

May 10, 2026, Order of Service - Mother's Day & Christian Family Sunday

Welcome & Lighting Of The Christ Candle -by Mary Grant, Forest Hill UC, Fredericton, NB

With thankful hearts, we gather here where the doors are wide open to all. We come with open hearts and open minds, thankful that we are all children of the light of Christ. The candle is lit.

Announcements

Call To Worship

L: Creator, parent of the human family,

P: We gather to worship you.

L: In baptism, we are called beloved children of God, as such,

P: We gather to worship you.

L: Friends, neighbours, siblings in faith,

P: We gather to worship in song, in prayer, in readings from your story/our story, in thoughts and reflections. Let us worship God.

Ministry of Music *I Believe in Miracles*

Opening Prayer

L: God, creator of us all, we gather to worship you.

P: We come as individuals, we come in family units, we come as neighbours and friends.

L: We come here where we are known by name, welcomed with all our fragilities and strengths.

P: We gather with kindred spirits who long to live faithful to your calling.

L: Guide us, inspire us, challenge us, comfort us, and nurture us in this time of worship so that we might be enabled to return to our daily lives ready to engage fully with all of your creation. We pray. Amen.

Gathering Hymn *Let Us Build a House*, MVU # 1

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live, A place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive. Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace; Here the love of Christ shall end divisions. All are welcome, all are welcome, All are welcome in this place.	Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true, Where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew. Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God's grace; Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus. All are welcome, all are welcome, All are welcome in this place.	Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine, and wheat; a banquet hall on holy ground, where peace and justice meet. Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space; As we share in Christ the feast that frees us: All are welcome, all are welcome, All are welcome in this place.	Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone. To heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known. Here the outcast and the stranger Bear the image of God's face; Let us bring an end to fear and danger: All are welcome, all are welcome, All are welcome in this place.	Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard and loved and treasured, taught and claimed. As words within the Word. Built of tears and cries and laughter, Prayers of faith and songs of grace; Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: All are welcome, all are welcome, All are welcome in this place.
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Prayer Of Confession with Singing Bowl

God, you know how hard it is to live in relationships, and yet you call us to do so. **(S.B.)**

At times it is hard to be fully present to our siblings and others in our nuclear family and within this Christian family.

Singing Bowl is played for time of silent reflection and prayer

Our patience may be short, we sometimes don't really listen, we may be tired, or angry, or hungry, or lonely, or ... whatever it is that keeps us from loving and caring for one another, help us to know that you are always with us, loving us so that we may love others.

Singing Bowl is played for time of silent reflection and prayer

Words Of Assurance

Through all the joys and all the struggles of living in relationship, one truth is offered to each and every one of us:

- God has loved us,
- is loving us, and
- will always love us.

Thanks be to God for this unending gift of love.

Hymn **Spirit, Open My Heart**, MVU # 79

Refrain Spirit, open my heart To the joy and pain of living. As you love, may I love, In receiving and in giving, Spirit, open my heart.	God, replace my stony heart With a heart that's kind and tender. All my coldness and fear To your grace I now surrender. Refrain	Write your love upon my heart As my law, my goal, my story. In each thought, word, and deed, May my living bring you glory. Refrain	May I weep with those who weep, Share Your grace with my sisters and brothers. In welcoming Christ May we welcome one another. Refrain
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Offering Invitation & Prayer

God has blessed our lives with relationships - joy inspiring and challenging. In response to God's blessings in our lives, we are now invited to share our offerings. Creator God, you have blessed our lives with relationships that both inspire and challenge. We offer these gifts so that we might continue to build relationships with one another and with your whole creation. Bless these gifts that they may bring wholeness and life abundance to all your people. We pray this, Amen.

Children's Ministry Story of family first and family unity.

Prayer

Dear God/Jesus: You invite us into relationship with one another, to know one another as families, to care for one another. In baptism you welcomed us into this worldwide Christian family. Today, as we celebrate Christian Family Day and Mother's Day, we also celebrate being part of that family and being called to the task of "kin-dom" building and sharing here on earth. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Children leave for Sunday School

Scripture Reading

Luke 15:11-32 (The Message) The Lost Son

Jesus went on to say, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger one said to him, 'Father, give me my share of the property now.' So, the man divided his property between his two sons. After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living. He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. So, he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat.

At last, he came to his senses and said, 'All my father's hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about to starve! I will get up and go to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers."' So, he got up and started back to his father.

He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him. 'Father,' the son said, 'I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.' But the father called to his servants. 'Hurry!' he said. 'Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Then go and get the prize calf and kill it and let us celebrate with a feast! For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.' And so, the feasting began.

In the meantime, the older son was out in the field. On his way back, when he came close to the house, he heard the music and dancing. So, he called one of the servants and asked him, 'What's going on?' 'Your brother has come back home,' the servant answered, 'and your father has killed the prize calf, because he got him back safe and sound.' The older brother was so angry that he would not go into the house; so his father came out and begged him to come in. But he spoke back to his father, 'Look, all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me? Not even a goat for me to have a feast with my friends! But this son of yours wasted all your property on prostitutes, and when he comes back home, you kill the prize calf for him!' 'My son,' the father answered, 'you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.'

Reflection -by Catherine MacDonald, Whitehorse UC, Whitehorse, YK

The Prodigal Son's Mother Speaks - A Monologue for Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Welcome home!

You noticed that I am not mentioned in that story that was just read, didn't you? I am Lydia, the mother of those two boys, those two very different boys: Nathaniel the eldest and Zachariah, the child of our old age. And, of course, I am a wife, Simon's wife.

I want to tell you a little bit more of the story. Do you have children or grandchildren, or know your neighbour's children? Then you know how different they can be. One who never gives a moment of trouble, and another who constantly asks questions about everything.

I think my second child was born with the word 'why' on his lips. In the early years, it was easy to answer his questions. When I look back, they were pretty simple questions:

Why does the sun rise every day? Where does it go at night?

Why does the moon disappear sometimes and shines so brightly other times?

Why do we not eat the meat of pigs?

As he got older, the questions became impossible to answer:

Why do I have to work in the fields when I want to write a story?

Why can't I go to the next town to find some more musicians?

Why do you want me to take a wife?

Ach! Questions, questions, and more questions! I tell you; it wore me out some days.

Of course, it was worse because my eldest son loved to work in the fields. He gladly and willingly went out with my husband in the morning and came back singing at the end of the day. He loved this land and all that it took to work it. He was eager to take a wife and begin a family of his own. He never dreamed of far-off places or things that couldn't be.

But our younger son did. And eventually, we couldn't keep him home anymore. He told me that he was going to ask his father for his inheritance and start travelling. I told him that Simon would never allow that. After all, he was the younger son, not really entitled to much of anything except a place in the family home. But he persisted. My goodness, once he got an idea in his head there was no shaking it. And he eventually wore my husband down. Simon sold some of our cattle and gave him the money and declared, "You are no longer my son."

When I heard those words, my heart broke. How could he no longer be our son?! I had carried him under my heart, nursed him from my breast. I could not deny his existence. I argued with Simon. My heart was breaking, but as the days and weeks and months and years passed, I understood how Simon's heart was breaking, too. He never said anything to me, but he had a look in his eyes that told me how much he missed hearing the music and laughter that Zachariah had brought into our home.

Simon still worked in the fields and planted crops with Nathaniel. He looked after our tenants as he always did, but it was as if he was forcing himself to put one foot in front of the other, to keep going day after day. He was sad.

I knew Simon often waited by the gate of our property, looking down the road as if he expected our son to appear one day. He never told me that he did, but you know, a partner always knows. He would come in and I could tell how troubled he was. Simon missed Zachariah.

Even though his daydreaming ways used to annoy Simon, and Zachariah's music and laughter when he was supposed to be working used to anger him, Simon missed him. I watched my husband grow older and thinner; it was as if he was diminishing right before me. It was hard, even though we still had so much to be thankful for. Bountiful crops, family and neighbours who were there in times of joy and celebration and also when the barn burned down, God and going to synagogue and the rituals of the temple when we could get there.

But there was something missing in our world. Our son, our youngest son!

I knew that my husband asked all the travellers if they had encountered him. But it seemed as if nobody had. And as the days turned to months and years, we thought he was lost to us forever. We didn't speak his name. It was too painful, and still, we each whispered his name in the quiet. We each offered a prayer: *Be safe, my child, be safe.*

One day, I watched in secret as Simon stood by the gate, and I saw something that I never expected to see! My husband, a dignified elder of the village, no longer a young man, running down the road like a gazelle! He had picked up his robes, and I could even see his sandalled feet as he raced down the road, feet flying faster than since he was a boy!

I didn't know what was going on. And then, and then I saw a small figure off in the distance, dressed in rags, and dirty and skinny, and I realized it was Zachariah! And Simon was running down the road to meet him, his arms held wide open. And then he embraced Zachariah and wept, this time with tears of joy.

Zachariah knelt down in the dust and told his father how sinful he had been. And he tried to tell him that all he wanted was a place as one of the hired hands. But Simon would have none of that. He called for a servant to bring a robe and sandals, and a ring that named him once again as one of our sons.

And called me to tell the servants to start preparing for a feast. And we did! But it seems that nothing is perfect.

Our eldest son heard music and laughter and asked one of the servants what was going on. When he found out that there was a celebration in honour of Zachariah's return, he became angry and jealous, I'm sure. He went to his father and told him that it wasn't fair, that he, Nathaniel, had been loyal and hard-working all these years and he didn't even get even a young goat for a celebration with his friends. But Zachariah - for him, a prized fat calf had been killed!

I think Nathaniel knew he was being unreasonable. After all, he had had his father's trust and goodwill all his life, but still, he didn't want to join the celebration. Simon tried to explain this to him. He said, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

Lost and been found! Dead and come back to life! That is how I felt, a part of my heart had come back to life with the appearance of Zachariah.

I asked Nathaniel if he recalled how our scriptures told us to welcome the stranger, how that God often came in the guise of a stranger. If we could welcome a stranger, we could welcome a lost son back to our home. I don't think Nathaniel was convinced right away, but as the weeks and months passed, he understood that Zachariah wasn't trying to take his place. In fact, Nathaniel began to realize that he had missed Zachariah, too, that part of his heart had been missing.

I know people refer to this story as the story of the prodigal son, but really, it is more about my husband. He was the prodigal - the prodigal father, the extravagant and lavishly, recklessly, generous one with the welcome he gave, the love he poured out on both sons. His love was a well that never would run dry.

I am an old woman now, and Simon is long since dead, but not before he saw both of our boys get married and begin to raise their own families. We still talk sometimes about the day Zachariah came home. We talk about the joy and celebration of all the family together. We all learned something that day.

Now that Nathaniel has children of his own, he understands that a son or a daughter is always a part of you, no matter what they have done or where they have been. Zachariah learned that he got another chance. My husband learned that his love was stronger than his dignity. And me, I learned that sorrow doesn't last forever, that which is lost can be found again.

And I praise God for those lessons! Amen.

Hymn The Care the Eagle Giver Her Young, VU# 269

The care the eagle gives her young,
Safe in her lofty nest,
Is like the tender love of God
For us made manifest.

As when the time to venture comes,
She stirs them out to flight,
So, we are pressed to boldly try
To strive for daring height.

And if we flutter helplessly,
As fledgling eagles fall,
Beneath us lift God's mighty wings
To bear us, one and all.

Prayers For and of the People -by Susan Carlson, Grace UC, Edmonton, AB

Dear God, we pray to you today, on this Sunday dedicated to families in all the different forms that they come to us, whether a family of origin or a family by choice. We are truly blessed by the love and support that we find within our diverse families, and we are enriched by the special relationships in our lives. We are blessed to be able to learn from those closest to us and are grateful for the teachings that they share with us. The time and commitment dedicated to nurturing family relationships is something we thank you for. We ask your blessing today on each of the members of our families. May they feel safe, protected, and comforted, surrounded by your love.

We pray, too, for those for whom family relationships are difficult. We pray for those who, instead of experiencing love and support and all the other positive things we often picture when we think of family, experience hurt, pain, and isolation. We pray for those who have never had the opportunity to experience the support of family and for those for whom time and circumstance have changed the relationship into something less positive. We ask your blessing on relationships that are struggling and, if possible, that healing take place. Most of all, may all those involved feel the love that comes from you.

And we pray for those who today are remembering family members who are no longer with us. Whether the loss is recent or many years old, today can bring up a lot of emotion. We are blessed with the gift of memory, and so we take time today to look back and remember the precious times that were shared with our loved ones. We remember the things they taught us that we carry with us today. We remember the feelings we had as we shared special moments with them. We give thanks that those memories will always be a part of us. We ask your blessing today on those who are missing a beloved member. May each one feel the comfort your love provides.

We also pray today for those who are members of the families we choose to be a part of - our work family, our school family, our teams, our communities, our congregational family. In particular, we pray for those we name in our hearts. (*a time for individual prayers*)

Loving God, all are blessed to be members of your family. We pray that everyone is able to feel the love from you that is with us today and always, for we are your beloved children. Amen.

Parting Hymn I Am the Light of the World, VU # 87

Refrain
I am the light of the world!
You people come and follow
me!
If you follow and love
you'll learn the mystery of
what you were meant to do
and be.

To find the lost and lonely one,
to heal the broken soul with
love,
to feed the hungry children
with warmth and good food,
To feel the earth below, the sky
above!
Refrain

To free the prisoner from all
chains,
to make the powerful care,
to rebuild the nations
with strength of good will,
to see God's children
everywhere!
Refrain

To bring hope to every task
you do,
to dance at a baby's new birth,
to make music in an old
person's heart,
and sing to the colours of the
earth!
Refrain

BENEDICTION

L: In baptism you name us your beloved children, kin to one another.

P: As we go from this place, may we know your love that found expression in the most vulnerable of human form: guide us, sustain us, and empower us to love.

CHORAL AMEN

EXTINGUISHING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

We gathered this morning to worship in song, in prayer, in readings from your story which is our story, in quiet thoughts and in deep reflections. Continue to guide us, inspire us, challenge us, comfort us, and nurture us so that we might be enabled to return to our daily lives ready to engage fully with all of your creation. The Christ Candle is extinguished.