



South Cayuga Community Church

of The United Church of Canada

Pastor Dawn Ballantyne, DLM

VAMs: Joan Willis, Rev. Bryan Melick

Pianist, Wendy Willis

Music Leader: Donna Wylie

Sunday, Jan 28, 2024

Welcome

Good morning and welcome! Welcome to those of you who are here in the sanctuary and to those who are joining us online! Whoever you are and wherever you are at along your faith journey, we're so glad you've chosen to worship with us this morning!

Gathering Song

Your Work, O God, Needs Many Hands VU 537

Your work, O God, needs many hands to help you everywhere,
And some there are who cannot serve unless our gifts we share.

Because we love you and your work, our praise to you, we give;
Reaching out to others where they live, in Jesus' name, amen.

Words modified, 2024.

Territory Acknowledgement

Two things happened this week that really made me think about the territory acknowledgement in a new way. One, was that in the book I'm reading, recommended by our own Fred – Call Me Indian by Fred Sasakamoose – Fred explains that even though he was suffering at the residential school he had been forced to attend, when he got home to his parents, he never told them what was happening at the school. He couldn't tell them – he didn't want them to know how awful it was because he knew that they were powerless to stop it and he didn't want to break their hearts any further. That's why for so many years we didn't know anything about the atrocities that were going on... we didn't know because no one talked about it...

And the second thing that happened was after worship last Sunday, during coffee hour, I was here in the sanctuary with a bunch of young ladies – I think there were five of them... and they were just playing with the fish and tinkering on the piano but a few of them really wanted to use the microphones and kept asking me to turn on the sound system... because they wanted to sing Taylor Swift. But one of the young girls, when it was her turn to pretend at the microphone – she started reciting the land acknowledgement that she hears every morning at school. And she said Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Attawandaron and Wendat – like a boss. I mean, she didn't stumble over those difficult names, she knew them perfectly. Because she hears them every day at school. Because she is learning our Canadian history – and when we know better, we do better.

So that's why we do this every week. Because now we know better and we're trying to do better. And so we acknowledge that this is sacred land that we are gathered on here today, land long stewarded by the Indigenous people who hunted and fished and foraged on this land that we now call home. It is still a very long journey ahead towards reconciliation but we're taking the journey together, one small step at a time.

Lighting of the Christ Candle

Just as lighting the Christ candle each Sunday is a small reminder of Jesus, light of the world. Who told incredible stories and performed magnificent miracles and who teaches us that nothing is more important than loving our neighbours..

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 111)

Praise the Creator, you people of God.

**We have come to sing, and laugh,
and shout God's praises for all to hear!**

Listen to the Creator, you people of God.

**We have come to hear God's word,
and ponder the mysteries of God's sacred promises.**

Praise the Creator, you people of God.

**Our God is an awesome God,
greatly to be praised.**

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2277/worship-elements-january-28-2024> modified by Pastor Dawn Ballantyne, 2024.

Opening Prayer

Loving and gracious God, it is so good to be here. Thank you for the opportunity to gather and to share in worship together. Thank you for teachers today – young and old and in-between and for the prophets of biblical times, who continue to help us learn new ways to love one another and to love you. May our hearts and minds be open to what you would have us hear today. Amen.

Opening Hymn

All Creature of Our God and King

VU 217

Theme Time

“Wow, Meh & Psalm 111”

Let's play a little game first. I'm going to read out a statement and I want see your reaction. And your reaction could “wow,” “meh,” or “ahhh!”

For the “wow” reaction, they should make an excited face and put their arms in the air. For the “meh” reaction, they should shrug and make a disinterested face. Let's add one more reaction just to make it a little more fun – an “ahhh!” reaction, a scared or frightened reaction, children should open their mouths and raise their hands.



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- You win a million dollars in the lottery.
- You discover a baby deer and its mother grazing in the woods.
- You're hiking along a trail and a huge snake slithers across in front of you.

- You earn an A on a school assignment.
- Your best friend keeps a promise they made to you.
- You experience a thunderstorm from the warmth of your bed.
- You walk into class and the teacher announces that there's going to be a surprise math test.
- You're at the dentist and the power goes out and suddenly the room is pitch black.
- You go to a movie with your friends.
- You go to a movie with your friends and the power goes out!
- You learn food donations your church made to a local food bank provided 100 families experiencing food insecurity with meals.
- You discover God has answered your prayer.

Did everyone react exactly the same each time? We had different reactions to different statements because we're all a little bit different. Right? Some of us get excited about some things and others don't; some are afraid of some things and others aren't...

Today's Bible story is a little different. This one isn't about Jesus – this one is from the Old Testament. And it's from the book of Psalms. Does anyone know what a Psalm is? It's kind of a funny word, eh – because it starts with a “P” but the “P” is silent... and it kind of sounds like the word “song” and it is kind of like a song – it's like a song of praise that in ancient times, people would sing or recite (say out loud) together. So we're going to try that today. We're going to say this Psalm out loud, together.

Psalm 111:1-10

One: Hallelujah! Praise to the Creator!

Congregation: I give thanks to GOD with everything I've got—
Wherever good people gather including here with the congregation.

Congregation: God's works are so great, worth
A lifetime of study—endless enjoyment!

Congregation: Splendor and beauty mark God's craft;
God's generosity never gives out.

Congregation: God's miracles are forever wonderful—
God is gracious and generous and full of love.

Congregation: God gave food to those who fear him,
God remembered to keep the ancient promise made.

Congregation: God proved to all people that God could do what God said:
Hand them the nations on a platter—a gift!

Congregation: God is honest, truthful and just;
All God's products are guaranteed to last—
Never out-of-date, never obsolete, rust-proof.

Congregation: God is so personal and holy, worthy of our respect.
The good life begins in the fear of GOD—
Do that and you'll know the blessing of GOD.

One: Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Forever!

I wonder what jumped out at you. What part of that psalm did you like the best? Or what did you notice? I noticed that the psalm talked about forever a few times... It said that "God's miracles are forever wonderful" – it said, "God's products are guaranteed to last – never out-of-date, never obsolete, rust-proof" – that's kind of like "forever" and then it ends with "Hallelujah! Forever!"

What do you think of when you think of the word forever? Never-ending. Infinite. Everlasting...

What is something that feels like forever?

- Waiting for Christmas
- Waiting for the school day to end
- Waiting in line at Costco
- Waiting for a party to start

What is something that you wish would last forever?

- Summer vacation!
- Friendships
- Good weather

The one thing that truly last forever is God; God's love for each one of us. God's goodness and mercy and grace and love and hope lasts forever. And that's why we come together and we learn more about God and Jesus and the bible each week; and we pray and sing and eat together...

So right now we're going to sing a song of praise to God.

Children's Song

Allelu – Praise Ye the Lord

Scripture

Mark 1:21-28

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. ²² The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. ²³ Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, ²⁴ "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!"

²⁵ “Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” ²⁶ The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek.

²⁷ The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, “What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him.” ²⁸ News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Hymn

In Loving Partnership

VU 603

Reflection

“The Missional Banquet Table”

We’ve got a couple of tricky scriptures on the docket this morning. We began with Psalm 111 with the children. It’s always a little tricky when we include the Old Testament because in the Old Testament there are so many references to the need to fear God. And that can make some of us uncomfortable. That’s not the God of the New Testament – it’s not the God that Jesus teaches about...

But in that old, old hymn that we all know – we sing, “’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved.” God’s grace – God’s love, relieves our fears. Fear is part of the process of being alive. And most often, we can replace the word fear with awe. And so, from the Old Testament, from Psalm 111, we can hear: God gave food to those who were in awe of Him. God remembered to keep the ancient promise He made...The good life begins in AWE of God. Do that and you’ll know the blessing of God.

If we wanted to continue the game I played with the children of making faces in response to different statements – what face would you make in response to awe? Chances are, your response would look pretty similar to fear. Fear and awe go hand in hand, and really they’re just about being vulnerable around God.

And then we hear the gospel lesson from Mark where we hear about demons or an impure spirit. We don’t like to talk about demons. It makes us uncomfortable. Because sometimes, it means we have to be vulnerable. In biblical times, in the Gospel of Mark that Robert read, that impure spirit or demon, could have been mental illness. Which we know today, because of scientific and medical research is not a demon. But demons still exist today... for example, one example, addiction – and I don’t just mean booze or drugs or gambling... who’s addicted to caffeine? To nicotine? To their phone? To social media or gaming? To food? To work? There are all kinds of modern day demons or addictions that taint our spirits, that interrupt and hurt our relationship with God.

And the thing about Jesus; the example he sets for us over and over again in the Bible, in the story that we heard today from Mark is that he doesn’t turn away from the person who is suffering from the impure spirit, from the demon, from the addiction – Jesus sees someone in need and he helps them. Jesus sees someone in need, he does not turn away from them, he goes to them, and he helps them. Jesus doesn’t give up on the person in need.

We know people like that. People who run towards those in need and offer their assistance. They are the missionals among us; “those whose lived faith brings them into direct contact with human suffering and social need.” (1)

Two weeks ago we started with the evangelicals; last week we added the ecclesials – this week we are adding the missionals to our banquet table. This banquet table is a symbol or a metaphor for not-only our congregation but for this United Church of ours. A representation of five different ways of living out our faiths whilst all belonging at the same table; at God’s table, as part of the same family but with unique and valuable ways of seeing God and understanding how God is active in the world, and in turn, how that affects how each person lives out their faith and serves God in this world.

So week one I added the cross with a crown of thorn to represent the evangelicals whose lived faith’s top priority is to share Jesus with others. Last week, I added bread and the cup for the ecclesials whose hearts are deeply rooted in this community, in this building, in these people, in being the body of Christ. Today I’ve added a pitcher and bowl and towel, because over the years, these have become symbols of Christian service, of compassion.

Rev. Janet Gear writes, “the missional is the person whose faith is lived in proximity to the immediate needs of strangers. For the missional, God is at work in the world through Christ’s disciples whose

compassion and love of neighbour heals and restores lives and quietly witnesses to the power of God's love." (2)

I also considered adding this statue as the symbol for missionals. This is called Homeless Jesus by Timothy Schmalz and the original bronze statue was erected in 2013 at Regis College in Toronto. Because for me, the scripture that fits best with the missionals is Matthew 25:35-36

³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came visit me.'



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And these missionals among us, who are part of our church family might not be here this morning. Because they might be at work! Or because this part of serving God, coming together to worship is of less importance to them, than the "hands-on, walking-the-talk discipleship" (3) that they participate in on a regular basis. "Nurses, social workers, counsellors, teachers, medical researchers, fire-fighters, care-givers, military and prison chaplains, diaconal community ministers," (4) are all examples of missionals.

I had an epiphany when I read these two chapters in Gear's book, about the missionals... and after having read previously about the ecclesials who feel like they've failed when something is over or has finished or seems to have run its course... Because I know that many of you look around and wonder where are your children and grandchildren... they were raised in the church but they don't feel a need to come here on Sunday mornings anymore... but how many of them are working in healthcare? How many of the folks who are missing from the pews are working or volunteering in social services? "Where others feel at-one with God or whole in themselves or at peace in the world through prayer or togetherness or justice-seeking or silence, missionals experience this in hands-on acts of kindness, care, healing, and presence." (5) The missionals might not be in Sunday morning worship because they are out and about in the world offering acts of kindness and care, healing and presence wherever they can.

Just as we sang after the scripture, "In Loving Partnership We Come: we are the hands and feet of Christ, serving by grace each other's need." (6)

Missionals understand the church not as a place but as an activity. Don't *go* to church: *be* the church. (7)

Author Christopher J.H. Wright, in his book The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of Church's Mission, wrote "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission – God's mission." (8) The church doesn't have a mission; the mission has a church. God's mission – of love and forgiveness, of grace and acceptance for all – has a church, has a structure where we can meet, where we can gather and learn and grow and support and love one another – and where we are called to go forth from – so that we might share God's mission with the world.

We talked about fear of God, we talked about demons and thirdly, we should unpack mission and missional – because that's become a bit of a taboo concept in today's society. According to Broadview magazine, "Mission" is more than just a word. It's a shorthand for an entire system of colonization that wreaked havoc here in Canada and around the world." (9) But that's not who we understand the missionals among us, or within The United Church of Canada, to be today. The missionals are not focused on converting folks to Christianity or insisting on those who are distraught's need to be "saved" but rather, missionals have their feet on the ground, offering practical and tangible help to anyone in need. Just as Jesus did. Inspired by Jesus' ministry of healing, inclusion and compassion, missionals reach out and do what they can; truly believing that this is how they show their love for God and how they see God's love in the world, through acts of kindness.

And I can't say it or describe it, any better than Richard Gillard did in 1977 when he wrote "We Are Pilgrims: fellow travellers on the road, here to help each other; I'll hold the Christ-light for you, I'll hold your hand; I'll weep and laugh with you... let me be your servant."

Missionals. One of five lived faiths among us – the "doers" who are called "to love: to heal, to protect, to accompany, to put oneself between another and the danger, struggle, disadvantage, loss or pain they are experiencing." (10) Their lived faith is "embodied in their actions." (11)

To those of you who identify as a missional – your heart is “pure and beautiful”; you “protect the church from isolation, prevent us from romanticism about what it is to follow Jesus, from an exclusive perspective on whom God loves, from spiritualism about the gospel’s call to love, and from an elitist version of Christian discipleship... Thank you for reminding us of Jesus and inspiring us to go and do likewise.” (12)

- (1) Gear, Janet. Undivided Love: Navigating Landscapes of Living Faith. Altona, MB: FriesenPress, 2022. p.111.
- (2) Gear, Janet. Undivided Love: Navigating Landscapes of Living Faith. Altona, MB: FriesenPress, 2022. p.120.
- (3) Gear, Janet. Undivided Love: Navigating Landscapes of Living Faith. Altona, MB: FriesenPress, 2022. p.120.
- (4) Gear, Janet. Undivided Love: Navigating Landscapes of Living Faith. Altona, MB: FriesenPress, 2022. p.121.
- (5) Gear, Janet. Undivided Love: Navigating Landscapes of Living Faith. Altona, MB: FriesenPress, 2022. p.121.
- (6) Strathdee, Jim. “In Loving Partnership We Come.” Words and music copyright ©1983 Desert Flower Music., Voices United. p.603.
- (7) Gear, Janet. Undivided Love: Navigating Landscapes of Living Faith. Altona, MB: FriesenPress, 2022. p.129.
- (8) https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/95925.Christopher_J_H_Wright
- (9) <https://broadview.org/mission-and-service-united-church/>
- (10) Gear, Janet. Undivided Love: Navigating Landscapes of Living Faith. Altona, MB: FriesenPress, 2022. p.113.
- (11) Gear, Janet. Undivided Love: Navigating Landscapes of Living Faith. Altona, MB: FriesenPress, 2022. p.117.
- (12) Gear, Janet. Undivided Love: Navigating Landscapes of Living Faith. Altona, MB: FriesenPress, 2022. p.124-125.

Hymn

We Are Pilgrims

VU 595

Prayers of the People

Loving and gracious God, just as the psalmist wrote, we know that you are incredible, that your works are amazing and that you are wonderful forever. We come before in awe and thanksgiving for your infinite love and your absolute forgiveness for each and every one of us. Truly, our praise to you awesome God. Thank you for the missionals who show us your love here on earth in tangible ways: by offering us medical care as doctors and nurses; by counselling us in our grief or struggles; by ministering to us when we are in need; by doing the work of your hands and feet – by living out their faith in healing and helping professions.

Thank you for the reminders every day of your goodness, all around us, amidst the darkness; amidst the despair and tragedy and terror that we see on the news. We pray for all those who are suffering in the midst of war in the Holy Land, in Ukraine and throughout the many other countries who are in great conflict. We pray for the government and military officials and others in positions of power who can make significant differences – may they be wise, may they be kind. Holy Mystery, we pray for those who work as police, firefighters and EMTs – all those who run towards danger to lend a hand to those in need – keep them safe, we ask; give them courage when they are afraid. We also pray for those who are living in fear – those in dangerous situations, those who are lonely and don’t know where to turn, those who are facing health challenges, financial hardships, problems at work and in relationships – fill them with your peace Holy God, remind them that they are never alone.

We pray this morning for those connected to this church family – those who are away on holidays, those who are unwell, those who are in nursing and retirement homes, those who are not close enough to join us in-person or who simply feel more comfortable at home; may they be reminded of their worth and that not only do you God, know them by name and love them, but that this congregation remembers them and longs for nothing but goodness for them. We bring before you now, Holy God, the people and situations weighing heavy on our hearts today...

In your way and in your time we ask that our prayers be answered – trusting that in your way and in your timing, your will be done. Thank you for the gift of the son Jesus, light of the world, our brother and friend – who taught us not to turn away, but to see someone’s need and to help them. Jesus commissioned us to go into the world and reflect his light and love to all in need, just as he did his closest friends, the disciples who he taught how to praying 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

Draw the Circle Wide

MV 145

Sending Forth

Renewed and refilled by having been gathered in community here,
And reminded of God's unconditional love, forgiveness and grace;

Go forth filled with awe and wonder,
To love and serve God,
by reflecting the light and love of Jesus into this crazy world we live in,
in whatever way that you are called to share it.
Go now in peace.

Hope Shines as the Solitary Star MV 220

***Hope shines as the solitary star.
Faith is the inner light.
You and I together mirror the Light of Lights,
and illumine the pathway home.***