the other – so they created a governance structure that included congregations from the Congregationalists, presbyteries from the Presbyterians, the presbyteries formed Conferences and then representatives from the Conferences formed the General Council.

So we built in safeguards and security measures to ensure that no one church could “take over.” One of those safeguards is a remit -or a referendum to any broad sweeping change that the national church, the general council would make. So the question is asked of each congregation across the country and the congregation then has to remit whether the change is a good idea, or not.

That means that every single congregation has to vote on whether or not they think the remit is a good idea or not and the majority has to vote yes or that change/remit fails.

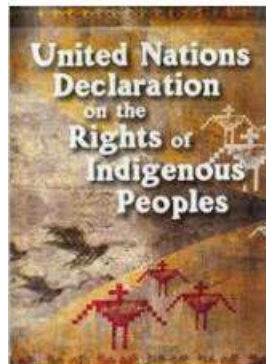
Now we fast forward a little – a whole bunch of things happened, there were a couple of world wars, there was the first woman ordained in the UCC, the Evangelical United Brethren Church joined the UCC, the first woman moderator, and we come to 1986/1995



Slide – 1986/1998

In 1986 the United Church of Canada apologized to its Indigenous members for its racist attitudes and contributions to colonization. And in 1998 we apologized again but this time specifically for the harms caused by residential schools (the UCC ran 15 residential schools). This is a painting by artist Mervin Meekis in 1986 an artist who was from the Sandy Lake reserve – which happens to be the same reserve where Fred Sasakamoose who I've mentioned a couple of weeks because some of us have read his biography, was from and even became chief of.

This painting was presented to the 31st general council in 1986 as they were considering issuing an apology. We see the dove – we know that the dove represents spirit, represents peace – we like to think of ourselves as peaceful, as spirit-filled people – but in this painting – the white dove represents the Indigenous people and the institutionalized church is represented by the eagle, with the sharp beak and sharp talons. And this painting speaks to the tension between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous within the church.



Slide – 2007

The United Nations made a declaration on the rights of Indigenous people. It proposed that Indigenous people have the right to own property and resources and have access and control over that; proposed that Indigenous people have the right to make decisions about themselves, for themselves; and that they have the political power to do that. (There were 147 countries that voted on this declaration and only 7 voted against – sadly, Canada was one of them.)



Slide – 2015

In 2015, here within The United Church of Canada, the Comprehensive Review taskforce finalized their report on how to restructuring and reorganizing the church because the system we had, with presbyteries and conferences wasn't working. So in 2015 at General Council the taskforce

presented their plan to take the work and powers from presbyteries and conferences and put that into Regions – which is the system that we have now. We now have churches (communities of faith), regions and General Council.

2015 was also the year that the final report from the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (whose work had begun 8 years prior) was released. Within those calls to action were a few directed specifically to churches in their hope of living into true reconciliation.

The following year, The United Church of Canada released a statement reflecting way back to the United Nations Declaration back in 2007 saying, yes we're ready to implement these recommendations with regards to Indigenous people including the call to action about Indigenous people being able to make decisions about themselves, for themselves, self-autonomy.



Slide – 2018

Calls to action came to The United Church specifically, from The United Nations Declaration and our response and then from the Caretakers of the Indigenous Circle regarding how Indigenous ministers might be trained, how the Indigenous church might be structured and organized, how congregations might be supported, and the paperwork was adopted by General Council in 2018.



Slide – 2022

In 2022, the General Council met virtually because of the pandemic and that was their logo. At the meeting, the remit, the remit material before us now was developed and passed. So the General

Council approved the creation of a National Indigenous Organization within The United Church of Canada structure, and made the request and took the action that this remit process, where every congregation has to say yay or nay to every decision, that the Indigenous Church be exempted from having to do that. The thinking behind that coming from the calls to action from The United Nations around the Indigenous people being able to make their own decisions for themselves, so that the Indigenous people are not having to come to the colonial church to get approval for things for themselves; so for the Indigenous church to be able to make decisions how they want, when they want, for themselves.

So we can look at this remit in a couple of different ways – that this is a restructuring piece of bookkeeping... or as an invitation to decolonize the church, the decolonize the structure and our process.



Slide – March 31, 2024

March 31, 2024 is the deadline to have our remit decisions submitted. Any church that has not voted and submitted by this date will be considered a “no” vote. And so here is the question we are being asked to consider:

Slide –

Does the pastoral charge agree to amend the Basis of Union to reflect:

1. That The United Church of Canada will be organized as follows: (1) a three-council structure, consisting of communities of faith, regional councils and a Denomination Council (General Council) and (2) an autonomous National Indigenous Organization; and
2. That once the new autonomous National Indigenous Organization is established within The United Church of Canada, it will have its own mechanism to make any changes to its structure and processes, and therefore it will not be subject to the remit process under section 7.4.1 of the Basis of Union; and
3. The changes required for the establishment of the autonomous National Indigenous Organization.

Does anyone have any comments or questions?

I wonder if I could have a motion asking that all members and adherents in attendance here today be counted in the vote...

If we're ready to vote on the remit – I'm going to read the question one more time in its entirety.

Slide – please replay the slides with the remit question...

And then after the vote please use the below image for the slide that can stay up until we get to the hymn.



Okay, we have done some work for the wider church today. Something a little different – but again and again we are asked to make decisions, to be part of a story – of God’s story. Terrible things happened in the past with Indigenous people AND new things are happening now AND more things will happen within and outside The United Church of Canada in the future. AND God is here for it; here for the yes’ and the no’s; here for the frustrations, doubts, disappointments, worries, joys and hopes. God meets us where we are at.

So sit back and listen to these words by Rev. Sarah Are Speed, entitled, “Remember When.”

God never begins letters with the words,
“I hope this finds you well,”
Or those words imply distance.

Instead, God begins God’s letters to you with the words,
“Remember when?”

Beloved child,
Remember when we dipped our toes into the water?
Remember when we dove right in?
Remember when the ice cream dripped down our hands
And the cicadas sang their song,
And the seasons changed,
And the days were long?
Remember when we fell in love and the world was new?
Remember when our heart was broken?
Remember the tears?
Remember the long nights?
Remember when we laughed again and the sound surprised us?
Remember when we marched in the street?
Remember when we cast our vote?
Remember when we believed in hope?
Remember when?
I do.

That’s what God’s letters say.
So on this day, and every day to come,
Remember: God is meeting you.
If you look back, you might remember when.

Amen. One day, we will look back and remember today and remember that God was with us in our decision making. As again & again God meets us where we are.

Hymn

In Suffering Love

VU 614

Prayers of the People

Holy God,
If I am honest, faith often feels like water in my hands.
No matter how hard I try to hold onto it, some of it always slips through –
Like droplets of truth running down my wrists, back toward my heart.
This human inability to hold onto you leaves me thirsty for more.

So God I give you thanks for meeting me here in this sacred space; for meeting me in the prayers
and the scripture and the bending and learning and voting.

Meet us in our hope and our heartache.
Meet us in our fear and our joy.
Meet us in our cupped hands and clenched fists.

And even if the water keeps running,
And we do not have a sky-parting moment of clarity,
Or a tangible sense that you are near,
Even if we do not hear the words, "This is my beloved,"
Ringing in our ears,
We will trust that you are near,
Always and forever meeting us here, running towards our hearts.

And so we pray for all those who also long to hear your voice, who long to feel you near, you long for
your peace – wrap them in your loving embrace Holy God. Fill them with your peace that surpasses
all understanding – those who are struggling with grief, with loneliness or fear or worry; those who are
in hospital and nursing homes – those undergoing treatments and those with no where to live and
those with empty kitchen cupboards and fridges. We pray for those who are being bullied and for the
bullies who are acting out. May your words ring in their ears – you are my beloved.

Holy God, we pray with grateful hearts for your presence even when we can't hear you or feel
you – we trust that you meet us again and again, wherever we're at. Just as you were with Jesus as
he was tempted in the wilderness and when we taught his friends to pray to you saying,

The Lord's 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,
forever and ever. Amen.

Announcements

Closing Hymn

Go Make a Diff'rence

MV 209

Sending Forth

As you leave this space,
May your mouth speak of God's goodness.
May your arms hold those in need.
May your feet walk toward justice.
May your heart trust its worth.
May your soul dance in God's grace.
And may this be your rhythm –
Again and again and again,
Until God's promised day.
In the name of the Lover, the Beloved, and Love itself,
Go with courage, go with heart, go in peace.
Amen.

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,
Reach 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.**