

Light the Christ Candle

Welcome & Announcements -please see the bulletin

Introduction of Rev. Joan Golden

Born in Grey County, Rev. Joan Golden was a 'farm girl' and attended a one room elementary school. She is married to Rev. Richard Golden, who is also a retired United Church minister, and is the mother of one son and one daughter and proud gramma of 4 boys. She served in Brussels/Ethel Pastoral Charge from 1999 to 2005. In 2005, she was commissioned as a diaconal minister within London Conference. Her settlement charge was St. Andrew's United Church, in St. Thomas, from 2005 to 2015. In 2015 she was invited to join the ministries of Oneida United Church of the Thames and Moraviantown United Church of Delaware Nation. She was also appointed Pastoral Charge Support for Kettle & Stony Point. In June 2024, Rev. Golden retired from Oneida United Church and Moraviantown United Church. She continued to be pastoral support to Kettle & Stony Point United Church. Currently Rev. Golden serves as a member of the Congregational Support Commission of Antler River Watershed Regional Council, and Secretary of the DUCC (Diakonia of the United Church of Canada) Coordination Committee. On November 1, 2025, she accepted a short term, part-time pastoral support appointment at Courtright and Sixth Line United Churches. She leads worship 2-3 times a month.

Call to Worship

L: We gather this morning, rising from summer sleeping to sacred singing,

P: from weeding gardens to worshipping God,

L: from campfires to times of meditation

P: from recreation to re-creation.

L: We rise in the light of lingering summer days

P: and gather in the light of God's Holy presence. **Let us worship God!**

Ministry of Music God Sees the Little Sparrow Fall The Hymnary # 588 -Choir & Faith Noddin

This hymn was written in 1876 by Maria Straub, aged 58 (1838-1897) and her brother composed the music. She is attributed to writing over 200 hymns.

At the Antler River Watershed Regional Council we sang this old hymn. Yes, this surprised me and many people, but it was sung with enthusiasm. The Right Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath, the 45th Moderator of The United Church of Canada, spoke about how even the sparrow is important in the eyes of God and reminded us to consider the words of this song. It was sung with such feeling - yes there were newer hymns, but in conversations at lunch it was talked about. We also sang In the Garden - that too was talked about in conversations during the meeting. All ages commented, one younger woman - of course everyone seems younger than me these days. She could hardly wait to tell her grandmother that we sung some of her favourite hymns.

God sees the little sparrow fall,	Refrain	He paints the lily of the field,	God made the little birds and
It meets His tender view;	He loves me too, He loves me	Perfumes each lily bell;	flow'rs,
If God so loves the little birds,	too,	If He so loves the little flow'rs,	And all things large and small;
I know He loves me too.	I know He loves me too;	I know He loves me well.	He'll not forget His little things,
	Because He loves the little	Refrain	I know He loves them all.
	things,		Refrain
	I know He loves me too.		

Gathering Prayer -based on Romans 8:26-39

All: Creator God, in goodness and grace You made us co-creators of this amazing world we live in. You are present with us and have promised to never leave us abandoned. You assure us that nothing can separate us from Your love – nothing in yesterday, nothing in today and nothing in tomorrow. May Your Spirit continue to guide us in following the model of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Praise Hymn This is the Day, VU # 412

This is the day, this is the day	Open to us, open to us	You are our God, you are our God,
That our God has made,	Your gates, O God,	We will praise your name,
that our God has made;	your gates,	we will praise your name;
We will rejoice, we will rejoice,	O God;	We will give thanks,
And be glad in it, and be glad in it.	We will go in, we will go in,	we will give thanks,
This is the day that our God has made,	To your holy place,	For your faithfulness,
We will rejoice and be glad in it.	to your holy place.	for your faithfulness.
This is the day, this is the day	Open to us your gates, O God,	You are our God,
That our God has made.	We will go in to your holy place.	we will praise your name,
	Open to us, open to us your gates, O	We will give thanks for your faithfulness.
	God.	You are our God, you are our God,
		we will praise your name.

Prayer of Confession

All: We confess, O God, that we so often carry the burden of the world on our shoulders and find it too much to bear. We become immobilized with guilt and fear. We lose sight of the signs of hope present among us. We forget your call to be co-creators with You and each other. Sometimes we keep visions of the future locked in our minds, reluctant to follow your call and letting fear block us.

Words of Assurance

L: Peace is God's precious gift; pardon is God's gracious gift; new life is God's free gift to those whose hearts and minds are in Christ Jesus.

P: We are a forgiven people. Thanks be to God!!

Invitation for Offering This is the time we can reach out to others as we give of ourselves. With joy, let us present our offerings of commitment and support for the work of this Community of Faith and into the wider world.

Offertory Hymn **Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow** VU # 541

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God, all creatures high and low;
Give thanks to God in love made known:
Creator, Word, and Spirit, One.

Dedication of Offering

All: Through the Spirit of God, our tiny offerings become storehouses for hope. Our barely visible ministries become important to make another world possible. We give our selves, our lives, our offering in a sacred trust that God is at work and wastes nothing we share.

Hymn **Small Things Count**, VU # 361

Small things count, so Jesus said:
Cups of water, crumbs of bread,
Small things done because we're kind
Count as big things in God's mind.

Small things make the big things grow:
Grains of yeast inside the dough,
Puffs that fill a big balloon,
Notes that make a happy tune.

Every hair that's on our head,
Every sparrow, Jesus said,
God takes care of, counts and knows,
God loves us from top to toes!

Children's Ministry **Everyone makes a difference**

During this time Rev. Golden asked for volunteers to ring bells to a well-known hymn **Jesus Loves Me**. It wouldn't be recognizable if notes were missed – everyone and every note makes a difference. Each one of us makes a difference and are important. As we work together and play together harmony happens.

Children's Prayer

All: Dear God, thank you for this July day, for the bright sunshine and the warm breeze. Thank you for the birds singing, the green trees, and the long hours playing outside. Help us to share your joy and be kind to everyone we meet today. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Scripture Reading *Five parables; mustard seed, yeast, treasure, pearls, and fishing net. Treasures old and new.*

Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-49, 51-52 (NRSV)

The Parable of the Mustard Seed

He put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

The Parable of the Yeast

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

Three Parables

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. 'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So, it will be at the end of the age.

Treasures New and Old

'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

Message **Parables for All**

Jesus sits down by the lake and is surrounded by such great crowds that he gets into a boat and teaches them from just offshore. His teaching is all about the kingdom of God - the kingdom of heaven whose will is to be done on earth.

In the few verses that we read today Jesus says the “kingdom of heaven is like” five times. Better yet, this instruction is short and sweet. This is no long list of commandments. Nor is it a dense and difficult theological passage. Jesus simply tells parables. Parables are for opening eyes and ears. Parables can sound like simple metaphors: “The kingdom of heaven is like ...”.

But these parables of Jesus are not so simple as we had imagined. The thirteenth chapter of Matthew’s gospel is riddled with parables that are themselves riddles. Jesus speaks to the crowds in metaphors that intend to perplex rather than to satisfy. I think these parables are teasing invitations to enter the kingdom of heaven where these metaphors are no longer strange puzzles but have become everyday wisdom.

This is not in language just for the educated or the rabbis. This is preaching for the masses, using images and happenings of everyday life. These are directed at the crowds gathered.

Take, for example: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” This sounds straightforward enough. God’s realm is like a tiny seed that holds within it the power to become a tree.

Except for one confusing detail. Mustard seeds do not become trees. Everyone standing on the lakeshore listening to Jesus knows this. The crowds of farmers know that mustard seeds produce bushes, none of which are big enough for birds to ever nest in.

But the crowds also know scriptures as told to them and they surely remember Daniel’s depiction of Babylon - the most powerful kingdom on earth: “The tree grew great and strong, its top reached to heaven and it was visible to the ends of the whole earth ... the birds of the air nested in its branches” (Daniel 4:10-12)

Then there is another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.” This parable to me suggests that the kingdom of heaven is not easily seen - but mixed together. This is not something that is out in the open. And three measures of flour. She is making a lot of bread, it is thought this would make about 100 loaves of bread.

Again, this appears a rather straightforward parable. The kingdom is like the leavening agent that transforms a massive quantity of flour. Without this small, hidden ingredient the rest of life - of the world itself cannot rise, remains flat, does not come to life. Yeast in those times was a foul-smelling mass of rotting bread – but with a just a bit of it fluffy bread loaves of bread would be the result.

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Merchants would understand this parable. The kingdom is like a treasure and a pearl. Some stumble over it, discovering it in a book or a person or community almost by accident one day. Upon finding it they realize that this amazing discovery has changed everything about the course of their life. Others spend years, even decades searching. They seek everywhere for the pearl of great price. That is why they know it when they finally find it. The kingdom of heaven is like a highly prized treasure. It is so near and yet it is so hidden.

There is much talk of finding the kingdom and yet far less experience of living in the kingdom. That is the reason that when the kingdom comes that there is nowhere else on earth that one would want to be. It’s when reconciliation takes place, when forgiveness is offered, when relationships are restored, when the table is set for those who once had no place to eat then the treasured, hidden kingdom has been revealed, discovered, found and it is worth everything to be there.

This is a puzzle until we realized that Jesus gave all he had for our salvation. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the evil from the righteous. Here Jesus goes beyond the bounds of the parable to make sure the crowds understand. In this case, this is one of times we would rather he had chosen a little less clarity

Actually, we’re quite prepared to separate the good from the bad, to accept those who make the grade and reject the bad apples, to make some feel right at home while casting others aside into the loneliness of a rejection. But Jesus says it’s not like this in the kingdom. We think the kingdom must only have room for those who are prepared to set aside their evil ways. Yet the kingdom is like a net that catches something of everything, of everyone

In the meantime, sorting out good from evil will always be a profound mystery even for those who are caught up in the nets of the kingdom of heaven. Then Jesus says: “‘Have you understood all this?’ They answer ‘Yes’. They “get it”. These riddles make perfect sense to them. Or do they?

They are living as citizens of the God of the mighty mustard bush and of large batch of bread. They have discovered the hidden and precious mystery of God’s extraordinary activity in the world. They only have to look at one another to see that the nets of the kingdom of heaven hold a motley catch. Yes. They have understood all this. Then Jesus says to them: “Therefore, every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” Now Jesus tells a parable not about the kingdom but about the scribes of the kingdom. Who are they?

These days the church is sorely tempted to transform Jesus into an appealing, attractive commodity trying to encourage others to join – a hard sell when it was a small group. In our eagerness to please we look for way to market Jesus so that the church can be popular, acceptable, relevant to the modern world. We hope that his parables will be like bumper stickers - snappy sayings of everyday wisdom. But scribes who are trained for the kingdom of heaven have learned otherwise. Their vocation is to open up the treasure of the ancient and future ways of the kingdom – not only to write of the good news but to tell of the good news, look for ways to explain the good news.

There are times we try to explain our faith. The simple truth is God loves us so much he sent Jesus the Christ to bring love, light, compassion and justice into the world. We may try to make it more complicated but the truth is simple.

The following story was shared with me at the Antler River Watershed Regional Council Spring Meeting:

A farmer was trapped under a large bale. His wife, upon finding him, quickly called for help. Many came to help, some suggesting a fork life to get it off him, some trying to life it manually. Meanwhile, his wife could see his lips moving but couldn't make out what he was trying to say. She knelt down by him and heard the whisper of his voice, "Cut the twine". A simple action that was overlooked. So often obvious simple solutions are sometimes overlooked, while trying to plan action.

We think in big numbers and may forget that the ministry of Jesus started very small - twelve disciples in an obscure corner of Galilee - but it has spread throughout the world.

Like a small amount of yeast affects the entire loaf, the disciples of Jesus have affected the entire world. The nature of yeast is to grow and to change whatever it contacts. When we accept Christ, his grace grows in our hearts and changes us from the inside out. As the gospel changes lives, it changes the entire world.

We, as individuals and communities of faith, may see ourselves as small, but like the mustard seed and the yeast, all are important in the kingdom of heaven. Everyone makes a difference. Thanks be to God for these scriptures that make us think. Amen

Prayers of the People Loving God, we have gathered to worship and praise You, but we look also to You to heal our hurts and to offer to us Your wisdom and guidance. Remind us to keep our ears open to hear Your will. We are members of the human family: We belong to the crowd, and yet each one of us is loved by You as a special child. Each of us have our own lives and stories that make up this community. Each one of us is a puzzle. We, together, are the poor and the rich, the seeking and the satisfied. You are there in our weeping and in our joy. The pieces of our lives, of each and of all, seem never to fit together. We need Your restoring Word and Love.

We pray that You open our ears to hear Your words of promise and challenge. To us all, bring a healing deeper than the assurances and comforts we seek. Wherever we suffer amid poverty, war, oppression; wherever we live by illusions of success, security and power - heal us. Heal us, O God, by the power of Your truth, for we long that Your world be whole.

We give thanks for those who are part of our communities of faith but are now in care facilities or confined in their homes due to illness or frailty. We pray for strength, encouragement and healing of those who are ill, or in the midst of treatments, or waiting lists and those making decisions of their care.

We raise these prayers in confidence knowing You are waiting for our words or meditations of our hearts and minds. Amen

Parting Hymn *O Master Let Me Walk with Thee*, VU # 560

O Master, let me walk with thee	Help me the slow of heart to move	Teach me thy patience, still with thee,	In hope that sends a shining ray
In lowly paths of service free;	With some clear, winning word	In closer, dearer company,	Far down the future's
Teach me thy secret, help me bear	of love;	In work that keeps faith sure	broadening way,
the strain of toil, the fret of care.	Teach me the wayward feet to stay,	and strong,	In peace that only thou canst give,
	And guide them in the homeward way.	In trust that triumphs over wrong	with thee, O Master, let me live.

Benediction We go in the peace of Christ, open to the surprising love and presence of God in our lives today and always. Amen.

Choral Amen

Extinguish the Christ Candle